

Rise of the urban refugee <i>David Holdcroft</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>1</u></a>
Retired bishop confronts militant religion <i>Peter Kirkwood</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>3</u></a>
Sex addiction shame and sympathy <i>Tim Kroenert</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>5</u></a>
Australia follows US drone lead <i>Fatima Measham</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>7</u></a>
If Dickens were alive today <i>Andrew Hamilton</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>9</u></a>
Feminism, Greer and Tankard Reist <i>Lyn Bender</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>11</u></a>
Abominable blood ties <i>Various</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>13</u></a>
Our racist editors <i>Geoff Davies</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>16</u></a>
Harmonising the government bureaucracy symphony <i>David Cappel</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>18</u></a>
Keeping Conroy out of bed with Rinehart <i>Michael Mullins</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>20</u></a>
Rage against ageism <i>Moirra Rayner</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>22</u></a>
Moving on from Tent Embassy tussle <i>Brian Matthews</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>24</u></a>
The problem of goodness <i>Andrew Hamilton</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>26</u></a>
Humanising Hoover and Thatcher <i>Tim Kroenert</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>28</u></a>
The crossing guard and the dawdler <i>Vin Maskell</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>30</u></a>
Catholic social solutions to workplace fairness <i>Race Matthews</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>32</u></a>
Dreams of pulling Australia out of its slump <i>Ian C. Smith</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>35</u></a>
Opportunists could rule in 'nervous' America <i>Tony Kevin</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>39</u></a>
Pope's advice for Gillard and Abbott <i>Michael Mullins</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>42</u></a>
Breaking the 'boat people' deadlock <i>Lyn Bender</i> . . . . .	<a href="#"><u>43</u></a>



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## **Rise of the urban refugee**

### POLITICS

*David Holdcroft*

In most of our minds the word refugee conjures up images of rows upon rows of tents or mud shelters stretching out to a dusty horizon. This tent city image further lends itself to a sense of temporariness and the associated idea that these people are awaiting rescue in the form of rapid resettlement to a western country or perhaps return to their homeland.

In the last ten years however the world of the refugee has rapidly shifted. The refugee camp is now the exception rather than the rule: 58 per cent of all refugees reside in urban areas, mostly in the rapidly growing slums of the cities in the global south.

Johannesburg hosts an estimated 450,000 people in refugee or refugee like situations. This is the largest concentration of refugees anywhere. Damascus, Cairo, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Amman, Bangkok and many others also host large forced migrant populations.

What is this significance of this shift?

It must be said that life in a refugee camp is never rosy, and the duration of stays in camps has been steadily increasing, Camps can be a hotbed of illness, violence and boredom. Most inhabitants adopt coping mechanisms for these long stays that vary from the clever to the criminal.

The crucial factor is that, without a firm plan for onward movement, camps essentially trade the right to safety with a whole host of other human rights — to movement, to gainful employment, to education and so on. Without an 'exit plan' there is little to live for.

Nonetheless camps do generally provide basic food and shelter and a semblance of safety. For the urban refugee there is no such security.

In some cities the UNHCR or a local NGO provides money for shelter and food for three months only. In that time, the urban refugee is expected to: register with the authorities and begin processing their refugee case; gain a working knowledge of a new language; train themselves so they can find sustainable employment; and locate new accommodation, while at the same time keeping their documentation in order, their family fed, children in schools, sick people looked after and so on.

All this while negotiating a complex social transition into an often-hostile local population in an urban area characterised by high crime rates and crumbling infrastructure.

Little wonder that many become prey to criminal activity. Young women are

forced into transactional sex to help pay the rent, men are forced to pay bribes to prevent their hard won hawkers permits being torn up by local police. Many work illegally in informal jobs prone to all kinds of exploitation.

The fact that some of these people do make a transition of sorts says much about the capacities within many refugee populations. In Johannesburg 75 per cent of the forced migrant population is economically active, 35 per cent to a degree that they are able to send remittances to relative back home; 83 per cent of Somalis and around 63 per cent Congolese speak English.

Surely this is a good news story. It indicates a new manner in which those considering assisting such populations must operate. Clearly the old camp provision-of-service mentality is neither applicable nor affordable. With leadership, imagination and in a spirit of cooperation the capacities within these populations must be brought to bear.

Yet governments, perhaps fearful of the long-term impact of local integration of large groups of immigrants on local employment, increasingly restrict refugees' rights.

In South Africa, the education system has in recent times relied heavily on skilled Zimbabwean teachers. This can be seen as a problem, or a short-term solution to an identified skills gap. What is to stop Zimbabweans being employed in training roles to capacitate further the teaching population?

Regrettably there is now talk of eliminating the asylum seekers' right to work, a short-term measure which will end up costing the South African community more in the long term as it tries to cope with the humanitarian crisis that is likely to result.

It is true refugee movements can be unpredictable, making it difficult to frame policy. But more recognition could be given to the skills base of refugee populations and their capacity to adapt to new situations quickly. In such cases governments have a clear task to educate the local population of the overall benefits that can accrue as, at the end of the day, everyone stands to benefit.

There is a need for leadership. Let us not be misled: forced migrants' anonymity in the cities of the global south must not be construed as a reason for the international community — particularly its wealthier members — to abrogate further its responsibilities. But new ways to do this must be found.

The first step is for people to come together to enable the story of the urban refugee to break the chains of anonymity and become widely heard.

The second is for refugee community groups, local organisations and international players to learn to work together, each bringing their unique set of capacities to the table.

## Retired bishop confronts militant religion

VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

Last weekend the Fairfax press carried an investigative piece by Debra Jopson [profiling](#) the 21 Muslim men convicted of terrorism charges over the last six years in Sydney and Melbourne. The report was accompanied by mug shots of all the men, most of them young, bearded and fierce-looking.

The article sought to put this in perspective when it quoted research that 'identified a fringe of about 100 Islamist extremists in Australia's Muslim population of 340,000'. This indicates that those jailed are the extreme end of a tiny minority, but highlights the sense of threat engendered by this group.

The United Nations has designated 1–7 February each year as World Interfaith Harmony Week. It was launched in 2011 to counteract this sense of threat at a time when interreligious conflict is a grave concern around the globe. To mark Harmony Week, Eureka Street TV features this interview with a man who is one of the world's leading interfaith activists.

Retired Episcopal Bishop of California, William Swing, is the founder of one of the largest international interfaith organisations. Through it he is seeking to mobilise believers from all traditions to cooperate and to lessen the dire effects of militant religion.

The event that triggered his interest in this area was an invitation in 1993 from the United Nations to host an interfaith service at the Episcopal Grace Cathedral in San Francisco in 1995. This was one of the events celebrating the 50th anniversary of the formation of the UN.

At first Swing's vision for his new interfaith organisation was inspired by the United Nations, and it would be called United Religions. It would involve world religious leaders, and peak religious bodies meeting to formulate a charter that would unite them in a common vision.

But after travelling extensively and meeting with many of the main leaders, he was disillusioned, realising there was not the will for this sort of collaboration. After extensive consultation, he came up with a radically different idea that he called the [United Religions Initiative](#) (URI).

Rather than a top-down model working with religious leaders, URI starts at the grass roots, fostering 'cooperation circles' in local communities. This involves people from different faiths working in small groups on projects in which they have a common interest. The circles are self-organising and self-funding, and work under the aegis and guiding principles of URI.

URI began in 2000 with the declaration of its charter: 'We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and Indigenous traditions throughout the world,

hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.'

The URI started with just one local group, and from those humble beginnings, it has grown exponentially. It now has 570 cooperation circles in 78 countries that involve the participation of over 500,000 people.

Swing was born in West Virginia, the son of a touring golf professional. He served as a priest in a number of parishes in West Virginia and in Washington DC before his appointment as Bishop of California. In San Francisco, as well as his interfaith activism, he is well known for his work on behalf of the homeless, Latino immigrants and people affected by HIV/AIDS.

He has a number of honorary doctorates, including one from the Jesuit sponsored University of San Francisco. His books include *Building Wisdom's House* and *The Coming United Religions*.



## Sex addiction shame and sympathy

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***Shame* (R). Director: Steve McQueen. Starring: Michael Fassbender, Carey Mulligan. 101 minutes**

Films about addiction tend to follow a formula, albeit one that chimes with reality. When we meet the addicted character they are generally 'functional', their addiction hidden in the margins of a more civilised lifestyle. The film tracks their 'downward spiral' as the addiction takes an ever larger place in their life and feeds other destructive behaviours.

