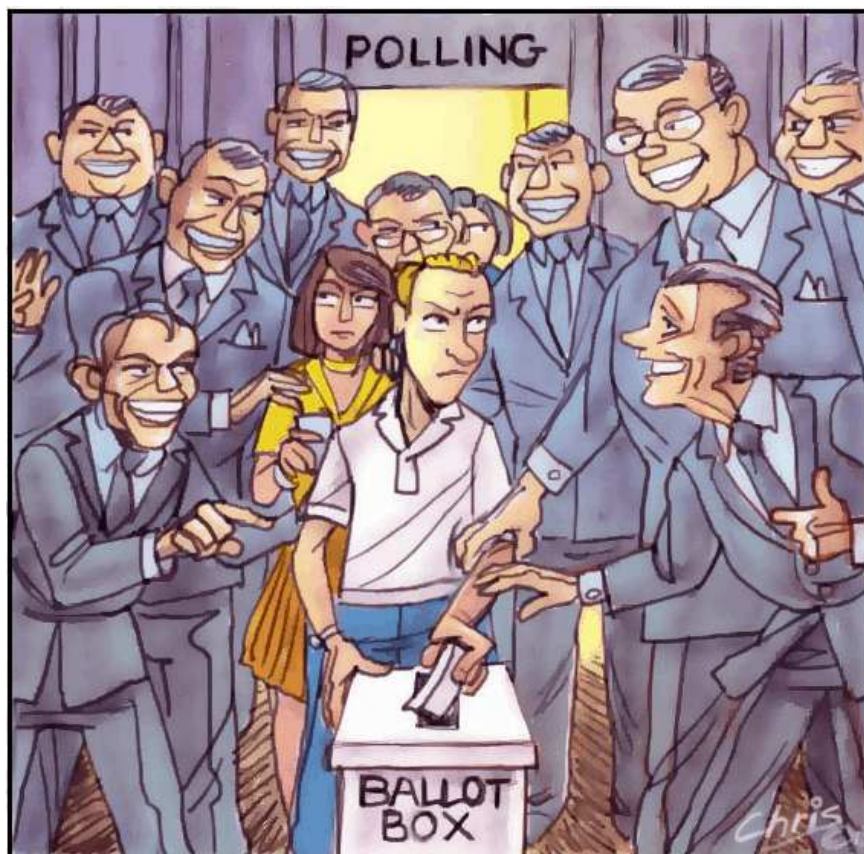


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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

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

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Life beyond IVF purgatory

REVIEWS

Jen Vuk and Barry Gittins

***Resurrection Year* by Sheridan Voysey. Thomas Nelson Inc., 2013.**

Website

Jen:

It wasn't so much a phone call as a lifeline. That's how I remember the day the fertility clinic called me with news of my pregnancy. After six years of hoping and lamenting, the life my husband and I had all but given up on was to be ours.

Meanwhile, religious broadcaster Sheridan Voysey and his wife Merryn Voysey were in IVF purgatory. In 2010, after a decade-long journey through 'Expectation. Expectation. Disappointment', the Voyseys came to the 'heart-breaking conclusion' that their quest for a family was over.

'The wilderness, I find, reflecting on those scriptures, is a place of rich significance,' writes Sheridan in his aptly named memoir *Resurrection Year*. 'At its best it is the place where we encounter God and discover his will for our lives ... At its worst it is the place of unfaithfulness and judgment'.

I don't think it's giving anything away, Barry, to say that when we first meet this deeply Christian couple both are struggling to see the wood for the trees.

It doesn't much improve, for Sheridan anyway, when Merryn suggests they look towards Europe for their 'new life'. The move would mean turning his back on a successful media career and Christian talkback radio show. He's unsure whether his ego, already reeling from the perils of infertility, can survive another hit.

'Empty and confused', yet totally committed to Merryn, he decides that cutting ties and relocating overseas is the only path towards 'restoration'.

While undeniably candid and, at times, uncomfortably confessional, there's nothing glib about this very modern story. Often we hear of IVF success stories (yours truly, a forever grateful example), yet *Resurrection Year* reminds us that while great advances have been made in this critical area, IVF is no miracle cure.

Sheridan writes with the clarity of someone who knows what it means to live daily with the spectre of infertility. 'Like chronic illness, unwanted singleness, and other life statuses that deviate from the 'norm', childlessness can bring isolation', he writes. 'Infertility can remove you from community.'

And yet he's nothing if not engaged with the world around him and driven to find his and Merryn's place in that world. *Resurrection Year* delights with a surprising vitality. This is a book motivated by a lightness of being, propelled by the author's need to reconcile with a 'God who is sometimes silent but never absent'.

At its heart lies a trembling, poetic reminder to hold fast onto a lifeline, wherever we may find it. As Sheridan reminds us, Barry, in the exigent realm of infertility there are no easy answers and even fewer absolutes, barring one: that the one thing more tragic than 'a broken dream is a life forever defined by it'.

Barry:

Jen, thank you for sharing; the evocation of bliss redolent of sorrow. You know what's at stake here.

Resurrection Year reveals two broken people rediscovering joy and purpose in disappointment's aftermath. Sheridan is an award-winning writer and broadcaster; Merryn, a skilled medical statistician. This is more than window dressing and ego; in particular, the self-worth of a 'bloke' is inextricably tied into what he can do.

That said, I agree Jen that Sheridan's angst over his 'purpose', the grief at interrupted roles, is less weighty for the reader than the couple's infertility and desire for answers.

Male infertility is largely an unexplored country for Australians and our national media. One in six Australian couples suffer infertility, and medical stats place Sheridan as one in 20 male Australians whose lives, and those of their partners, are blighted by infertility. Forty per cent of relevant treatments in Australia address male infertility, yet that is largely unspoken; at least by men.

Jen, the process of manning up on Voysey's part, his shame and sense of responsibility for Merryn's unrealised hopes, makes for a tough and moving read, doesn't it? But without sharing the varying ethical and cultural armwrestles over adoption, conception, and their IVF efforts, this just wouldn't hit home ... well, what else but a 'balls and all' account will help break the silence about male infertility?

To get to this point of public revelation and musing, past catharsis, past confession, and towards their mutual acceptance of childlessness, required the understanding and cooperation of the author's wife and, putting it bluntly, considerable *cojones*.

Yet for all its intensity, Jen, I agree it's not a bleak book. The couple's faith in each other; humour interspersed with serendipitous insights; their ongoing hopes for fulfillment ... it balances the chronicling of their grief and uncertainty — and ultimately their belief in each other and their God.

A 'public Christian', Voysey knows the adage that 'God provides' is hit and miss: 'I feel like I'm about to burst into tears all the time. Perhaps I didn't pray hard enough ... I can hardly pray at the moment though. Feelings of spiritual failure haunt me ... God, why won't you come through for her? Why? She's getting damaged by this.'

A purportedly interventionist God doesn't intervene. Benjamin Franklin's quip

that 'God helps those who help themselves' self-evidently doesn't ring true. But doubt doesn't deny the strength or consolation of their faith in a God of grace, as Voysey proves.

While some theological agonising may alienate some readers, the couple's love, joy, pain and devotion bleed through the pages.

McGuire ape gaffe exposes Australian tolerance as myth

AUSTRALIA

Ruby Hamad

There are lessons to be learned from the Eddie McGuire 'King Kong' debacle, not least of which is how it so perfectly demonstrates the discrepancy between how Australians like to view themselves and the reality.

When Indigenous AFL star Adam Goodes was called an 'ape' by a teenage fan McGuire jumped in to defuse the situation, apologising to Goodes and passing off the taunt as the innocent mistake of a teenager who had [no idea](#) that what she said was racist.

This is how we like to see ourselves: a country that is fundamentally tolerant and where racist incidents are not only aberrations but usually not even racist. As long as we apologise and quickly move on, we can continue believing there isn't an underlying racial inequality inherent in our society.

But McGuire's on air comments just days later, that Goodes could be employed to promote the musical King Kong, brings the reality to the fore. Even as we apologise for causing offence — unintentional of course — in the very next breath we can and speak in a way that ensures racial inequality perseveres.

If the girl in question didn't know she was making a racist statement, it is in large part because of flippant comments such as McGuire's that continue to equate black people with non-human animals. The reason 'ape' is an intrinsically racist comment when directed at black people is because for centuries it was this equation that was [used to justify](#) colonisation and attempted annihilation.

In some ways, this casual racism is more devastating than deliberate racial vilification because it exudes an unconscious acceptance of white privilege, of a state of mind that does not understand what it means to be the inheritor of centuries of dehumanisation.

This, along with other recent incidents, such as the [Delta Goodrem 'blackface' episode](#), show how desperately Australians need to discuss race. I have no doubt that Goodrem and McGuire had no malicious intent. But both of them have forwarded the erroneous belief that when it comes to racism, it is intent not outcome that matters.

Those who object to Indigenous people being called 'apes' and to white men painting themselves black are dismissed as being politically correct and infringing on the rights of others to say and do as they please. Comments such as those of British comedians [Stephen Fry](#) and [Ricky Gervais](#) to the effect that there is 'no right not to be offended' are used to defend the rights of the privileged to continue marginalising the disadvantaged.

Here's the thing: there is offence and then there is offence. When Fry and

Gervais say we choose to be offended, they speak of the offence to one's sensibilities. They mean that one can decide to be offended by, for example, public nudity, swearing, or the satirisation of religious doctrine.

Then there is the offence against one's very person. How can Goodes choose not to be offended by comments conceived for the very purpose of justifying crimes against the racial group to which he belongs? How can any of us who belong to marginalised groups not be offended when we know the damage caused by such language?

Language is not harmless. It is through language that unspeakable horrors against blacks, women, Jews, and others were justified.

As historian Marjorie Spiegel [notes](#), throughout history, when oppressors wanted to target a particular group, they used language to prepare the population for the coming destruction. Slavery was accepted because the terminology used to describe black people — mad dogs, coons, apes — did such a powerful job of turning humans beings into something 'other' that it was not considered a crime to sell them into bondage.

To defend statements that clearly vilify a certain group under 'freedom of speech' not only undermines what that freedom actually is — to speak your mind without the threat of tyranny — it totally subverts it from something intended to protect vulnerable people into something that maintains the discriminatory status quo.

Here is what it comes down to: those who belong to a dominant, privileged group, do not get to decide what is and isn't offensive to the marginalised minorities that are the butt of the offence.

The idea that such minorities should 'get over it' and allow the majority to live in a cocoon of ignorance is not acceptable. To accept race-based taunts is to ensure the lessons of the past will never be learned.

These are our teachable moments. It is through our reaction to these incidents that we can finally turn the fantasy of how we Australians perceive ourselves into the reality of a tolerant and equal nation.

Boys using violence to impress girls

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Mud* (MA). Director: Jeff Nichols. Starring: Matthew McConaughey, Reese Witherspoon, Tye Sheridan, Jacob Lofland. 130 minutes**

Some lessons need to be learned more than once. A young boy punches an older peer in defence of the honour of a girl he admires. The girl is suitably impressed, enough so that she invites the boy on a date. Is violence, then, an approved medium for the defence of romantic ideals? It is a premise that the boy, Ellis (Sheridan) will test twice more, in differing circumstances and with less gratifying results.

Mud is a coming of age story, set and beautifully filmed in backwoods Arkansas river country. Ellis lives on the river with his parents, part of a semi permanent community of houseboats that is under threat from new regulations. Ellis' fundamentally romantic world view is reflected in the film's gorgeous cinematography, which soaks up the rough and elegant details of Ellis' world, from the ramshackle timber of the houseboat and tangles of trees and scrub to the chocolate-ripple of the river and the black squirm of cottonmouths in a creekbed.

Of late Ellis' romantic notions are coming under strain, due not only to the threat on his home but also from the tense marital woes of his parents, who are staring down the prospect of a separation. Ellis seeks solace in a typically boyish adventure — *Mud* has its boots planted firmly in the literary footsteps of Mark Twain — which in turn brings an alluring but potentially dangerous new influence into his life.

Ellis and his 'Huckleberry', Neckbone (Lofland), take a non-parentally-approved boat ride to an uninhibited island on the Mississippi, to witness and claim as their own the no-less-than-miraculous sight of a boat left high in the branches of a tree by recent flood waters. This utterly mythic childhood experience takes an equally mythic turn when they encounter Mud (McConaughey), a tattooed transient with an enigmatic air and a deadly past.

Neck is wary, but Ellis is won over by a tale that plays right to his romantic world view. Mud is on the run from the law, having killed a man in the defense of the woman he loves. They are now estranged by circumstance, but Mud has come to the area to be reunited with Juniper (Witherspoon), herself a mythic creature with nightingales tattooed on her hands, who the boys soon confirm is in the area. Dangerous parties are closing in on the two hapless lovers, and Mud needs the boys' help to ensure the rendezvous occurs safely.

I've never been a fan of McConaughey as an actor. Here, admittedly, his stagy charisma serves the character well, underpinning the fact that Mud is more myth than man. McConaughey plays up to the gaze of his young co-stars, with their

combination of awe and dread and bemusement and basic boyish curiosity. For their own part the boys match him for astuteness and brazenness; see the sly, baffled glances that they exchange at some of Mud's more theatrical or oblique pronouncements. They are drawn to him, but not unequivocally.

Ellis is not only intrigued by Mud's almost ethereal eccentricity (he wears a 'lucky' shirt and has crosses nailed to the heels of his boots), he is captivated by the essential romance of Mud's story. The ferocious love that attracts Mud to Juniper stands in Ellis' mind as a kind of ideal; the perfect contrast to the disintegration of his parents' marriage. In a way Mud is a vision of Ellis' own future; his back story contains parallels to Ellis' own fraught forays into young love, as portrayed in the film. But should Ellis take Mud's experience as inspiration or warning?

Ellis' coming of age, his journey from innocence to experience, takes place in the aching overlap between romanticism and fantasy. Like the rivers of Arkansas themselves, life's waters contain deadly snakes, and sooner or later they will bite (ophiophobic movie-goers beware). Boys can't go around punching other boys in order to impress girls; sometime marriages fail, though no one is at fault; the law is not always just; and consequences catch up even with those who are motivated by love. These are hard lessons for a romantic to learn.

Reconciliation balances guilt and hope

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Before the Apology to the Stolen Generations many people canvassed the relative merits of symbolic reconciliation and practical reconciliation.

The limitations of such symbolic gestures are evident: they may make divided groups feel better about each other but lead to no material benefit for the weaker group. The limitations of practical reconciliation have also often been noted. Actions may address particular needs, but, if imposed, can further alienate the weaker group.

To lead to reconciliation, both symbolic and practical actions must flow out of a shared imaginative world. Each group must make space in their imagination for a realistic view of the often terrible events that divided them and of who was responsible for them. They must also make space for a realistic view of the enduring consequences of these actions. And they must share a hopeful vision of what reconciliation might mean for their society.

How difficult it is to reach an imaginative world in which hope and acceptance of a horrifying reality are held together could be seen in the South African Truth Commission.

It was often difficult for White South Africans to acknowledge the horrific things the government had done in their interests and the extent of the sufferings caused to Black South Africans. It was equally difficult for many to hope that out of this acknowledgment could come reconciliation. But when hope and recognition of a terrible reality went together, seeds of change were sown.

Because it is so difficult to hold together in the imagination a vision of a full reconciliation and the recognition of past wrongs whose consequences continue to be felt many generations later, it is natural to reduce the tension between hope and recognition. We minimise the wrongs and horrors of the past and the extent to which their effects mark people's lives today. And we lower our hopes for what reconciliation might mean.

It may mean moving on without confronting the past and the way it has advantaged some and disadvantaged others, or thinking up plans to deal with the problem that the other group poses. Because the causes of division are not addressed, no reconciliation takes place. Indeed what is intended to benefit people is perceived by them as an imposition and resented.

If divided people are to be reconciled, both symbolic and practical actions are important. But both must flow from a shared imagination in which harsh historical realities and large hopes are held in tension. Symbolic actions of reconciliation are important because they help to preserve the tension.

In the Apology, Kevin Rudd spoke powerfully of the sufferings inflicted on people by a wrong policy, and of the continuing effects of those policies. But the context of the Apology expressed the hope and determination to build a better and reconciled Australia.

Symbolic actions like this give hope that by acknowledging a harsh reality we can be reconciled and set free. And in turn they strengthen us against yielding to the easy charms of a harmonising imagination.

Practical actions are also needed to heal what has been broken in society, and these will of necessity be enabled by the more powerful of the divided groups. But these actions must also come from a shared imagination that holds conflicting things in tension.

For non-indigenous Australia this means acknowledging the wrongs done to Indigenous people by the settlers and the continuing effects of these wrongs today. It also means acknowledging the harm that when the descendants of settlers analyse the situation of Indigenous people and devise solutions to what they see as problems, they will perpetuate the effects of the original wrongs.

Practical actions that will bear fruit demand listening with a humility born out of awareness of a destructive history, and taking time to listen and to build reconciliation, not simply to implement a policy.

Bumpy road trip to a remote community

AUSTRALIA

John Adams

I arrived at Kiwirrkurra after two days on the road including a five-hour dialysis session for Patrick and a [Papunya Tula](#) AGM in Kintore.

Patrick's excitement when I picked him up from the hostel in Alice was palpable. We had the usual drama about the key card with no number and a bit of tension about me not buying him orange juice. I only learnt 20 minutes before that orange juice and bananas are a 'no go' for dialysis patients. I also found out that more than 500ml of fluid a day is a health risk. That's pretty tough when it is 40 degrees in the shade!

Dialysis patients don't piss, so they are the perfect companion for a long road trip.

Patrick Tjungarryi is a senior Pintupi man who grew up in Balgo Hills. He is a Papunya Tula shareholder and one of Australia's most collectable artists. His paintings feature prominently in the [Canning Stock Route](#) exhibition currently touring Australia.