At some point the character hits rock bottom, before a tragedy — or near tragedy — affecting themselves or a loved one, provides an emotional and psychological shock that has the potential to break the pattern of addiction — a Pyrrhic victory.

The best of such films — and *Shame* is among them — achieve this in a way that is not merely voyeuristic, but which offers insight into the nuances of the character's emotional and psychological makeup, and their humanity. As a story about addiction, *Shame* follows the formula. What makes it distinctive is that the addiction in question is not a drug or other substance, but sex.

The film is not reticent about its full frontal consideration of this subject. Within the opening minutes we see Brandon ( [Fassbender](#) ) walk naked across his apartment, the camera placed unabashedly at waist height. Biologically speaking, Brandon's genitals are at the centre of his addiction, and therefore presumably at the forefront of his addicted mind.

His addiction finds several expressions. These range from the excessive use of pornography (including on his work computer), to one-night stands with women seduced in bars, to more deviant behaviours such as paid cyber sex via webcam. There are graphic scenes, yet the most powerfully erotic captures merely an exchange of lewd glances between Brandon and a stranger on a train.

The sex Brandon uses to fulfill the demands of his addiction is divorced from intimacy. As a matter of fact he finds himself physically unable to engage in sex with the one partner with whom romantic involvement seems like a possibility. Immediately afterwards, he engages the services of a prostitute to satisfy his craving. Evidently his impotence was of an emotional rather than physical nature.

He fears intimacy, perhaps only partly due to the personal shame of his addiction. It is offered to him by his sister, Sissy ( [Mulligan](#) ), yet he responds to her with rage and contempt. She, like Brandon, bears wounds from an unnamed past trauma: 'We're not bad, we just come from a bad place,' she reminds him. 'Damage' is another trope of the addiction story, with addiction the sinister salve.

Director McQueen's background is as a visual artist, and as with his previous film *Hunger*, the themes of *Shame* are expressed both frankly and artfully (although a scene where Brandon stares into the camera with an anguished expression, while he has sex with two prostitutes, is uncharacteristically on-the-nose). It also offers hope, though no promise, of salvation. Addiction is never easily shaken.



## Australia follows US drone lead

### POLITICS

*Fatima Measham*

In November last year, American lawyer [Clive Stafford Smith met Tariq Aziz](#) in Islamabad. Smith was at a traditional jirga, a meeting with Pashtun elders, as part of his work with Reprieve, an international human rights organisation. He was there in order to understand from a local perspective the clandestine drone war being conducted by the United States in Pakistan.

Toward the end of the meeting, 16-year-old Tariq volunteered to help collect physical evidence linking American drone strikes to civilian casualties. He never got the chance. Three days after he met Smith, he and a 12-year old cousin were killed by such a strike on their way to pick up an aunt.

Yet President Barack Obama [recently stated](#) that the use of drones in Pakistan 'is a targeted, focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists'.

He also claimed that 'drones have not caused a huge number of casualties'. But there is no magic number that somehow makes civilian casualties acceptable. For Tariq's aunt, and many others like her, there is only desolation.

The civilian numbers killed by drone strikes can be difficult to extract. Journalists are barred from investigating targeted areas, and both sides inflate figures according to their agenda.

But a [study](#) by the New America Foundation found that the 114 reported drone strikes in northwest Pakistan from 2004 to the beginning of 2010 killed between 830 and 1210 individuals. Around 550 to 850 were described as militants. This means a third of those who were killed were civilians.

Despite the supposed sophistication of drones, innocent people die.

Drones, otherwise known as UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) or RPAs (remotely piloted aircraft), had been mainly used for surveillance during the Clinton years. However, advances in technology, as well as heightened dismay over American fatalities in Afghanistan and Iraq, have driven the development of drones for deploying missiles in Pakistan and Yemen.

The argument is that they can more accurately conduct lethal action, either by the military or the CIA, without any risk to personnel. American pilots may now safely engage in combat by remote, literally from the other side of the world. But the risks for ordinary people on the ground have not changed.

These civilian deaths are drawing attention to Washington's '[awkward, open secret](#)'. Drone strikes have quadrupled since Obama took office. The number of drones themselves has also increased, with the US surging ahead in a [drone arms](#)

[race](#) . Defence analysts say others are not far behind, with over 50 countries having built or bought UAVs.

Australia is phasing in UAVs as part of its [Defence Capability Plan](#) . The initial fleet will be mainly for maritime surveillance, with a LOT (life of type) of only ten years. This is 'to ensure that the ADF is positioned to take advantage of technological advancements'.

The fact is that our special forces are already being trained to use drones in combat. Last year, senior officers [used American drones](#) in strikes against Taliban insurgents.

We are already at the next stage of global conflict. Yet legal restraints or even public debate about the use of drones have so far been alarmingly muted.

[Signature strikes](#) , aimed at clusters of unidentified men perceived to be militants (as opposed to 'personality strikes' which target specific high-profile terrorist leaders), form the bulk of CIA operations. They highly endanger civilians. This is a clear contravention of international humanitarian law, which upholds the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants.

That a civilian agency is pursuing military objectives is also disturbing. Some CIA strikes last year actually drew complaints from the Pentagon and the State Department, as civilian casualties only sharpened diplomatic tensions between the US and Pakistan.

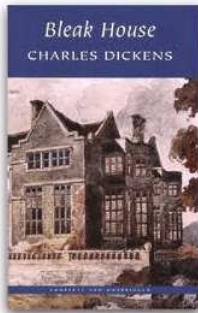
The US is driving a drone industry in the same way it drove the nuclear arms race. The technology has surged ahead of philosophical, moral or legal inquiry about its use. It is normalising pre-emptive strikes, with no clear accountability for future prosecution. It has removed a significant impediment to bellicose foreign policy: the prospect of loss of life and injury to young men and women in uniform.

These conditions do not bode well for us, even as it is too late to wind back the technology. Even so, it must be met with the same resistance that continues to meet nuclear weapons and landmines. International scrutiny is urgently needed. The world community must move quickly to highlight the legal implications and moral turpitude of negligently killing innocent people by remote.

## If Dickens were alive today

NON-FICTION

*Andrew Hamilton*



When ruminating on the conditions under which asylum seekers and Indigenous people in Australia are forced to live, one is tempted to exclaim, 'Were that Dickens was alive today!' The phrase itself has a characteristically Victorian ring, an unconscious tribute to Charles Dickens, the 200th anniversary of whose birth we celebrate this week.

Dickens was an energetic social reformer as well as a novelist. He drew attention to his causes through his novels. It is not surprising that his work was translated and disseminated widely through the Soviet Union. They were presented as a realistic account of 20th century England. A cynical use of literature, but with literary fringe benefits.

I imagine that Dickens would have been thoroughly at home in today's culture. He would have been a natural in the world of soaps. My favorite among his novels, *Bleak House*, has all the makings of the genre. It was published in installments, left the reader hanging at the end of each chapter, had a multitude of small characters and sub-plots, all woven into the development of the story and neatly enough tied up by the end of the series.

The plot and characters of *Bleak House* also have the staples of soaps. The noble and the base are instantly recognised by their names. Lord and Lady Dedlock, Esther Summerson, Ada Clare, the Krooks, Mlle Hortense, Mr Tulkinghorn and Mr Bucket announce their dispositions before they appear.

Characters and plot are also larger than life. An impossibly noble benefactor and an impossibly sweet natured heroine, both apparently born without original sin, a promising but doomed love affair, a proud woman with a terrible secret, an implacable policeman with a deep concern for justice and dodgy ways of winning it, a gaggle of avaricious and smarmy lawyers engaged in an interminable suit, the chief lawyer whose incorruptibility is a natural consequence of his lack of flesh and blood humanity, a vicious French servant maid, a greedy landLord, a do-gooder neglectful of her family, and at the centre of the novel an aristocratic couple whose social self-understanding finally crumbles as their own reality is made public.

As good soaps do, *Bleak House* allows the reader to know how various other halves live. Prisons, poorhouses, the unsanitary lanes where the homeless sleep and Lady Dedlock's life ends. These are set against the felicity of the heroine who finally finds a good home and good husband.

Of course, there are well-written telly series and bad ones. The power and the

interest of *Bleak House* and Dickens' other novels come from the quality of his writing. He is a master of description, catches high and low style perfectly, can move from good humor through satire to poignancy within a phrase or two. However unlikely his characters are in total, they are persuasive in their small interactions.

As a socially committed writer Dickens displays the reality of the world in which he and his readers live. The plot of *Bleak House* brings Lord and Lady Dedlock from bad consciousness to a recognition of a human reality. The quality of the writing, the comic elements of the plot and the caricaturing of the minor characters create space for the readers to reflect on the reality of their own world.