In 2008 the Northern Territory government refused to allow Patrick to come to Alice Springs for dialysis. They told him he would have to move to Perth. Advocacy from a number of NGOs lead by Western Desert Nganampa Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation (WDNWPT) reversed this decision and caused Minister Snowdon to commission a report into renal health in Central Australia. (WDNWPT delivers nurse assisted dialysis in Kintore, Lajamanu and Yuendumu, and supports Western Desert Dialysis patients in Alice Springs through the Purple House.)

Patrick learned to do peritoneal dialysis and returned home to Kiwirrkurra, and cared for himself for two years. An infection meant he could no longer do this and he was forced to leave Kiwirrkurra to access dialysis treatment in Alice Springs. Alice Springs is Arrente country. Pintupi forced to leave their communities and live on another person's land experience significant homesickness and a sense of shame.

The six hours to Kintore were uneventful. I've done the trip a couple of times before but it's been a few years. We passed through Papunya and Mt Liebig on the way. By the time we got to Mt Liebig the store was shut so Patrick and I made do with crackers and cheese. I asked him if he wanted some of my apples but he told me in mumbles and sign that his teeth aren't up to it. Communication is a bit of an issue but we make do.

When driving, Patrick tells me where the road is bad and where the water holes and outstations are along the way. If I miss one of his subtle finger movements and we hit a hole in the road too hard he grumbles.

He can get cranky but it's mostly down to frustration and when he's happy with me he calls me *Jakamarra* and gives me a cheeky grin. But there's not a lot of that. We share a similar personality, getting irritated with each other occasionally, but this has its own integrity. It's hard to hide from each other on trips like this.

On day one in Kiwirrkurra I caught up with Patrick and his family. His son tells Patrick I am a Catholic, and that impresses everybody a great deal. I gave Patrick one of my Jesuit cards when I was in Alice Springs and he gave it to his son. Apparently there had been a discussion the night before about who was this 'husband of Sarah' who brought the old man home.

I went to the clinic to meet the nurse, a convivial, older chap by the name of Paul. He made time for me even though he was busy.

I then caught up with the community development advisor. She talked about the community's desire to build a recreational hall. They have \$600,000 to go towards it. I talked about my own experience in building such things and how they probably were a bit short on cash to build what they wanted. I said I would help out if I could.

In the afternoon I caught up with Bobby West, the community leader who invited us to Kiwirrkurra. He showed me his country and let me know my obligations regarding its use.

On our return to the community I met with Jimmy Brown, the chairperson for the community and the Lutheran pastor. We talked about bringing the Catholic priest from Alice out to perform a Mass for the Catholics at Kiwirrkurra. (Whether at Kiwirrkurra or Ali Curung I always get told 'We [are] all Christians, don't matter'. Too bad they never met my grandmother, it really mattered to her!)

Although I make a point of spending most of my time being with community members, a lot of time on these trips gets spent with the non-indigenous staff. They all seem to struggle with the culture and Aboriginal ways of doing things. We are supportive and listen, being careful not to buy into their issues .

Frustration is the overriding emotion. Quite often they bring up the same issues or ideas I heard 20 years ago when I was one of them. The way forward hasn't changed in my mind: one needs to be grounded in the community, there are no simple answers and people are entitled to experience the world in their own way. Non-indigenous people think they can fix things, they don't see that this view reeks of cultural superiority.

Service providers who work in such communities need to be mindful that they engage with the whole community, are transparent, and are useful in practical ways. This requires patience, a full experience of the life of the community, and a willingness to listen. Urgency is the enemy.

The trip home is long. Patrick looks like he has a weight lifted from his shoulders. His wife has failing kidneys and has dementia. Each time he goes home it could be the last time he has with her.

A weight has been lifted off my shoulders too, by the way the community welcomed my involvement in their lives. I feel Patrick and I have the start of a relationship. We know each other a little better — 16 hours in a Hilux will do that to two grumpy old buggers. And I know that Kiwirrkurra mob a little better now too. It's a start.

Abuse cover-ups perpetuated priestly mystique

AUSTRALIA

Ray Cassin

As usual, a cartoonist captured the reaction best. Tandberg, in the Fairfax press yesterday, sketched a child cowering as an arm clad in clerical black lunged from a church doorway.

The image was captioned with the euphemistic phrases that Catholic bishops have too often employed when conceding that church authorities concealed the sexual abuse of children: 'a past mistake ... an error of judgment ... a misdemeanour'. The admissions seem reluctant, and so lacking in compassion as to demean the suffering of victims and their families.

And it was in that vein that the world heard Cardinal George Pell respond to committee members' questions on the last day of public hearings by the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into child abuse. 'Do you agree that the Catholic Church placed paedophile priests above the law?' asked Labor MP Frank McGuire. 'In some cases, unfortunately,' was the understated, and underwhelming, reply.

As the man who, when archbishop of Melbourne, laid down the contentious 'Melbourne Response' protocols for dealing with complaints of abuse, Pell got a roasting from inquiry members. McGuire's Liberal colleague Andrea Coote asked how he could justify compensation for victims being capped at \$75,000 when \$30 million had been spent on a hostel for Australian pilgrims in Rome, in which an apartment is permanently set aside for him.

Pell's bureaucratically cautious reply — 'that the church has never claimed it would be unable to pay appropriate compensation' — seemed oblivious to the rhetorical force of Coote's question, as did his bizarre historical excursus on the tradition of building pilgrims' hostels in Rome, which he traced back to the ninth century Saxons.

It was McGuire's questioning, however, that went beyond the issues of concealment, compassion for victims and compensation to the causes of the abuse. He asked whether priestly celibacy might have had something to do with it. Pell conceded that 'in some cases' it may have, but insisted 'marriage is no deterrent to paedophiles'.

Even that very limited concession, which did not take issue with the 1000-year-old discipline of mandatory priestly celibacy among Latin-rite Catholics, is interesting. Such an admission has rarely been made by a senior cleric commenting on the abuse crisis. But Pell's reply, and perhaps McGuire's question too, ignored the real reason for suspecting that the origins of clerical sexual abuse lie in obligatory celibacy.

Of course marriage is no deterrent to paedophiles. It is well attested that most

child victims of sexual abuse are molested by family members, not clerics, teachers or scoutmasters. Acknowledging that the problem is not caused by sexual frustration, however, only raises again the question of why bishops and major superiors put so much effort, for so long, into concealing the abuse that did take place, and into protecting perpetrators.

One consequence of mandatory celibacy has been the creation of a priestly mystique: a notion that the priest, because of his heroic renunciation, is someone special, a man set apart. The lived experience of the past 1000 years has hardly vindicated the mystique, but that hasn't prevented the church's clerical leadership from continuing to invoke it anyway.

Celibacy has become an instrument of power, the badge of an elite clerical caste, rather than what its defenders claim it to be: a total dedication of one's life to building the Kingdom of God. It might have been that had it remained voluntary, as it was in the first 1000 years of Christianity, as it still is in the Eastern churches and has always been in the Protestant churches.

In Latin Christianity, however, the obligation and the mystique have got in the way of freely chosen dedication.

When Pell and other bishops appearing before inquiries into sexual abuse admit that the cover-ups were attempts to avoid 'scandal', they are really talking about the mystique — about their fear of what might happen if priests were no longer thought to be special. The mystique has well and truly been exploded now, yet we still live with its baleful consequences.

One of them is that the priesthood has sometimes attracted those who hoped that a celibate life would allow them to avoid accepting their own sexuality. That belief usually caught up with them, blighting their own lives and often the lives of others, too. Even worse, the obsession with this particular form of renunciation has skewed the entire ascetical tradition, as a glance at the list of canonised saints will confirm.

The great majority of those whose names the church from time to time adds to that list are either clerics or vowed 'religious'. Lay people who get the gong have usually had to go a step further by losing their lives: Thomas More, for example, or Joan of Arc, whom the church, under political pressure, burned as a sorceress because she had committed terribly transgressive acts such as wearing blokes' clothes and leading men in battle.

In its ordinary teaching the Church routinely proclaims the spirituality of ordinary life, yet we do not have a model of sanctity that is not based on heroic renunciation. That is very strange for a church that makes marriage a sacrament. Source of grace it may officially be, but in practice it's still treated as the second-class option.

In the meantime, the failure of too many priests to live up to the supposed

first-class option has landed us in a situation where bishops front up to inquiries to make rehearsed, lawyer-like admissions and apologies that, even when sincere, seem to be too little, too late. If that is ever to change, bishops will have to rethink much more than how they compensate victims of abuse, and which of their predecessors they blame for 'past mistakes'.

Asylum seeker sonnet

CREATIVE

Various

Treasure Island, a sonnet

Within our happy harbourside retreat
we put on show of affluence and glee
and round the barbie with our friends we meet
or watch the footy final on TV.

Our leaders stop the boats, turn back the tide
of those who seek to storm our golden gates,
to let them know that God's not on their side
nor will we ever count them as our mates.

With every boat that sinks our grief's untold,
the smugglers just don't care they're overfull,
so join the queue, no need to bribe with gold
and get a proper visa in Kabul
or if we must, illegals to prevent
we'll just excise the whole damn continent.

Brendan Doyle

small and smaller islands

beaches, these doors swung wide
through barbed-wire cliffs, gates
held wide by a welcoming smile
of sand; land a place for landing and
the landed, greeting and the waving,
new bricks farmed and growth
embraced like fresh children;

 across the valley there
a tragedy of cliffs, no garden clinging
by its fingers, no symbiosis blending

in the soil; standing straight-backed,
staring out to sea.

Ben Walter

Blind tiger

They repatriated this security risk.
You'll be safe back home,
they assured him, *the war's over.*
He knew about the war,
forced to fight when still a child.
And he knew about *over.*
Over was why he risked death
to escape to a place
that sounded so safe and festive:
Christmas Island. Only he was flown
to another island where men
hung from beams like strange fruit.
Now he sits on a footpath
begging for coins, his eyes
punched out by bicycle spokes.
You'll be safe there, they growled,
the war's over. He knows
what it means to be blind.

Rob Wallis

Wage inequality leaving workers in poverty

AUSTRALIA

Brian Lawrence

We will soon know the outcome of the Annual Wage Review 2013. The decision of the Fair Work Commission will increase the wage packet of the one in six workers who is only paid the prescribed safety net wage.

The size of the increase will attract headlines and editorial comment. But the longer term importance of the decision will be in its response to past minimum wage decisions. This year, more than ever, the Commission has been confronted with evidence that the safety net wage system has failed low paid workers and their families.

From December 2000 to December 2012 Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings increased by 74.4 per cent, far outstripping price increases of 39.5 per cent, due to increasing productivity and a dramatic change in the Terms of Trade. Even through the five years straddling the GFC, these average earnings increased by 26.6 per cent.

The rivers of gold that flowed into the Commonwealth Treasury in this period have funded the extension of family payments to the middle class, large tax cuts for high income earners and much needed increases in pensions.

The problem with changes in aggregates, such as average weekly earnings and Gross Domestic Product, is that they can hide counter-trends and growing inequality.

Despite increasing national wealth, the unemployed languish on \$35.50 a day and the Commonwealth Government has made life much tougher for sole parents by their transfer from the Parenting Payment to the poverty-inducing Newstart allowance.

Wage inequality has grown greatly over the past decade or so. A worker employed on a wage rate of more than \$767 per week had a real wage cut over the 12 years. All safety net-dependent workers were relatively worse off in 2012. A major cause of the current situation has been the failure of successive wage-setting tribunals to adjust safety net wages to reflect increases in community earnings.

A very troubling consequence of increasing wage inequality is that a growing number of people have fallen under rising poverty lines.

In December 2000 a family of four dependent on the Federal Minimum Wage, now called the National Minimum Wage, was \$1.03 per week under the poverty line (set at 60 per cent of median disposable income). By December 2012 the poverty gap had grown to \$109.46 per week, equal to an annual loss of about \$9 per week.

This extraordinary change places enormous pressure on the second parent to get a job just to make ends meet. A similar family who depends on the base trade-qualified wage rate saw their margin of 11.4 per cent above the poverty line fall to 2.8 per cent under the poverty line, with a poverty gap of \$28.70 per week. By contrast, the same family on average weekly earnings had risen from 24.7 per cent to 26.9 per cent above the poverty line.

These changes also impact sole parents unable to secure full time work because of a lack of work or affordable childcare. Many sole parent families live in poverty with no prospect of their minimum wage lifting them out of it.

Research commissioned by the Australian Council of Social Services in 2012 showed that 7.1 per cent of full time workers are below the poverty line and 20.5 per cent of those who are living in poverty are in, or rely on, full time employment.

Poverty matters, especially for children and their capacity to develop and participate fully in our society. Poverty and social exclusion also have social and economic costs which require government action.

The rivers of gold into the Commonwealth Treasury have dried up and programs that have provided some relief to struggling families are being wound back. The budgetary constraints will redirect attention from the public purse to the wage packet. Families need considerable assistance from government, but, in principle, a decent wage is to be preferred to welfare.

Whether or not large cohorts of workers and their families continue to live in poverty depends on the decisions of the Fair Work Commission. The situation has been laid out before it. The proper response requires commitment to an evidence-based program that gives proper weight to the need to avoid working families living in poverty and to give them the prospect of a way out of poverty which recognises the value of their work.

Paul Keating and Sorry Day's indulgence with a purpose

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

At the beginning of [National Reconciliation Week](#) , we observe Sorry Day as an expression of remorse for our historical mistreatment of the nation's Indigenous citizens.

Sorry Day has been on the calendar since 26 May 1998's first anniversary of the tabling in Federal Parliament of the [Bringing them Home](#) report. The report documented the forced removal of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families for much of the 20th century. The children who were removed have come to be known as the Stolen Generations.

There are a number of commemorative days that focus attention on the needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, such as National Close the Gap Day in March and Mabo Day on 3 June. Paradoxically Sorry Day is not one of them.

It is instead a day for non-indigenous Australians to dwell on themselves and their failures. To think about such important issues as how we can improve Indigenous health in this country is always a good thing. But actually it defeats the purpose of Sorry Day, which, if we are non-indigenous Australians, is all about us.

As an exercise in secular soul-searching, former Prime Minister Paul Keating's 1992 [Redfern Speech](#) does exactly what Sorry Day encourages all non-indigenous Australians to do. Its most memorable lines are not about Indigenous Australians at all, but the Europeans who stole their land, their children and their dignity.

We committed the murders.

We took the children from their mothers.

We practised discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice.

And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

Keating says 'the plight of Aboriginal Australians affects us all'. By 'affects', he means that it penetrates not only our minds, but our hearts as well. So our action to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians is not based in ideology or something we think we should do to pay our dues. It's much deeper, something we want to do for the fulfilment of our own lives as well as those of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Importantly Keating implores non-indigenous Australians to acknowledge their guilt and then to quickly move on and 'see the things which must be done — the practical things'. Guilt on its own, he says 'is not a very constructive emotion'

because 'what we need to do is open our hearts a bit'.

It is significant that Sorry Day comes at the beginning of Reconciliation Week, not the end. Timing and sequence are important. Those familiar with the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* will know that the [First Week](#)'s dwelling on sinfulness is only a means to the end of making the person on retreat ready to be of service to others.

It's similar for National Reconciliation Week — Sorry Day is getting us ready to take whole-hearted constructive action that will help close the gap between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

When it comes to work and welfare, market rules Labor's roost

AUSTRALIA

Luke Williams



If I was a long-term unemployed person on Newstart, how would I answer the question, 'What has the ALP done for me?' Probably along the lines of, 'Lots, and not very much.'

I might recall my excitement when the suburbs swung to Kevin Rudd on a fairness, equity and change platform in 2007. Rudd said he was no socialist, but spoke of the importance of social justice and reducing homelessness.

He axed work-for-the dole and funded specific programs for job seekers in local communities. His government also created the somewhat improved Job Services Australia, while 'mutual obligation' and its often devastating 'non-compliance' penalties were significantly softened.

In short, Rudd ushered in a revamped, though not revolutionary way of thinking about the welfare state — the Howard Government's approach was watered-down rather than turned on its head.

Rudd also ushered in important symbolic and rhetorical change; 'dole bludgers' and 'job snobs' have now moved to the fringe of the lexicon. Symbolism can only go so far though, and it was a great shame that most of the unemployed missed out on stimulus payments equivalent to a whole month's salary.

Julia Gillard came to power and provided a more specific message, telling the Sydney Institute that Labor was the 'party of work, not welfare'. Over time it dawned on me that Gillard, unlike her predecessor, has made no critique on neo-liberalism, the importance of social justice, poverty or homelessness. Now the ALP is about 'jobs and growth' and the 'Fair Go' — but 'fairness' says Gillard 'can only be funded through economic strength'.

'ALP values', Gillard has said, can only be achieved with 'new structural savings that will maintain the sustainability of the budget and make room for key Labor priorities'. This contention has proved only partially true, it seems Gillard's welfare policy style has been part cut and part thrust: carrots for industry, education providers and government departments, and sticks for the unemployed.

Gillard has expanded the unemployment bureaucracy beyond recognition — her 'social democracy' is too-often narrowly framed by the economic and political interests of middle Australia. Her Government's record on welfare is fairly poor: she has refused to boost the Newstart Allowance, she made it much harder to qualify for the disability pension and for young people to get the dole, and cut single mother pensions.

It also revived, extended or rebranded Howard Government welfare-for-work, work-for-the dole and income-management programs, and introduced retrospective legislation to crack down on 'welfare cheats' — although this was a law that the High Court would later rule invalid.

'Jobs not welfare' is fine in principle, but jobs remain hard to come by for many in our society. Indeed, we have a serious unemployment issue in the nation: 150,000 more people are unemployed now than before the GFC; since 2009 the number of long-term unemployed in Australia has risen by 50 per cent and youth unemployment is at levels not seen since the 1990s recession. A further 800,000 people remain involuntarily under-employed.