Were that Dickens was alive today! But would he be equally successful in persuading our society to confront scandalous policies and neglect? Certainly, the success of *Underbelly* and its derivatives suggests an interest in the picaresque and in the way in which breeds lower than ours live. Dickens would surely have caught the voice and the social context.

But whether he could now share widely his insights into the defects of society and provoke reform is doubtful. His readers shared a generally religious view of the world and believed that the wrongs of society should be healed. The general view was not turned into reforming practice because they did not see the reality of the world in which they lived, and were happy to remain uninformed. Because reading was a principal means of entertainment for the educated as well as of instruction, a novelist who could describe an unacceptable reality could also promote a demand that it be changed.

If Dickens today wished to address the deprivation and discrimination suffered by Indigenous Australians and asylum seekers, he would need to turn to popular culture. But he would then need to address an audience whose members share a sense of entitlement, and weighs the claims of others by their own interests. It is not in their interests to remedy the conditions that afflict asylum seekers and Indigenous Australians live. So they do not want to recognise them.

For this reason, even the best of teledramas in which the lives of people like us intersect with those of the excluded would most likely flop.

Were Dickens to return today with his passion to set things right, he might remain poor and unnoticed a lot longer.

## **Feminism, Greer and Tankard Reist**

MEDIA

*Lyn Bender*

Melinda Tankard Reist has been [pilloried](#) for her stance on pornography, as a pro-life supporter and for declared Christian beliefs. There have been vociferous calls for her to surrender her feminist badge. Tankard Reist also receives daily [hate emails](#) threatening her with acts of sexual violence.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung is reputed to have said 'I'm glad I'm Jung and not a Jungian'. The price of any definition of allegiance can be the pressure to conform to narrowly defined 'right' principles, to have acceptable, 'right' allegiances, and involves the risk of being branded an outsider.

More importantly not being admitted to the club seems to mean that arguments are not to be considered on their merits or examined with true rigor. This has been the fate of Melinda Tankard Reist who describes herself as an activist and feminist.

In an article in the Drum titled 'Tankard Reist Furore: Feminists on the attack' Claire Bongiorno also [questions labelling](#) as critique. Bongiorno reports that leading feminists such as Eva Cox and Anne Summers have specifically questioned Tankard Reist's right to call herself a feminist, thereby removing an invisible stamp of approval. But have her arguments been fully and fairly considered?

Tankard Reist has been denounced as unworthy to claim feminist credentials on at least three counts.

Firstly she is arguing that pervasive and extreme pornographic depiction of women's sexual expression is limited, degrading and a negative influence on young women and men's sexuality. She maintains that the porn industry deliberately targets boys as young as 11. She has also campaigned against the inappropriate sexualisation of children in advertising and marketing.

Secondly Tankard Reist is pro-choice, editor of a book titled *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's Stories of Grief After Abortion*. Thirdly she is [criticised](#) for having worked as an advisor to Senator Brian Harradine, a strong opponent of abortion.

Overarching all of this, she is discredited for her Christian beliefs. When asked about her Christianity informing her values, she states that she tries and mostly fails to follow the teachings of Jesus.

But why should any of this be a cornerstone for judging her argument ?

It is playing the woman, not the ball, and more closely resembles rowdy one-eyed barrackers at a football match, opposing all about the 'other' team while applauding their own. If this sounds familiar you may be recalling Federal parliamentary debate, which commonly descends to jeers and cheers rather than

forensic examination of the proposals as they relate to the common good.

The central difficulty of assumptions made by pigeon-holing a person's beliefs and values is that the argument is not heard. I am no fan of Reverend Fred Niles, especially in regard to his views on homosexuality, but he can occasionally say [something I agree with](#) .

So there may be sound rigorous arguments for concern about internet pornography or the lack of informed choice, beyond abortion, for some pregnant women, but these are howled down.

It could be argued that Tankard Reist's views do not conform to the extracted 'rules' of a previous fearless work, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*.

Greer was arguing for the liberation of women in many areas, including sexual expression and reproductive choices. She was a breath of fresh air in a rigidly configured view of women's destiny. It was an era when women were urged to burn their bras as a symbol of release.

But times have moved on, and the new call of today could be for women to ditch their silicon implants and for the role of motherhood to be more highly valued.

Thirty years on, Greer has [declared](#) that she did not want to be a high priestess of feminism. Her views on the pressure of women to conform to a marketed cosmetically altered stereotype of a boyish body with large breasts are not out of sync with the views of Tankard Reist.

Greer's views are often intellectually complex, contrarian and difficult to pigeon hole. That is a strength. But what may have been extracted from her views and the constant evolution of the feminist movement has been diminished by being reduced to a formula such as that used in the denunciation of Tankard Reist.

We could do well to heed the words of Greer, the reluctant icon: 'Some of you may disagree with what I am saying. I am not worried about disagreement. I just want you to think about what I am saying.'

## **Abominable blood ties**

POETRY

*Various*

### **Reflection**

I was arrested  
by my father's face in a hallway mirror.  
I'm the age inhabited by him  
much of my life: youth spent,  
decrepitude on lay-by. It's  
an incontestable likeness,  
shape and set of the head,  
hair still thick, striated with grey,  
his eyes softened by capitulation, a face  
reposing in kindly ineffectualness.  
He seems about to say something,  
but I know he won't; this man  
who might have been someone else,  
if only ...  
Suddenly the face  
wears a grey stubble-cut beard,  
the set of the mouth is harder,  
eyes watchful, sharp  
behind steel rimmed spectacles  
as though much has been lost,  
defeat suffered, tolerance strained,  
trust costly,  
surrender's terms rejected.  
If there's a treaty, it lies unsigned.  
I turn away,  
leave the glass



reflecting the empty hallway  
and a Dutch genre print, a courtyard  
seen through an open doorway  
from a room observed from another room;  
but I'll meet him again soon, glancing  
from shop windows, glazed  
pictures, closed circuit television.  
I greet him with affection.  
We know each other well — men  
we might have been.

*B. N. Oakman*

**Mum**

Suddenly, in the glass, facet-edged,  
an enemy. My hand,  
twined trembling in the tap's calyx,  
is a drunk's hand, deep  
flutter of wine along sinew, and  
idiotic, I am granted prophecy,  
that approach to the still waters  
permitted only those  
dumb as a filled urn.  
Crowned awkward with feathers of maidenhair,  
I see: my crumpled iris-rim lip  
is her lip;  
the fine spoked wheel beneath my grimacing eye  
has etched itself deep with years upon her face.  
The wet red meat of my viscera is made of her,  
a shy-hood I cannot take off;  
the text that writes my living flesh  
bad at the source,

the voice of a woman who might do anything,  
anything,  
crying out, Why are you doing this to me?

*Belinda Rule*

**Brotherly love**

I'm contemplative, shy with women, serious —  
he's visceral, impulsive, brotherly  
only in blood. *He's certainly not otherly  
inclined*, one woman told me, *He's a riot*.  
I hesitate and chat, where he's imperious  
and kisses them on the mouth — and women buy it.  
He loves John Lennon, sings his heart, obsesses;  
Jane plays piano and hoards minutiae  
such as, *What year did Buddy Holly die?*

She belts out Joplin (Scott, not Janis). Sweet  
talk explodes to fury. Then he confesses  
he's wrong, quite often lying. And they eat.

She's put on weight. They're like my tank of fish  
with their circling and returning and their prowling.

One evening she's laughing, then she's howling.

I stay aloof, take sodden hankies, see  
her anger and her pain. In love, I wish  
sincerity could out-trump vanity.

*John Upton*

## Our racist editors

### MEDIA

*Geoff Davies*

Sensationalism and a bias to the interests of proprietors and other rich people are long-standing features of commercial media. However Australian media have, over the past few decades, become increasingly biased in news reporting, news selection and commentary. This trend is moving into the realm of overt propagandising and of reporting so distorted and hysterical as to amount to lies.

There is, in fact, a growing nexus in Australian media of fear, hysteria, racism and ignorant ranting.

The Australia Day 'riot' at the Lobby restaurant in Canberra is an example of hysterical misreporting. I happened to [see it unfold](#) . It was a rowdy demonstration, but there was no violence and no riot. Security and police were rattled and overreacting. Many people could even see in the footage that the situation was not as threatening as reporters' words were portraying.

The so-called reporting was also richly larded with judgemental words like 'ugly', 'marred', 'disgrace' and so on. So much for separating editorial comment from reporting.

The misreporting was racist in effect if not in intention. Many editors and commentators shot from the hip in condemning the protesters, and their reaction was more overtly racist.

Now comes the news that Australia's richest person, mining magnate Gina Rinehart, is [buying big chunks](#) of our media. Although some are denying that she wants to impose her point of view on our media, why else would she be buying them? Especially as GetUp! has released a video of climate denier Christopher Monckton, whom Rinehart supports, [urging](#) just such a strategy. They want hired guns like [Andrew Bolt](#) and climate denier [Joanne Nova](#) to peddle a mining-friendly view.

Everyone has a right to express their opinion, but when the opinion is ill-informed and delivered angrily it becomes a rant. Unfortunately the ignorant rant is becoming legitimised as proper political discourse in Australia.

It features prominently in talkback radio and online comments. It pervades *The Australian* newspaper, as evident in its response to Robert Manne's detailed criticisms in his *Quarterly Essay* ['Bad News'](#) .

The justification for the prevalence of ranting is the right to free speech. However free speech also implies responsibility. One responsibility is not to propagate falsehoods. Another is to reflect before mouthing off; to be aware of one's gut reactions and move through them to a more considered expression. This is known as emotional maturity, an increasingly scarce quality it seems. `

These responsibilities apply particularly to the media and those in the public realm.

Philosopher Karl Popper, writing in the context of threats from both left-wing communist dictators and right-wing fascist dictators, concluded that the most resilient society would be the one most willing to tolerate and cultivate a range of ideas.

The world is always throwing up new challenges. The broader the range of ideas a society can draw upon the more likely it is to meet such challenges and survive. Dictatorship severely restricts the range of ideas allowed currency, and thus limits the resilience of the society.

Short of dictatorship, there are those in Australia who seem to take pride in ignorance; tout their success as proof of its sufficiency, or present themselves as just part of the common ruck. This disdain for being informed cultivates illusion, the comforting belief that the world is as we want it. However an illusion is ultimately a lie, and our media are delivering too much illusion.

Writer Jane Goodall [reminds us](#) that the late Czech intellectual and president Václav Havel pointed to the deeper effects of the oppression of his people. Oppressed people become so used to living in a lie that it infiltrates every aspect of their lives, until they can't deal honestly with each other or with themselves. We are not as oppressed as the Czechs were, but we are fed a manipulated reality.

As Goodall observes, 'An electorate dominated by resentment and punitive impulses can easily vote its way back into totalitarianism.' Havel understood that only if we are willing to speak the truth, to ourselves, to each other and in public, can we hope to extract ourselves from the mire of oppression. He suffered imprisonment and risked his life to do so.

Goodall further notes that 'Havel spoke always from a conviction that civic intelligence is the most valuable commodity in any nation, and its erosion is the greatest danger.'

Media operate only with our permission, explicit or implied, and broadcasting is a great privilege. We need to rein in the increasing distortion of our social and political conversations, and require responsibility as well as freedom of speech.

## Harmonising the government bureaucracy symphony

### POLITICS

*David Cappo*

The Federal Government is using the word coordination a lot. And as part of the Queensland Government's election platform, it has announced that a new State Mental Health Commission is to have a role of coordinating services. Indeed, a major role of the new Federal Mental Health Commission will need to see coordination as one of its major preoccupations.



Beyond mental health we hear of the coordinating role of the Medicare Local system that is being developed across Australia. Additionally, in employment services, coordination of services is getting more attention.

I applaud these initiatives, but they could all come to nothing. More than that, they could precipitate further cynicism and mistrust from citizens who will see this as another good intention strangled by bureaucratic nonsense and political timidity, or merely as more hollow slogans.

The coordination of government services is important. If we are going to give the right services at the right time to people in need, governments must make sure services are integrated and targeted. If governments want to really see better health, mental health, education and employment outcomes, the integration and coordination of services is a huge issue that must be addressed.

As yet, such high-level effective coordination is not happening. So what needs to happen to bring it about?

The key is power. The giving and the use of power. The very thing that bureaucracy treasures and wants to keep to itself.

If coordinating bodies are going to be successful, governments must give them the power and authority to influence the priorities and work of various siloed departments and agencies. Coordination is more than good communication, linking agencies, or being more cooperative and sensitive. All this is good but is really a very superficial understanding of coordination.

The first sign of getting coordination right must come from our political leaders. The message must be given! We will delegate power and authority like we have never seen it in Australia. We will do it with transparency and all the appropriate safeguards and risk management procedures — but we will do it. We will take a calculated risk, because if we don't, this is going to be another failure.

Our senior bureaucrats must get this message. And part of the message must be that their performance will be judged upon their ability to bring about this culture shift: that real power will be shared; that coordinating bodies will be given the means to do their jobs effectively.

No doubt the Treasury and Finance Departments will find many reasons for this not to happen. But we need to break through. I believe the citizens of Australia will no longer tolerate governments who cannot exercise the authority to bring about good outcomes in the lives of citizens.

The second sign of getting coordination and integration right is that we start to develop what could become a new model for 21st century government.

Instead of having silo departments — e.g. an Education Department, a Health Department — a new structure is developed around commissions (like the emerging federal and state mental health commissions, Medicare Locals, or the former Social Inclusion Board in South Australia), which are given the power to monitor and oversee stated outcomes and goals agreed upon by government.

Like orchestra leaders they bring into the symphony of bureaucracy the right agencies and services at the right time and in the right harmony.

The third sign of getting coordination right, and this might be a long way off yet, is to see our departments of education, health, employment etc. transformed from closed silos into departments with responsibilities centred around a mix of key outcomes enunciated in a publicly noted strategic plan and to be achieved in a particular time frame.

When the time frame is up, the department comes to an end and resources are shifted to different goals to achieve more outcomes.

This would be complex and difficult to execute. But I hope politicians and bureaucrats reading this simply don't dismiss it as nonsense. Somehow I don't think the citizens of our nation would be so quick to say not to bother, and to leave things as they are.

## Keeping Conroy out of bed with Rinehart

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*



Mining magnate Gina Rinehart has many Australians worried about the future of Australian democracy after increasing her shareholding in Fairfax Media to just under 15 per cent. This, they believe, is just the beginning of her attempt to spoil the tradition of independent journalism we've enjoyed as readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*.

Former *Age* editor Andrew Jaspan [summarised](#) his fears in the newsletter of the group of eight universities' topical ideas website [The Conversation](#), which he now runs.

In a 1979 polemic called 'Wake up Australia', Gina's father, Lang Hancock argued: 'We can change the situation so as to limit the power of government', before concluding: 'it could be broken by obtaining control of the media and then educating the public'.

The obvious response to this is that the government can and should do more to limit the power of wealthy Australians seeking to dominate debate. This is being done, but only to an extent. Communications Minister Stephen Conroy [admits](#) there is a need to strengthen regulations to ensure media diversity, but is essentially quite relaxed about Rinehart's move on Fairfax.

'It has always been the case in Australia over my lifetime in politics that a small number of families have had a controlling interest in the majority of the media in this country,' he told ABC Radio.

Conroy has cultivated good relations with at least some of these families. Two years ago he [enjoyed](#) a game of golf with James Packer on the day the government announced a \$250 million licence fee rebate for free-to-air television stations. The stations subsequently reaped further huge rewards from the success of the extra digital channels the government allowed them.

Despite the UK Government's current hard line against Murdoch, it is unlikely politicians will ever take decisive action to limit the power of the dominant media owners because their electoral success is linked to positive media coverage.

If we accept that politicians cannot be trusted to regulate the media without fear or favour, we must consider taking certain fundamental aspects of media regulation out of the hands of government altogether. This could be done by making [media diversity](#) subject to a charter of human rights.

Obviously we do not have a human rights charter, and are unlikely to have one in the immediate future because the Government rejected the recommendations of the Brennan committee in 2010.



But media diversity is indeed a human right, and the Government's weak performance in legislating in this area represents a powerful argument for Australians to insist upon revisiting the human rights charter that was proposed.

## **Rage against ageism**

### POLITICS

*Moira Rayner*

The role of the law in setting moral or behavioural standards has always been contentious.

When I was a law student, the debate was a simpler vexation because, in those days of idealism the issues were libertarian — should law seek to regulate matters of private morality, such as sexual acts between consenting adults? — or about the public interest in individual choices, such as access to smutty literature or art, or the expression of abhorrent views, such as holocaust denial, or incitement to racial hatred.

By so saying I have revealed an attribute that is also typical of a child of the '60s, that I am now the adult I so much did not want to be when I was young and hopeful; a 'wise woman', as I would like to see myself, with the clearer eyes of an ageing one; a woman of a certain age, which used to be over 40, but is over 60 now. And unemployable, though unwilling and unable to 'retire'.