All is not bleak. The Gillard Government's most successful and admirable policies for reducing unemployment is its commitment to developing workforce skills and linking them to Australia's burgeoning skills shortages — long-term thinking which should reap benefits in years to come.

One particularly bright outcome is the number of people from disadvantaged communities who are now in higher education. Another successful but desperately under-funded scheme has been wage subsidies for employers to hire the disabled and long-term unemployed.

This skills commitment shows that the ALP values decent work, not just jobs; though in positing productivity as the path to prosperity the Gillard Government is certainly more Reagan than Keynes. Their key message seems to be that the market remains king.

In this way, the ALP offers a tepid version of welfare policy already offered by the conservative parties; choice, responsibility and liberalism rather than equality, rights and justice, all tinged with pragmatism, mottos, realpolitik and the sense that nobody has yet conceived a viable alternative to neo-liberalism.

Odds stacked against young online gamblers

AUSTRALIA

Lin Hatfield Dodds

We turn a blind eye to online sports betting at our peril. And it's our young men who will pay the price.

While there has been some debate about the issue in Australia for over a decade, there is limited data about the current extent and impact. Gambling help services see relatively few people with online gambling as the main cause of their gambling problems — pokies still dominate gambling harm in Australia.

But there is emerging international evidence of the risks associated with online gambling. The Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre released a comprehensive report in 2009. They concluded that 'the prevalence of problem gambling is three to four times higher among internet gamblers than non-internet gamblers'.

They also reported that 'internationally, the prevalence of problem gambling is higher in European countries ... and that the Caribbean, North America, Asia, Australia and New Zealand have lower rates'.

Estimated international internet gambling (including online sports betting) prevalence rates indicate that the rate in Australia is 4.3 per cent for the population, 2 per cent for New Zealand, 3 per cent in the UK, 4 per cent in the US, 7 per cent in Sweden, 3.5 per cent in Canada and 14 per cent in Finland.

Sweden has some of the earliest research about internet gambling. Their first wave of a longitudinal gambling study (SWELOGS) reported in 2009 that for Sweden 13 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women gambled on the internet the previous year, and 18 per cent of the men playing poker on the internet were problem gamblers.

Of great concern is the revelation that 33 per cent of the men aged 16—17 who gambled on the internet were problem gamblers and 33 per cent were at low risk, while 21 per cent of the men aged 18—24 who gambled on the internet were problem gamblers and 38 per cent were at low risk.

This study reinforces the findings of the Canadian study and subsequent research that internet gamblers are more likely to be young males.

This is why the online sports betting industry aims so much advertising at young men, and also partly explains the low numbers of people coming to help services with gambling problems — young men are notoriously difficult to attract to any sort of help service.

The recent saturation advertising of sports betting, particularly during sporting broadcasts, has rightly attracted considerable public concern, but the question of

what can be done is more vexed. Online and internet gambling is a global industry, with some responsible and some much less responsible operators.

Against this reality, gambling regulation in the public interest has, internationally speaking, almost all been at provincial or state levels, New Zealand being the exception. There are very few national gambling regulators, and no international regulatory structures. These regulatory gaps need to be filled.

The South Australian Premier has made a positive move. On Monday he said 'the advertising of live odds betting will be banned from South Australian television screens during sports broadcasting ... It is of great concern to me that we will end up with a generation of children who believe gambling is a normal part of watching or even playing sport.' Other states and territories, and our Federal Government, need to follow this lead immediately.

The Australian Government needs to extend the powers of the recently announced Australian Gambling Regulator to include regulation of online sports betting and other internet gambling. This global industry is currently way ahead of any regulator. There is a lot of catching up to do.

We then need to require all online operators in Australia to be licensed, with strict licence conditions, including rigorous mechanisms in place to check the age of online gamblers. All operators must have in place mandatory pre-commitment measures. And operators must disclose regularly to the Australian regulator. An industry funded Gambling and Wagering Ombudsman scheme must also be established.

Failure to hold a license and to meet license conditions would mean debts incurred by Australian citizens are not recognised, and are therefore not enforceable for payment.

In addition, the Federal Government needs to establish regulatory compliance and enforcement protocols and standards with other governments, most likely to be achieved through multi-lateral partnership like the G20, ASEAN or CHOGM. And to deal with sports integrity, we need to establish a National Sports Integrity Commission, to work with the sporting codes and their emerging integrity processes.

We can learn from overseas that in the future, the risk of problem gambling from online sports betting is likely to be greater than the harm created by pokies. We need to act now to reduce the considerable risk of escalating problem gambling from online sports betting.

My theatrical encounter with Don Dunstan

CREATIVE

Brian Matthews

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

Sometimes, with no warning, a rush of images, memories and names comes rampaging out of the past — a kind of existential ambush that takes you back to that 'foreign country' that you thought you'd long since left behind. Usually something triggers this ambush, a name, a news item, a photograph, occasionally even a scent.

In my case there were two triggers within a day or so of each other.

The first was the 40th anniversary of the Adelaide Festival Centre. Opening officially on 2 June 1973, one of the great monuments to the 'Dunstan Decade', it was the first capital city complex devoted to the performing arts, winning that honour by three months in a photo finish with the Sydney Opera House.

The second trigger was, sadly, the death of actress Penne Hackforth-Jones (pictured).

During the late 1970s I was writing a book on Henry Lawson. Hackforth-Jones was the great granddaughter of Lawson's contemporary, Barbara Baynton, whose bush stories were even grimmer than Lawson's.

We met during a conference in Sydney. She was charming, witty and a mine of information about our mutual interest, Australian literature of the 1890s. She was planning to write a biography of Baynton which, despite a crowded stage and film career, she completed ten years later — *Barbara Baynton: Between Two Worlds*.

One of her brief early roles was as Ginny Campbell in the long running ABC TV soap, *Bellbird*. In the same series, an emerging actor named Robin Ramsay played the part of shonky stock and station agent, Charlie Cousens. When, after many episodes, Ramsay wanted to move on, Cousens was 'killed off' — as I remember it, he fell to his death from a silo. Hundreds of viewers were enraged and some sent flowers to the ABC for Charlie's funeral.

One of Ramsay's post-*Bellbird* plans was to indulge a long time interest in Henry Lawson but many commitments intervened, including playing Pilate in Jim Sharman's long running *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and he didn't get round to his Lawson project until 1977. When he did, he wrote to me asking permission to use a quotation from my Lawson book, *The Receding Wave*, in the theatre program for his *The Bastard From The Bush*. I agreed.

Meanwhile, in 1973, the Adelaide Festival Centre had opened to much fanfare and flourish. The complex grew in the following years with the addition of the Playhouse — later the Dunstan Playhouse, where I saw Ramsay's *The Bastard*

From The Bush when it toured to Adelaide — the Amphitheatre, the Space and a new restaurant.

Opposite, in the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden, the famous tents of the Adelaide Festival Writers Week appeared when the increasingly popular literary event moved out of the lecture theatres of Adelaide University and began its dynamic life *en plein air*.

Towards the end of the 1970s I became a member of the Adelaide Writers Week Committee. It had been the custom in previous years to have a commemorative session on an Australian writer. Henry Handel Richardson and Christopher Brennan were among those honoured in the early years. Possibly because I was a newchum, I got the job for Writers Week 1980.

I decided to stage a kind of play for voices — a couple of critics, a poet, a narrator and two actors. Apart from the critics' contributions on Lawson's work, and the narrator's story line, the script consisted entirely of excerpts from Lawson stories, ballads and letters.

For the female voices I tried to get Hackforth-Jones. She was keen but unavailable, so I signed up a talented local actress, Anna Pike. For the role of Lawson I decided to go for broke and ask Ramsay. He said yes. That left the narrator, an important role requiring someone with a fine voice, good timing, impeccable presence. With an insouciance that still embarrasses me when I look back, I asked Don Dunstan himself. He too said yes.

So we did it and it was a hit.

I had arranged lunch for the cast in the Festival Centre restaurant when the show was over and I walked across with Dunstan. As we approached the splendid building, its domes and contours glowing in the bright autumnal sun, he stopped, waved an arm to encompass the whole scene and said, with an ironic grin, 'I did that.'

Two days ago I heard ABC Classic FM's Julia Lester celebrating the 40-year-old Festival Centre. And I found the program for *The Bastard From The Bush*, signed by Ramsay, and the program for the Writers Week Lawson show signed by all the cast. Then, when I opened *The Age* I saw the death notice of Hackforth-Jones.

And so, from that foreign country where they do things differently, the ambush came — with all its poignant and irresistible force.

Unlocking Australia's incarceration culture

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The Commonwealth and the Victorian state budgets this year were marked by a contradiction. Both committed more money to incarceration — immigration detention centres and prisons; and both limited programs to help the people confined there. Such contradictions are usually signs of a bad policy that flows from shallow cultural values.

The myth of incarceration says that prisons hold only bad and dangerous people. The reality, evident to anyone who spends time in places of incarceration, is that most people there suffer from some form of mental illness, often accompanied by addiction, a great number have also had traumatic experiences in childhood, and almost all have very loose and precarious connections to family and society.