Unwilling because there's life in the old girl yet, and my brain has not slipped into desuetude, even though I have learned that my IQ has slipped well below 147 as it aged, and because my confreres in the financial world have made sure my careful plans for retirement of 40 years ago have foundered along with my superannuation savings.

And unable, because of simple, plain and ineradicable age discrimination.

No matter what law may be passed, nearly all employers will not even look at appointing a woman — or a man — to any kind of job because of the assumed characteristics of their age.

These rules do not apply, of course, to the Rupert Murdochs of this world, nor to the elderly but well-connected men hogging the boards, discretionary appointments in universities, and consultancy gigs (or royal commissions) beloved of the closed circles of big business and governments willing to appease dumped politicians and powermongers.

I was once offered a professorial appointment which did not eventuate for more than a year and then for a derisory term while an MP who announced his impending retirement was appointed to a personal chair within ten days of that announcement, and I acted accordingly.

But sometimes even those who have been flying moderately high experience what my friend Charles, 59, and countless others experience every day of their mature working lives, no matter what the law says, in terms of enforced, unpaid, idleness.

Last March Michael Gill, then the editor in chief of the *Australian Financial Review*, learned to his considerable surprise that he had been working for Fairfax for far too long, and that his former deputy, a spring chicken of just 35 years, was to be appointed in his place.

Not a lot was said at the time, but it will be spoken about quite a lot in the next few weeks and months because he has sued his former employer in the Federal Court using a little-used provision of the Human Rights Act which implements Australia's obligation under international law to prohibit age discrimination in employment.

He wants more than a million bucks for what his old employer hath done to him, and a full page advertisement of apology.

Many older working men and women (though women are treated even worse in the media than men, and rarely if ever make it to Gill's managerial status) will watch this case with interest. I for one will be praying that it does not settle, and that the wimpish provisions prohibiting age discrimination in equal opportunity laws around Australia are exposed for the pathetic non-protections that they truly are.

Though the Commonwealth has given the Australian Human Rights Commission the power to receive complaints under a specific law, the Age Discrimination Act, most older workers know better than to seek to use its complaint conciliation processes.

This is because: the law itself is riven with exceptions and exemptions that make its reach decidedly dubious; as with racial discrimination provisions, the employers inevitably attack a complainant's 'performance' and divert attention from their own rampant preference for 'young' and presumably more ingenious, creative and energetic performers, as well as putting the claimants through the equivalent of a rape trial where the victim is seen as a persecutor of no moral worth; and because state laws with similar coverage and intent are now managed by commissioners and tribunals which are less independent and more limited to voluntary conciliation than investigation and authoritative interventions than was the norm even 15 years ago.

So, all power to Gill. Employers learn more from litigation than sweet reason, as the Board of David Jones showed us at the suit of Kristy Fraser-Kirk. Don't settle, Gill. Show us that a law based on the human right to be free from discrimination has sharp and expensive choppers.

## **Moving on from Tent Embassy tussle**

BY THE WAY

*Brian Matthews*

When Tony Abbott said of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy that 'a lot has changed since [its establishment in 1972] ... it is probably time to move on from that', he wouldn't have expected the violent repercussions, nor would he have been aware — it seems safe to say — of their Australian provenance. The phrase 'moving on' is fraught with ambiguities and distracting baggage.

On 19 March 2003, President George W. Bush launched 'Operation Iraqi Freedom', an attack justified by the conviction that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was a repository of a vast cache of what came to be known as 'Weapons of Mass Destruction', or WMD. Later, when the idea of the existence of large scale WMD became untenable, the rationale for the war subtly altered to 'regime change'.

In the US and Britain opposition to the war was fierce. Amid widespread protests and demonstrations, British Ministry of Defence biological warfare expert, David Kelly, cast doubt on the government's 'sexed up' WMD dossier in interviews with BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan. He attracted vigorous official and unofficial objections, the strain and ignominy of which, it seems, drove him to suicide.

Meanwhile, in the US opposition to the war was widespread, vocal and occasionally violent.

From Australians, however, Prime Minister Howard encountered no such reaction. In London, a British journalist asked Howard to explain how Australia had escaped pretty well unscathed by the tumult and outrage that had erupted in America and Britain about non-existent WMDs, when he was as deeply engaged in and totally supportive of the views of his northern hemisphere colleagues.

Howard's answer was: 'Because Australians have moved on.'

I remember the journalist's bewilderment — and my own. What did 'move on' mean? When you moved on were you simply ducking the issue, leaving it behind unresolved? On what ethical or philosophical grounds could one move on from a question as serious and as deadly (remember poor David Kelly for one thing) as WMD without having come to any resolution one way or the other?

I didn't feel as if I'd moved on, nor did many other Australians. What signs was Howard detecting that told him about our moving on?

Yet the phrase is ubiquitous. When Teresa Gambaro, the Coalition citizenship spokeswoman, recently urged that immigrants should be taught to wear deodorant, learn how to queue and be brought into line with 'what is an acceptable [hygienic] norm in this country', Warren Truss, standing in for holidaying Tony Abbott, said Gambaro's views were 'out of step with modern Australian attitudes'.

Gambaro claimed she had been taken out of context, though God knows what contemporary context would provide a happy home for such views. But Truss wrapped it up: she should 'move on' he said.

About the same time as all that was making news, Australian Test cricket wicketkeeper Brad Haddin taunted the Indian opposition in a press conference, saying that Australia had broken their spirit. Indian captain M. S. Dhoni, invited to respond, said the Indian team would 'move on'. He didn't mean they'd pack up and go home, but he didn't mean they would play better either. They didn't.

After his tangle with a cyclist became news, Shane Warne advised the cyclist to 'move on', and when Thomas Berdych's on-court snubbing of Nicolas Almagro in the Australian Open tennis championships grew into headline material Berdych, without taking a step back, suggested Almagro should move on.

He didn't mean Almagro should go away, any more than Warne meant the cyclist should: he meant the problem should go away, disappear into some limbo of the unresolved and unfaced-up-to.

I'm not one of Abbott's fans, but I don't think for one minute that he meant the Tent Embassy should be ripped down. He meant let's just forget it, stop thinking about it, and somehow it will all just fade away and be replaced by other problems.

The riot that ensued occurred because, even if not misinterpreted, 'moving on' is an imponderable phrase, a synonym for sticking one's head in the sand and hoping that up in the real world, everything will somehow blow over.

## The problem of goodness

### APPLICATION

*Andrew Hamilton*

The problem of evil has always been with us. The ills that befall us and the monstrous evil that people do are a problem because they challenge the belief that life has a higher meaning. They are particularly corrosive of belief in a loving God.



The problem of goodness is rarely spoken of. Yet it challenges the view that the only meaning we can find in the world is at the level of what can be perceived and measured.

Evil challenges large frameworks of meaning because random suffering and human brutality are experienced and imagined with such intensity. Explanations of how they are consistent with a loving and attentive God may be intellectually satisfying. But when people experience suffering and brutality in their own lives, they are often repelled by large arguments.

The explanations, which work at a level of abstraction and assume a large view of the world, may seem superficial to them in their deep loss and pain. Once they believe that the cost of accepting that their suffering has a higher meaning would be to deny its overwhelming reality and obscenity, they reject all large explanations.

Theories that deny any higher meaning may then be attractive. If we can say that there is no other human reality beyond the small causalities and interplay of chance at atomic, genetic and other levels, evil and suffering cease to be a problem. They can be explained in material and physiological terms, with no need for a larger reason, nor an intelligible purpose into which to fit. So people are relieved of the burden of meaning.

Then there is goodness. In this context I understand goodness as something concretely experienced and not as an abstraction.

Most of us have known people whom we could only describe as good and whose qualities have made an indelible impression on us. We experience them as generous, serene, selfless, and unfailing in their consideration and personal regard for others, even when this is costly to themselves and apparently not in their own interest. We see in them a great and remarkable inner freedom and consistency. We might describe our dealings with them as an experience of goodness.

Goodness is an encouraging an experience as evil is undermining. But it becomes a problem if our understanding of the world and of our own lives is confined to the interplay of material causality and chance. We might certainly expect to find evidence of genetic predispositions to friendly behaviour, the influence of habit in modifying brain paths in ways that incline us to altruism, and

the role of nurture and environment in helping shape the ways in which we live.

But what we experience in people who are translucently free in their goodness is not adequately explained by these factors.

Just as the arguments for larger meaning can fail to meet the concrete experience of suffering and evil, so arguments that rely on chance and determinism may fail to do justice to the concrete experience of human goodness. The accounts are too piecemeal and reduce goodness to something much smaller than what is experienced.