These deficiencies, rather than inherent badness, shape the ways in which they behave.

It requires little insight to guess the effects of incarceration on people with such backgrounds and experiences. Psychologist Patrick McGorry famously described immigration detention centres as factories for producing mental illness. He might also have been speaking of prisons.

To hold vulnerable people in prisons is like keeping alcoholics in a pub. Mental illness thrives there. Nor, for all the dedication of staff and counselors, can mental illnesses and addictions be treated effectively there. If you take away someone's freedom, you also diminish their sense of responsibility for their own betterment.

Incarceration also weakens people's already precarious connections with family and with their local society. In addition to forced separation, the stigma of imprisonment and its erosion of self-esteem erode people's frail personal relationships and their connections with workplaces.

Connections made in prisons can help sustain some prisoners during their sentences. But for others the most significant connections made promote anti-social attitudes and skills.

When people are freed from jails their underlying mental illness and lack of respect for themselves will not have been addressed. They will be unable to maintain or build on relationships already weakened by separation. They will struggle to find work. So they will seek comfort in the bad company and environments where they lived before. As a result of being in jail they will be more, not less, likely to offend again and return to jail.

Prisons are certainly necessary to protect society from the actions of people who seriously threaten it. But most people in prisons wish to live more ordered lives.

So given the effects of incarceration it is a mystery why any society would spend money expanding and running prisons that prepare vulnerable people only for further prison time, instead of addressing seriously the factors that underlie their anti-social behaviour.

The answer to this problem may be sought in social and cultural attitudes commonly shared by citizens and politicians. Prisons are symbols of the way in which we see human beings and human priorities.

In our society the emphasis on custodial sentences and on building more prisons flows from a view of society as composed of individuals, who make ourselves by our own choices and measure ourselves by material prosperity. The relationships and connections we form and keep are not seen as given, but as a matter of choice.

If we are simply what we choose to be, the horizon of our lives is the present moment, or at most the span of our individual lives. We owe no respect to the past and have no responsibility for the future. We can take sole credit for who we are and for the prosperity we enjoy.

From this perspective the world is divided into winners and losers, and the business of government is to provide security to citizens, especially in the face of the threat from losers. So we all have a personal stake in prisons.

When we focus on the present welfare of the individual, and disregard our natural connection to other human beings and our responsibility for them, we shall also naturally resist any increase in taxes, and particularly any government expenditure that will change the life path of people who are disadvantaged.

It is also dangerous to focus on the present welfare of the individual without acknowledging what we have been given by the past and owe to the future. We inevitably fail to learn from experience that to imprison people without caring for them makes it likely that they will return to prison.

Nor shall we consider the cost to society of the subsequent actions of prisoners who are corrupted by time in prison. All that is necessary is that we have guarantees of our own security.

Just as churches, with their statement of the connection between worshippers themselves, between kings and commoners, and our connection to a reality beyond the graspable world, were the signatures of a religious society, so the proliferation of prisons is an emblem of a society that canonises individual choice.

They symbolise and entrench the gap between winners and losers, celebrate the business of locking people up as a source of private profit, and fly the flag of perceived interest over that of shared experience and reflection.

Deeper thinking about human beings and society would surely lead to better ways of doing justice.

Lives broken by false abuse claims

REVIEWS

Tim Kroeoenert

Broken (MA). Director: Rufus Norris. Starring: Cillian Murphy, Tim Roth, Zana Marjanovic, Eloise Laurence, Robert Emms, Rory Kinnear, Rosalie Kosky, Bill Milner, George Sargeant. 87 minutes

Along with the Danish film [The Hunt](#), the British film *Broken* was the second, outstanding film I watched in as many days that is centrally concerned with wrongful allegations of child sex abuse.

Whereas *The Hunt* portrayed a small town gripped by paranoia after a sensitive and imaginative child's confused comments are taken out of context, in *Broken* the accusations are more sinister, used by a young girl to deflect consequences from herself, in full knowledge of the damage that her claims will cause to the accused.

She is not merely malicious however. *Broken* is a film where characters' dysfunctional moral compasses are tested by an environment where social and emotional hardship is a daily, oppressive reality.

It is based on a novel by Daniel Clay, which itself is in part a modern-day retelling of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee's seminal novel about justice waylaid by prejudice. At its heart is charismatic pre-teen Skunk (read Scout), played by newcomer Laurence. She lives in a lower-middle-class culdesac with her brother Jed (Millner) and their divorced lawyer father Archie (Roth), who like Atticus Finch before him is the story's wise moral centre.

Skunk's coming of age is the soul of the film, as she witnesses and becomes embroiled in the tragic events that unfold in the troubled lives of two neighbouring families. Her adoration for Mike (Murphy), the boyfriend of their housemaid Kasia (Marjanovic) (who herself is a sort-of love interest for Archie), and her budding pre-pubescent romance with new boy in town Dillon (Sargeant), stoke her emotional and psychological awakening.

The abuse allegation that sets the tragedy in motion is made by Susan (Kosky), one of three daughters of surly widower Bob (Kinnear). The sisters are cruel but not villainous; having been controlled by Bob's aggression, they use aggression to control others. Susan makes her accusation to deflect her father's rage. This might be almost forgivable, but the effectiveness of the ploy teaches her a dangerous lesson that will return with a vengeance.

The person she accuses is Rick (Emms), a young man, ostracised because of an intellectual disability (he is a composite, perhaps, of Boo Radley and Tom Robinson), who has for some time suffered the sisters' abusive taunts. The consequences of Susan's allegation have lasting implications not only for him and his long-suffering parents, but also for the kindhearted Skunk, who aside from his

parents is Rick's only friend on the street.

Broken is beautifully written by screenwriter Mark O'Rowe, and debutante director Norris and his cast carry the complicated characters and difficult subject with grace and empathy. Laurence is magnetic, capturing the tumult and extremes of a child's emotions, and Roth's Archie is, like Atticus, the softly spoken hero whose palpable loneliness is matched by a fierce love for his children, particularly the challenging but remarkable Skunk.

The script is deceptively intricate despite the short running time and has a knack for finding both profound joy and deep sadness in the mundane. See the way a young girl's act of willful resistance to parental discipline escalates from funny and cute to openly rebellious to something far more serious in the space of a few minutes.

It is a superficially gritty drama that also achieves genuine transcendence. There is something nearly mythic in the recurring image of nameless twins who cycle around town slinging sacks of shit at unsuspecting adults.

This vaguely 'magical' realism sets the stage for the film's more overtly metaphysical moments, such as Archie's recounted dream of Skunk's future, and the heartbreaking climax in which a character must make an explicit choice between the wearying vigour of life and the comforting surrender of death.

Broken is a reflection on both the unbearable brokenness of life as well as the intangible, indelible substances that make living it not just worthwhile, but essential.

Clobbering religious gay prejudice

RELIGION

Michael Kirby

In 2011 I launched a book titled *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality*, edited by Fr Nigel Wright, an openly gay Anglican priest. That book offered an alternative reading of the so-called 'clobber passages'; the well known biblical verses that are at the core of religious discomfort over homosexuality.

Every gay person who has been raised in the Jewish, Christian or Islamic faiths, and who worries about rejection, knows the 'clobber passages'. The purpose of *Five Uneasy Pieces* was to turn the spotlight of careful theological analysis upon those passages to find what they are really getting at.

Speaking about sexuality and religion remains difficult and painful for some and impossible for others. That is where the follow-up volume, *Pieces of Ease and Grace*, comes in.

Ten of the 14 authors are ordained Anglican priests. The book is an attempt to promote the kind of respectful conversation, and the exploration and exchange of analysis and opinions, that Rowan Williams urged as the way forward.

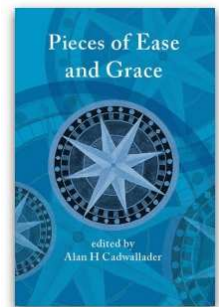
Pieces of Ease and Grace is made up of successive chapters addressing same-sex relationships portrayed in the Bible. None of the authors suggests that the relationships described involve a sexual or erotic component. Nevertheless, they assert that the love portrayed in the stories was real and vivid.

Thus James Harding explores the relationship of David and Jonathan, not arguing that David and Jonathan were sexual partners but rather that the depth of their relationship de-centres marriage. The comradeship between the two men is given higher status than the opposite-sex relationships of the two men.

Richard Treloar offers a profound reading of the book of Esther, both as an exploration of the elements involved in weighing the revelation of one's identity (i.e. of 'coming out'), and as a salutary warning about the violence of privileging a majority identity and repressing the non-conforming other.

Alan Cadwallader takes up two stories in Matthew's gospel of those from non-privileged religious groups who live in same-sex households: the centurion and the Canaanite woman. Both stories, he argues, contain the discovery that faith is alive and well within those whose voice and stereotyped lifestyle are repudiated by the religious majority.