Of course, problems do not always hole the ship of meaning. The extent to which the experience of overwhelming loss or evil will threaten someone's belief in a God who creates the world out of love, for example, depends largely on the strength of experience they associate with a caring God. It may also be that a similarly strong experience of the explanatory power of scientific thought will sustain others confronted with the opposite challenge.

The importance of experience suggests also why the proper initial response of churches to massive natural disasters such as tsunamis is one of solidarity with the victims and of providing symbolic space for people to experience and grieve the scale of suffering, and to pray. Responding to arguments that the disasters discredit Christian faith is best done later.

In arguing that goodness presents a problem for some accounts of the world, I am not trying to make a sneaky, back door argument for the existence of God. I am arguing simply that any account of the world must give full weight to the experiences that are problematic for it. It should not shrink the dimensions of the experience so that it fits into its theoretical framework.

The depth of the evils that people suffer and do and the transcendent quality of human freedom are the site on which explanations of the world must be built, not building materials to be cut to size.



## Humanising Hoover and Thatcher

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***J. Edgar* (M). Director: Clint Eastwood. Starring: Leonardo Di Caprio, Armie Hammer, Judi Dench. 137 minutes**

First, let's talk about J. Edgar Hoover's jowls. The bulldog visage sported by the first director of America's Federal Bureau of Investigation was somewhat of a trademark. Which makes the casting of the baby-faced Leonardo Di Caprio to portray him in a film about his life seem like an odd choice.

Then again, Di Caprio is a [perfectly fine](#) actor, and movie makeup is a veritable artform — one which has been honoured with its own category at the Academy Awards for over 30 years, ever since Christopher Tucker was snubbed despite his superlative work on 1980's *The Elephant Man*.

Unfortunately the work done by director Eastwood's makeup department is far below the standard set by Tucker and successive exemplars. A case in point: Armie Hammer, who plays Hoover's offsider and would-be life partner Clyde Tolson, appears to be wearing some kind of rubber fright mask.

Worse, you can see the seam where Hoover's patented jowls have been pasted onto Di Caprio's pretty boy cheeks.

This may seem trivial, but it's actually a big problem for Eastwood. From *Unforgiven* to [Gran Torino](#), his career as filmmaker has been marked by stories of redemption and flawed humanity. He clearly wants to humanise the oft-maligned Hoover.

So although the film focuses on Hoover's achievements as head of the burgeoning Bureau — his investigation into the kidnapping of aviator Charles Lindbergh's child; successive 'wars' on demonic communists and gangsters — it also dwells on his relationship with his adoring but demanding mother (Dench), and his love for Tolson, which he represses due to fiercely felt societal expectations.

Unfortunately, with the actors' performances impeded by those laughable, immobile facial prosthetics, the task of humanising is nigh impossible.

But the problems with *J. Edgar* do not begin and end with artificial faces. Like another recent biopic, *The Iron Lady*, in which an Oscar-baiting Meryl Streep vigorously impersonates Margaret Thatcher, *J. Edgar* introduces its subject in his later years, as he reflects back on the events of his life.

This can be an effective approach, able to imbue a story with an elegiac, regretful tone, so that even when seen at their worst (Thatcher at her most spittingly [imperious](#) ; Hoover as a repressed, self-aggrandising bully) the chance

of redemption seems always within reach.

But it is also a manipulative and disingenuous tactic. Both films err on the side of sentimentality — and these are [not](#) figures to whom sentimentality can be easily attached. The middling response from critics and audiences (both films received 'rotten' scores on review aggregate site [Rotten Tomatoes](#) ) suggest a more robust treatment of these notorious figures might have been in order.

Certainly *J. Edgar* and *The Iron Lady* appear insipid compared with other recent politically themed 'true stories' such as the Blair/Clinton film *The Special Relationship*, Ron Howard's *Frost/Nixon*, Oliver Stone's *W*, and Stephen Soderbergh's *Che*. These films humanised the characters but still dealt vigorously with their politics. They did so without sentimentality, Oscar-baiting — or badly applied fake jowls.

## **The crossing guard and the dawdler**

NON-FICTION

*Vin Maskell*

Some people laughed when I said I'd become a school crossing supervisor. They saw the big orange 'lollipop' Stop sign. They saw the daggy uniform. They saw the bizarre image of a bloke stopping peak-hour traffic with not much more than a whistle and a stick.

I'd see a father waiting at a corner 50m from the school, lovingly watching his young daughter make her way to the crossing.

I'd see a big sister holding a little sister's hand, all the way up the street, across the road and into the schoolyard.

I'd see mums and dads kissing their children goodbye at the school gate or waving silently from behind windscreens.

I'd see a boy dawdling, picking up sticks and stones, turning them over, putting them in his pocket. He was often the last to cross, arriving as the school's public address system played 'hurry up' music at 8:55am — usually 1980s rock anthems — but he was in no hurry.

And nor was I, standing there watching the world go by.

I took the job almost on a whim, in the mid-life midst of wondering where my future lay. Observing the cars and vans and utes and trucks driving past I tried to imagine being, say, a plasterer or a gardener or a police officer. A bricklayer, a paramedic, an antenna installer. A green grocer, a bus driver, a truckie. A road builder, a communications consultant, a driving instructor, a district nurse, a plumber, a window cleaner.

But with each glimpse of each vehicle I'd think No, No and No again. And as far as I could tell there were no particular vehicles — save perhaps the occasional beat-up sedan — that suggested a writer or a daydreamer.

Eventually I realised the job I wanted was probably the job I was doing there and then, that perhaps my future was right there in my hands, holding that Stop sign and being part of the rhythm of the neighbourhood, being — in a very small way — a guardian, a witness, a go-between, a shepherd.

But it couldn't last. The hourly rate was good but it's not a full-time gig. Ten 45-minute shifts a week wasn't going to pay many bills.

So after two months I packed my uniform, sign and flags under the stairs and headed into an office, into the land of the lanyard, into the chiming elevator world of flexitime, ID cards, logins, and security passes.

In between keying in data I think about the crossing. I think about the drivers:

most were patient and polite, some not-so. Some nodded hello, some kept talking on their mobile phones. I think about the parents: some were in a hurry, some had time. Most said hello, some kept talking on their mobile phones.

And I think about the children: friendly, cheerful, innocent, grateful. Some chatty, some moody and a few, yes, talking on their mobile phones. All of them growing up guided by their parents and their teachers and, even, a man in a daggy uniform with a Stop sign.

And then it's back to processing data. This job's only for a few months, so maybe all is not lost. Maybe, somehow, I could work a crossing again. Standing watching the world go by, possibly passing me by.

Will the loving father still be watching his daughter from the corner or will she be all on her own? Will the dawdler still be collecting sticks and stones or will the footpath treasures no longer catch his eye? Will the sisters still be holding hands all the way into the schoolyard?

And as I stop the various vehicles will I stop the occasional beat-up sedan, and nod knowingly at the driver as I blow my whistle and shepherd the children across the busy road?

## **Catholic social solutions to workplace fairness**

### POLITICS

*Race Matthews*



Bruising industrial confrontations within Qantas and in Victorian hospitals during the latter half of last year pose pertinent questions as to whether alternative forms of ownership and control of workplaces might in some instances have more to offer than conventional wisdom may suppose.

A case in point is the great complex of worker-owned manufacturing, retail, financial, agricultural, civil engineering and support cooperatives and associated entities headquartered at Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain.

With Spanish unemployment levels following the global financial crisis standing at some 22 per cent, the Mondragon cooperatives have demonstrated impressive resilience, absorbing their share of economic hits and emerging largely unscathed.

For example, Mondragon's Eroski worker/consumer retail cooperative — hitherto Spain's largest and fastest growing chain of supermarkets, hypermarkets and shopping malls — has over the last two years experienced for the first time since its inception in 1959 losses consequent on reduced consumer demand, and only in the current financial year anticipates a return to modest profitability.

Fagor, Spain's largest manufacturer of white goods, has successfully managed down production by 30 to 40 per cent in the face of a precipitous contraction of the consumer durables market.

The cooperative group's Caja Laboral credit union — effectively Spain's ninth largest bank — is recovering from a 75 per cent reduction in its profitability, from 200 million to 50 million euros.

And following a sharp reduction in the use by the cooperatives of temporary workers, overall employment has stabilised at around 83,800.

The cooperatives' triumph is attributable overwhelmingly to key attributes that set them aside from comparable conventional enterprises.

Not to be overlooked are the conceptual framework that underlies the cooperatives, as well as the enduring solidarity and subsidiarity values that enliven them. These are the legacy to the cooperatives of their founder, the Basque priest Don Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta.

Internalised and in part secularised as the values and framework have so largely become, they stem directly from the unswerving adherence by Arizmendiarieta to formation in the 'see, judge, act' or 'inquiry' study circle mould, as developed within the Young Christian Workers unionist movement.

As recalled by one of the five lay co-founders of the cooperative group, 'Father Arizmendi organised specialist courses on sociology to which he invited economics professors ... His ecclesiastical training led him towards being a practical apostle. He not only tried to give guidelines on what should be the model for the ideal enterprise, but he put that social enterprise to which he aspired into practice.'

The benefits of this model of industry underpinned by Catholic social values are manifold.

Practical advantage gives rise to enduring ties of loyalty to the cooperatives by their worker members. As equal co-owners of their workplaces, members enjoy job security together with individual capital holdings, equal sharing of profits on a proportionate basis and an equal say in governance.

And members share in ownership of a unique system of secondary support cooperatives, from which the primary cooperatives draw resources including financial services, social insurance, education, training, research and development.

A high priority is attached by the primary cooperatives to the competitive advantage of cutting edge research and development. To this end, the original Ikerlan research and development support cooperative is augmented by 13 sister bodies that specialise in particular aspects of manufacturing activity and product development.

And faced, as recently, by adverse trading circumstances, the cooperatives are able to avail themselves of significant flexibilities. For example, non-members employed on a temporary basis can be put off until conditions improve.

Members can agree to forfeit or postpone entitlements such as one or more of their 14 per annum pay packets or the payment of interest on their individual capital accounts, or in extreme circumstances authorise individual capital account draw-downs.

Cooperatives experiencing reduced demand are able to transfer members to cooperatives where demand is increasing, without detriment to their rights or entitlements. And supplementary capital can be accessed from centrally held inter-cooperative solidarity funds.

Meanwhile, on hold until the economy recovers, are further major changes expressing the ongoing commitment of the cooperatives to their origins and principles. These include agreed measures to enfranchise the 35,000 of Eroski's 50,000 retail workers who are not already members.

Some 114 local and overseas subsidiaries owned or joint ventured by the cooperatives are scheduled for conversion to worker ownership on a case by case basis, consistent with their differing cultural, legal, business and financial circumstances.

And in 2009, the US Steelworkers union entered into an agreement with

Mondragon to jointly develop manufacturing cooperatives in the US and Canada, that has yet to be given effect.

A record of so remarkable a character gives rise inevitably to pertinent questions. What contribution to productivity and workplace wellbeing might countries other than Spain have to gain from attitudinal change such as Mondragon has so successfully engendered?

And why is the Church in the English speaking world so largely silent about the Mondragon cooperatives' success in bringing to fruition the long struggle in the cause of its social teachings?

## **Dreams of pulling Australia out of its slump**

POETRY

*Ian C. Smith*

### **Cricket**

#### **(for Chris)**

Not yet thirteen, nor five feet tall,  
he plays his first C-grade match  
against older men and the better boys.  
Everyone bowled fast, he tells me,  
I kept getting an edge for quick singles.  
Sun, wind, joy, have burnished his skin.  
A mini-warrior, he broke his ebay bat,  
its snapped handle a review highlight.  
Later, he bowled four tight overs.  
He went close to a run-out,  
his speculative shy missing the stumps  
by a narrow gap between index fingers.  
He describes the free lunch, party pies  
proving the grown-up, privileged milieu  
he has glimpsed, grasped, memorised.  
Was it better than playing juniors? I ask  
like a teacher who knows the answer.  
Hell, yes! he says, graduation accomplished.  
I recall my boyhood sports debut with men,  
the surging pride in my uniform,  
its material heavier then, like me now.  
Sated, he goes to bed, perchance to dream  
of opening the batting, or bowling with pace,  
pulling Australia out of its current slump.

### **Archival**



Although most are probably long dead  
they seem happy, even excited.  
Perhaps they will toss triumphant hats.  
The wind might favour their team  
even steal tossed hats, but not hope  
facts that no doubt mattered when  
the photographer turned their way.  
Passionate voices shook the air  
each time their team thrust forward  
their breath, hearts, faster. Rapture.  
Beyond goals, beyond team uniforms  
the future is still composing in the dark  
its skies too indistinct to be seen  
waiting as this moment waited until  
its face appears as the present  
leaving after-images like exploded stars.  
Post-match, they review tactics, sweating  
on crowded trams, or punctual trains  
past our streets, these atoms & molecules.  
The Great War bled dry, their blind hope  
their dream, is that the only damage ahead  
is reserved for jousts with local rivals.

### **Damage**

I wake late after dream-mad sleep  
in this creaking house I know so well  
outside, soaked paths, grass glittering.  
I realise morning rain's soft drum roll  
had granted respite from daily truth  
a reminder of our long-ago sleep-ins  
naïve security in the future's potential.

Rainwater had spilled through rust holes  
in the sagging guttering, run into the shed  
below our canoe, for years strung up  
now a nest for possums under rafters.  
My thoughts flicker to that camping trip  
a swift current trapping us against a log  
our survival, with the help of friends.  
Where ibis roost I discover a fallen limb  
a canoe tree, river red gum, ancient  
from a different, more innocent time.  
Parts of a fence, a gate, lie crushed.  
Breathing the heavy scent of eucalyptus  
I separate firewood from bonfire fuel  
shattered wood buried deep in soft earth.  
What if I had walked beneath the limb  
at that fickle moment of gravity's power?  
A rushing noise, then oblivion.  
When I woke, it was from a dream.  
You were kissing me. I was breathless.  
I chop a V in green wood's pulpy flesh  
an old axeman disturbed by dreams.  
Drivers slow, stare, as if at an accident.  
The limb fell on its forked, thinner ends  
its jagged broad end high above ground  
a spectral gallows in the grey light.  
Insects seek refuge in my jumper's weave  
aches, and pain, attend each axe blow.  
Your dog remains close, watching me.

**Google Earth**

I limp through leaves on the old road

where I occasionally hear gunshots  
or animal screams in the night.  
Fence posts lie like felled warriors  
star pickets could mark an old battlefield  
where a school bus wound its way  
tubers memorials where shops traded.  
Neglect has its effect. I spot a fox.  
Silence, except for birdsong  
time's eroding agents on the loose.  
I used to run here with a stopwatch.  
It's what you can expect from disuse  
grass encroaches, shrinks the shoulders  
gravel sparse like an old man's hair.  
The road narrows, collapsed in places.  
Whatever happened here has receded.  
Those bus students' grandchildren  
could maximise this road on Google Earth  
among all our mapped days branching  
like membranes on these fallen leaves.  
A crow appraises me with its cold eye.

## Opportunists could rule in 'nervous' America

### POLITICS

*Tony Kevin*

Sometime tomorrow, we will know who won the Florida Republican primary — and by how much.

Primaries are voluntary stateheld contests, in which party members can vote for their preferred presidential candidate. In Florida, with third and fourth runners Rick Santorum and Ron Paul standing aside, it is a two-man battle.

A Newt Gingrich Republican candidacy for president is still possible. Six days ago — after Gingrich's unexpected but decisive primary victory over Mitt Romney in small, poor, redneck South Carolina — a credible CNN poll [showed](#) them neck to neck in Florida. Latest polls [claim](#) Romney has pulled ahead, 42 per cent to 31 per cent.

But it's still an open contest: in a highly volatile and emotive climate, no one really knows who will cast votes, or where the floating pro-Santorum and pro-Paul votes might go.

Populous, politically and ethnically diverse Florida really matters in the Republican primary process. Florida is a litmus test of the American electorate; and 50 Republican primary votes. If Romney wins in Florida but not by much, Gingrich will stay in the race, and Santorum and Paul will face important choices running up to Super Tuesday, 6 March, when 24 states hold simultaneous primaries.

If Gingrich pulls off an against-the-current-odds win in Florida, it is probably the end for Romney.

The real danger of a Gingrich candidacy has thrown both 'old' (East Coast moderates) and 'new' (Midwestern and Western new money, post-Bush) conservatives into action. The Republican party machine now sees that Gingrich could be their party's presidential candidate. A welter of conservative [criticism](#) has thus descended on him.

Gingrich is an authentic wild card populist politician: clever, experienced, quick-thinking, charismatic but erratic. Some former colleagues warn that he cannot be trusted to lead the party or the country. A few days ago, an anonymous admirer who has negotiated with him in Congress [commented](#) : 'Newt's absolutely brilliant ... He has 100 ideas; 97 are real good, the other three will blow up the world.'