Ceri Wynne considers the story of the eunuchs in Matthew chapter 19 verse 12, arguing that the early Jesus movement explored the ambiguity and spread of people's identities, affirming that the worth of a human being is not to be judged



on the basis of heterosexual identity, and that those who are familiar with different, ambiguous places may well have more to teach about faith than those who dwell comfortably without challenge.

Gillian Moses interrogates the stories of the household of Martha and Mary for the value that is attached to their relationship to each other, not just with the man Jesus.

And Gillian Townsley revisits the women leaders of the church at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche, revealing how the various identities ascribed to these women — from non-entities to assistants of the male apostle — have been forged more by interpreters' world views than by the possibilities of the text. She challenges those who would interpret texts to renew their commitment to establishing Scripture's hospitable inclusion of the oppressed.

If these biblical reflections do not have the power of the 'clobber passages', they demonstrate the variety of intense human love experiences recognised in the Bible. The insistence that all but procreative heteronormality is mere trivia, is hard to reconcile with modern but also with ancient human experience.

'History tells us that biblical literalism was used to support both the practice of slavery and the denigration of women,' writes Peter Francis in his foreword. 'We have moved past slavery and we are moving past the oppression of women. It is time to move past literalistic readings of the Bible to create prejudices against our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.'

But this is not a hostile book. Relationships, Francis asserts, are the primary way of expanding the circle of our awareness of the world. It is up to us whether we embrace, or reject, the ever-expanding circles of knowledge and empathy. He quotes a verse of poetry by the American poet, Edwin Markum:

He drew a circle that shut me out —
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.

But Love and I had the wit to win:

We drew a circle that took him in.

This is what *Pieces of Ease and Grace* attempts to do: to draw a circle that brings into an important conversation people who are presently hostile, suspicious, uncertain or closed of mind. It is sorely needed.

Rudd's gay marriage backflip fires church-state debate

AUSTRALIA

Ray Cassin

Most responses to Kevin Rudd's conversion on same-sex marriage have inevitably focused on whether it will change Australia's political dynamic on the issue. Equally predictably, more cynical members of the commentariat have chosen to see Rudd's announcement as his latest round of jousting with the woman who deposed him as prime minister.

Well, yes. Rudd's addition to the ranks of those advocating a change in the law is a reminder, if one were needed, that by opposing same-sex marriage Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott are adhering to the view of a shrinking minority of the Australian community. Polls regularly indicate that more than 60 per cent of voters now favour change, with support rising to more than 80 per cent among those aged 18–24.

The momentum is almost certainly irreversible, and the question is not whether, but when, there will be legal equality for same-sex relationships, including the right to use the 'm'-word.

On this issue, the prime minister and the opposition leader have, to use the apt if cliched phrase chosen by Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, placed themselves on the wrong side of history.

That's the politics. Those who bother to read the lengthy blog entry in which Rudd [announced](#) his change of heart, however, will be drawn into a broader debate about the relationship between church and state, a debate of a kind that takes place too rarely in Australian politics.

We are familiar with sloganeering — from partisans of both church and state — about what that relationship should be, and with the invective that gets hurled whenever legislation is mooted on issues such as reproductive medicine or the hiring policies of church institutions.

But Rudd's argument does not descend to slogans or invective, and may profoundly discomfit those who think civilisation will somehow be imperilled if church teaching on marriage and family is not enshrined in secular law.

Rudd accepts the traditional Christian understanding of sacramental marriage as an exclusive relationship of one man and one woman, and insists that a change in the law should not impose on religious institutions any alteration in their own practice. But he argues that the churches' teaching and practice can and should coexist with a secular law that acknowledges same-sex as well as heterosexual marriage, and with various models of parenting — heterosexual, same-sex, and single-sex.

These assertions should not even be contentious. The Catholic Church has

always taught that marriage is a natural institution, properly regulated by civil law, and that not every natural marriage is necessarily a sacramental marriage. Rudd is essentially saying little more than that, or more precisely, he is drawing out the implications of a distinction between natural and sacramental marriage for living in a secular, pluralist society.

In earlier societies, shaped by a more or less uniform profession of Christianity, the natural/sacramental distinction may have been a notional one. In the secular societies of the modern West, however, the distinction has become a practical challenge: we should live by it if we do not seek to impose our faith on others.

Nonetheless the argument Rudd is making is contentious to many adherents of Australia's various faith traditions, and among the clerical leadership of the Catholic Church in particular.

Conceding the reality of same-sex relationships, they may accept 'civil unions' but balk at describing any but a heterosexual union as 'marriage'. Asked why not, the usual response is that if the legal definition of marriage is broadened to include same-sex unions the heterosexual family would be undermined.

It is never explained just how that would happen, nor is it acknowledged that the horse has bolted long ago: there are many different kinds of family in modern Western societies, some with heterosexual parents and some with same-sex parents, but there is no evidence that children being raised by the latter are therefore growing up as deficient human beings.

Why are so many of the churches' leaders afraid of accepting the consequences of living in a pluralist society? Why is the tolerance they all publicly profess too often belied by the expectations they have of the state?

There is a long tradition of theological reflection that acknowledges the autonomy of both church and state. Indeed, it is no accident that modern liberal notions of tolerance emerged first in Western societies grappling with the experience of religious diversity.

It cannot be denied, however, that the Catholic Church came to terms with that diversity slowly and reluctantly. Until the Second Vatican Council, when popes and bishops spoke of 'religious freedom' they typically meant freedom for the church to spread its message.

The council's [Declaration on Religious Freedom](#) was substantially the work of an American Jesuit, John Courtney Murray, and it reflected his experience of American liberal pluralism. The declaration did not shrink from proclaiming that freedom was an inherent part of human dignity. It was not a message some people in the church wanted to hear, and to this day those who want to wind back the achievements of the council usually start with the declaration on religious freedom. They will say it has been 'misinterpreted'.

In Australia, one measure of whether Courtney Murray's vision survives, or

whether the revisionists have prevailed, may be in the response that Catholic prelates make to Rudd's argument for same-sex marriage.

My father's memorial service gets edgy

CREATIVE

Ian C. Smith

In need of goodness and mercy

I am being lulled by visions of still waters
when my father's memorial service gets edgy.
Smoke pours from a meter box outside.
Firemen scurry importantly like comic extras,
unable to locate the smoke's source.
Spaced apart in orderly rows we swivel,
casting sideways glances through tall windows.
Organist and minister struggle with focus,
walking in shadowed valleys en route to death.
My frowning brother once worked as a fireman.
Like me, he has toiled in many fields.
Between wife and sister I can't see directly
but the angled windows reflect like mirrors
so I maintain decorum without missing the action.
Earlier, my nephew watched us parking,
long legs stretched out his car door,
smoking, listening to football on the radio.
I felt uncomfortable, fearing evil when
relatives spoke to my pregnant second wife,
exchanging crafty looks like the pious
as if burdened with shameful news about us.
In the presence of what seemed enemies
my mother told the minister I was a recluse.
Listening to his practiced inflexions
trying to make a stranger's life interesting
from the tidy fiction she has fed him,

estranged by a smokescreen, firemen crying out,
I feel this absurdity must surely stop.

Killiecrankie

I should have lingered on my last bay days,
admired the shell-scattered expanse,
the guardian mountain's changing colours.

I knew each walk could be the last
tracking footprints to the far rocks,
working out who distant figures might be.

When the loaded crayfish plane took off,
rising slowly through driven clouds,

why didn't I monitor it until my eyes ached?

I should have waded up the small river mouth
in the lee of dunes, beyond tide-crash,
mind-printing those returning black swans.

Did I dream I carried a pointed stick,
wrote a joking rhyme about leaving,
watched waves wash my silliness out to sea?

Each day I jumped from the flat rock
into the slipways in shivering ritual,
should have kept plunging in until exhausted.

I should have remembered our first summer,
the decrepit shack where we understood myth,
gazing past fishing boats towards Old Man's Head.

Why didn't I climb the bluff once more,
haul on those ropes, breath banging in my chest,
looking, looking over a dark sea at lamplight time?

Youth

Here comes Ian Smith, look at him,
whiffy disapproval under a whiskery nose

worrying the rest of his faux-suffering face.
But I knew him as a tattooed ne'er-do-well.
Has he forgotten or is this yet another
example of selective memory-warp?
This poet-dreamer has distanced himself
from the community of one that was him
when he never fretted about the bomb,
wouldn't be bothered about global warming
if polar ice was then as terminal as manners,
didn't care about global anything,
people slaughtering people, rampant greed,
other constants like lies, which he told
if it stoked his needs, which was often
to do with seduction or other solipsisms
on past roads that petered into cul-de-sacs.
Listen to the priestly-wise old fart's cant.
He's whitewashed his blood-red fizz to live.
I know he has. I knew him long ago.

Labor lost in democracy's gaps

AUSTRALIA

Fatima Measham



I was sitting in a pub in North Melbourne when Treasurer Wayne Swan delivered his sixth budget. I was there with other 'wonks', Twitter tragics with a robust interest in politics, and we had purposely congregated to watch Swan sketch out the funding for Labor's big-ticket policies.