A top deputy to Gingrich during the Republican revolution of the mid-1990s, Tom DeLay [said](#) :

'What has been said about Newt is pretty much true. He had to step down

because ... conservative Republicans wouldn't vote for him again as speaker ... because he's not really a conservative ... he'll tell you what you want to hear. He has an uncanny ability ... to feel your pain and know his audience and speak to his audience and fire them up. But when he was speaker, he was erratic, undisciplined.'

By contrast, Romney is Machine Man Republican: safe, rich, dour, cautious — and utterly uninspiring. I doubt he could ever beat Obama under any circumstances.

Just conceivably if the economy tanks or in response to some destabilising foreign policy crisis, Gingrich could beat Obama. He is a mercurial, quick-on-his-feet public debater. As a sample of his political potency, watch how brilliantly he handled the marital infidelity minetrap laid for him in the final South Carolina candidate debate — and the wild audience support for him.

If Gingrich were to get Republican money and right-wing media power behind him — as he would, if he became their primaries-elected chosen candidate — he could be a formidable opponent.

I see the United States as it now is, not as it was 20 years ago. This is a nervous nation in military decline and socio-economic crisis, whose mass politics are febrile and unpredictable. The old small town verities and values can no longer be taken for granted in this apprehensive, entertainment-distracted, celebrity-drugged culture.

Huge numbers of ordinary people who a few years ago thought they were safely lodged in the middle class now realise to their horror that they are a deeply vulnerable white-collar proletariat who must live with economic anxiety every day, as a rich three per cent and its retainers enjoy dividend wealth from exporting American jobs offshore.

These stresses are bearing heavily on America's formerly sound collective judgement. Such circumstances breed political extremism. Fortunately, the Republican contest has not thrown up such a candidate. Both Gingrich and Romney are career-driven opportunists without much baggage in the way of principle or ideology.

Romney and Gingrich will now be hard at work courting support from the significant Santorum and Paul constituencies.

Former 'Tea Party' frontrunners Sarah Palin and Herman Cain now back Gingrich. Populist 'anti-elites' sentiment could start to flow his way. In a recent comment on Facebook, Palin [wrote](#) 'Ronald Reagan and Barry Goldwater would be ashamed of us [Republicans] in this primary ... What we saw with this ridiculous opposition dump on Newt was nothing short of Stalinesque rewriting of history.'

Cain [praised](#) Gingrich as 'a patriot ... who is not afraid of bold ideas ... and who is going through the sausage machine now'.

Romney is in many ways a throwback to the traditional kind of centrist presidential candidate, back in the days when the two parties were ideologically almost indistinguishable. But now, ideology is back.

If Gingrich wins the Republican nomination, the election will be a contest of two flavours of populism: 'socialist' and 'nationalist'. Both Obama (genuinely) and Gingrich (opportunistically) now stand against the power of big money and big right-wing media. Romney represents those forces. If he wins, the election will be a straightforward ideologically defined battle, which Obama should win.

But if Gingrich wins the candidacy, those forces will be with him. The election itself is an unequal contest in which voting geography (the electoral college system) and the advertising power of big money and big media favour the Republican candidate, whoever he is.

What a fascinating — and important for the world — drama this Republican primary contest has become.

## **Pope's advice for Gillard and Abbott**

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

We expect our politicians to be engaged with the electorate, often assuming this equates to constant participation in public debate in the media.

It's as if there is a mathematical formula allowing us to measure their 'cut through' according to the total number of words they utter in public. That is, a greater number of different words, repeated frequently, amounts to more effective communication.



On the contrary, it's more likely that *less* words will engage people more effectively. Thomas Merton said in his 1956 classic *Thoughts in Solitude* that silence 'teaches us to know reality'. He warned that words not informed by silence can 'defile' reality. That is certainly what underlies practices such as meditation and yoga, which help us to listen to silence so that we can connect with the world around us from the core of our being.

It was also the key point of Pope Benedict's World Communications Day [message](#) that was released last week. He said that silence and words are 'two aspects of communication which need to be kept in balance' if 'authentic dialogue' is to take place.

The Pope's insight could usefully serve as advice to the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader from political strategists charged with explaining why they are failing to connect with voters.

'In silence, we are better able to listen to and understand ourselves; ideas come to birth and acquire depth; we understand with greater clarity what it is we want to say and what we expect from others...| we avoid being tied simply to our own words and ideas without them being adequately tested.'

Applying this principle to political rhetoric, we might hope that punctuating words with silence will allow leaders to move beyond 'Stop the boats!' and other blunted and hollow mantras towards an understanding of the real fears and hopes of the Australian people. On this issue, there is little doubt that the weight of words has distorted and defiled reality.

The Pope refers to communication as 'a kind of ...œeco-system... that maintains a just equilibrium between silence, words, images and sounds'. These are the ingredients which, in right measure, could allow the hitherto elusive 'real Julia' to appear in time for the 2013 election.

## Breaking the 'boat people' deadlock

POLITICS

*Lyn Bender*



If you are tired of hearing about asylum seekers imagine how weary they must be.

Much of the analysis regarding asylum seekers does not seem to drive home the core truth: that the debate conducted by politicians is not really about solving the so called refugee problem. It is predominantly a show for an audience. It is a game of hardball.

That game is an old one played by tyrannical regimes throughout time and perfected under Nazism by Joseph Goebbels. First, demonise a group. Then you can progressively suspend their rights and use them to shore up your power.

Part of this denigration is achieved by holding back what might arouse common sympathy.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority's new Guidelines on privacy restrictions will prevent television networks filming asylum seekers arriving on our shores by boat. Jill Singer [cites](#) this as politically ominous and deliberate. Out of sight and out of mind. If people don't see the pain on the faces of refugees, concern and protestations will be lulled.

So much of the convoluted argument about what to do with boat people evokes the journeys of many persecuted groups. Their journeys are also our own, demanding moral self examination. What do we owe fellow humans from other lands who are fleeing war, persecution, torture and death?

The Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951, to which Australia is a signatory, has already supplied this [answer](#) . We have agreed that we owe refugees the right to seek asylum and we cannot send them back into danger. We must allow them to flee to our shores and shall receive them and hear and consider their stories and grant asylum to genuine refugees.

But the accusations of irresponsibility, queue jumping and terrorism characterise asylum seekers as less entitled. Portrayed at best, as powerless suffering victims, or at worst as invaders intent on stealing the benefits of our citizenship, the plight of refugees then invokes our most limited ways of thinking. Refugees are spoken of as unwanted goods to be sent back whenever possible.

Advocates and supporters are mocked as soft bleeding hearts who are responsible for deaths at sea.

So why are we deadlocked? Firstly the Geneva Convention has been ignored as



though its principles were up for grabs. Secondly our government and approximately 50 per cent of Australians have not focused on the humanity of refugees. Successive governments have used, abused and exploited them for perceived political gain and to distract from other problems.

It is a psychological mechanism, to focus on a threat or create an enemy coming from without in order to foster compliance or create a diversion from the problems within.

However, to erode or deny the rights of a few is to endanger the rights of all. Describing 'the slow lobster boil of erosion of freedom', Milton Mayor, in his book *They Thought They Were Free: The Germans 1933—1945*, writes, 'Resist the beginnings and consider the end. But one must foresee the end in order to resist, or even see, the beginnings.'

As a daughter of Jewish refugees I know this in the heart of my being. 'The beginnings' were told to me by my parents in the stories of nagging, relentless denigration and discrimination in their childhood as Jews in Poland in the 1920s and 30s. These beginnings prepared the ground for persecution to build in Germany and Poland towards the extremity of the 'Final Solution'.

Similarly, if Asylum Seekers are seen to be 'lesser than', compassion is removed. So politicians argued about whether a boy orphaned by the Christmas Island boat wreck should be 'sponsored' to travel to his parents' funeral and then sent back to detention. The enormity of his grief was sidelined as was his need for care and comfort. He was just another Asylum Seeker.

If we start from the rights and humanity presumption we might see a way through this.

It is hard if not impossible to deter by punishment the desperate who fear for their lives and are seeking family reunion. The alternative of putting the Geneva Convention at the core of our actions, faster processing and resettlement, and increasing our intake from places such as Indonesia will produce a better outcome for thousands of refugees and make dangerous boat journeys less likely.

This has been proposed by advocates including [Julian Burnside](#) .

If we were to dismantle what has become our own unethical and psychologically damaging refugee processing industry, we could end the politically motivated game.

That in my view is a way forward out of the quagmire that is Australia's reprehensible treatment of vulnerable people.