As strange as it sounds for normal people to be doing this on a rainy Tuesday night, it got weirder for me when I received a text from my sister. 'There must be hope', it said. The initial tally for the mayoral elections in my Philippine birthtown showed the opposition in the lead.

My sister added that people were scrutinising the numbers, which in the local context means they were watching for anomalies. It is an open secret that the incumbent engages in undemocratic methods to stay in office.

The juxtaposition threw me in many ways, such as by highlighting how much Australians take for granted that elections would be tamper-free. When I heard Swan being heckled in the parliamentary chamber at the start of his speech, I also realised democracy will always be an unfinished project.

As a mechanism for national self-reflection, representational democracy is still the best model we have. It is how our sense of identity and aspiration finds collective — and cacophonous — expression. The ideal endures despite the cacophony because silence is even more unbearable.

But reality often falls short of this ideal, especially in places like the Philippines where political dynasties have long had a stranglehold on government. Nearly all the names on the senatorial line-up in the latest elections are entirely familiar, fielded by families who have walked the halls of power for decades.

It is hard to tell whether this feudal state of things is sustained by grinding poverty or perpetuates it, but it is clear enough that it is a legacy of the colonial era.

The intersection of the Philippine revolution with the Spanish-American War swept Filipinos into a second period of colonisation under the United States. Spain lost the war and, after ruling for almost 400 years, ceded the Philippines to the US at the price of \$20 million at the 1898 Treaty of Paris. The Philippines would not become an independent state until 1946.

The strata of society that flourished under Spain were entrenched when the colonial administration under William Howard Taft limited suffrage to those who could speak or write in English or Spanish, had a specified annual income, and had past experience as an official under Spain. (He must have missed the irony in

advising the senate that turning government over to the natives would result in absolute oligarchy.)

The gist of all this is that the Philippine political culture has been shaped by patronage, a cycle of favour and debt that has led people to perceive merit based solely on a familiar last name. This, along with run-of-the mill vested interests, interferes with democratic representation — making a veneer of it.

But it's worth considering that similar points of incongruence between public and political interest exist in other democracies. In April, the US senate voted against a bill that would have expanded background checks on gun sales. Noting that nearly 90 per cent of Americans favour the policy, President Barack Obama demanded, 'Who are we here to represent?'

The same question may be asked of our MPs in relation to same-sex marriage. The most recent Galaxy poll on the issue found that almost two in three Australians believe same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, the highest proportion since 2009. Yet federal bills and a recent referendum proposal have not resolved the impasse.

In both cases, acquiescing to popular, reasonable opinion seems to be political suicide. It doesn't make sense.

Such dissonance seems to be the emerging feature of our democratic milieu. How do we make sense of the perception that the economy is being mishandled when every objective measure shows Australia is performing far better than other western countries? Or the fact that Labor faces a grim outcome in September despite overwhelming support for banner policies like DisabilityCare, school funding reform and the NBN?

These inconsistencies seem to belie the idea that democracy is an end in itself, or even merely a framework for self-governance. If it were, then good governance would make for good politics, which doesn't seem to be the case. Perhaps, we have been too caught up with the idea of the ballot as validation of the people's will, and been inattentive to the conditions in which it is cast.

The true work of democracy may be creating the conditions that would make each vote as authentic as possible — insulated from manipulation or distortion by patronage culture, powerful lobbies, or dissembling politicians.

Angelina Jolie's pain is a gain for all of us

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

The week's [news](#) of actor Angelina Jolie's pre-emptive double mastectomy has shown that science can improve human wellbeing with the use of highly specialised surgical techniques. Jolie went through the operation in order to reduce her chances of contracting breast cancer from around 87 per cent to 5 per cent.



In recent days, we also heard that scientists have [proved](#) it is possible to increase our wellbeing by turning skin cells into embryos that can be used to create tissue cells for transplant operations. This act of human cloning would lead to the cure of a range of debilitating afflictions including Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, heart disease and spinal cord injuries.

We can marvel at Jolie's short-term pain for long-term gain, and hope that we would have the courage to do likewise in comparable circumstances. But while hers was an entirely rational choice towards saving her life, there are instances where we would balk at making a rational choice to save our life.

An example might be eating human flesh in the absence of other food sources, which is considered taboo. The same can be said for human cloning. We could create a super race of human beings if we cloned intelligent people and sterilised imbeciles. But we wouldn't. There are certain actions that are considered uncivilised because to do them is to undermine civilisation and our collective human rights.

Many would contend that it hardly undermines civilisation to simply reprogram human skin cells to become embryonic stem cells to produce tissue for transplants — especially if the rest of the embryo is to be destroyed — if the intention is to save human life or eliminate chronic suffering. It's said that the risks can be managed.

Others would argue that this is a form of NIMBYism that threatens what we all share in order to satisfy our own private needs, even if it is the ultimate need to save a life.

A 1997 [resolution](#) of the European Parliament acknowledged the need to ensure the benefits of biotechnology are not lost, but insisted that:

the cloning of human beings ... [for] tissue transplantation or for any other purpose whatsoever, cannot under any circumstances be justified or tolerated by any society, because it is a serious violation of fundamental human rights and is contrary to the principle of equality of human beings as it permits a eugenic and racist selection of the human race, it offends against human dignity and it requires

experimentation on humans.

There is nothing wrong with the aspiration of eugenics to ensure desirable qualities in human beings, but not at the cost of our humanity. Angelina Jolie's use of science in such a courageous manner enhanced her dignity and inspired others to do likewise. But even judicious use of a cloning technique would threaten to undermine it.

New maritime rescue failure leaves unanswered questions

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin



On Friday, Fairfax Indonesia correspondent Michael Bachelard [reported](#) on another ordeal at sea, over ten days between 27 April and 7 May. The story as we know it so far raises disturbing questions about Australia's adherence to its rescue-at-sea obligations.

On 27 April, a boat left from an unknown location in Indonesia carrying 48 Iranian asylum seekers. They included 12 women and five children aged under six bound for Christmas Island.

Thirty hours out, the engine and pumps failed. Then they drifted for nine days, bailing by hand as the boat filled with water. On the third day, the (Indonesian) crew abandoned ship, swimming to other fishing boats nearby.

The passengers were left to drift for seven more days. Their food and water ran out. They suffered from sunburn, vomiting, and low glucose. It is a miracle that none died.

By the eighth day — 5 May — they were so desperate that two male passengers Sajad and Meisam set out for help in a makeshift raft. These men are presumed drowned.

Finally, on the tenth day at sea — 7 May — the passengers saw a surveillance aircraft overhead. Just three hours later they were rescued by an Indonesia-bound cargo ship, *MV Aeolos*. Their condition was described by their rescuers as tired, weak, dizzy and distressed.

They are now in detention in Merak. Bachelard met and interviewed them there. He also spoke with Dan Posadas, the chief officer of *MV Aeolos*.

Bachelard was advised by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA, which manages Rescue Coordination Centre Australia) that:

At approximately 6:15pm on Tuesday 7 May, RCC Australia received notification via Border Protection Command that a surveillance aircraft had detected a vessel that was stationary in the water 110 nautical miles north of Christmas Island.

RCC Australia issued a broadcast to shipping for vessels in the area to provide assistance. *MV Aeolos* was the closest available asset to respond to the distress broadcast. *MV Aeolos* responded to the RCC Australia's broadcast and proceeded to the vessel's location, arriving at 9:30 pm that day.

At approximately 2:00am on Wednesday 8 May, the master of the *MV Aeolos* reported to RCC Australia that all 47 people had been recovered from their vessel, which had been listing and was taking on water. The rescue occurred 110 nautical

miles north of Christmas Island.

AMSA advised Bachelard that this information had been sourced from both AMSA and the Department of Customs and Border Protection, which runs Border Protection Command (BPC). AMSA later confirmed that the first notification it had received from Customs of the vessel in distress was at 6.15pm on 7 May.

Based on my previous research into rescues of asylum seekers at sea, I find this whole story disturbing.

My guess is that the boat must have left from somewhere on the south western coast of Java. After 30 hours at an average speed of about 5–8 nautical miles an hour, it would have perhaps got halfway to Christmas Island, possibly as close as 110 nautical miles from Christmas Island. Conditions were calm.

This area is under regular surveillance by Australian aircraft — high-flying RAAF Orions, or Dash 8 Customs aircraft — and possibly by Australian radar, looking for incoming suspected irregular entry vessels. I find it hard to believe that, before 7 May, Australian Customs did not have some human or maritime sourced intelligence of this vessel's plight during the nine days the vessel was drifting 110 nautical miles north of Christmas Island.

Customs had had a good asylum-seeker boat rescue record over the past four months. Media releases by Minister Jason Clare show that at least 27 boats in distress have been assisted at sea by BPC vessels since 3 February. I have to ask how Customs could have missed this particular boat for so long. If they missed it, this would seem to be an operational failure. If they were aware of it before 7 May, this would raise other questions.

Finally why was it 'detected' by a low-flying BPC surveillance aircraft? How is it that the desperate people — by now near death — were finally rescued just three hours later by a conveniently close north-bound cargo ship?

I sense from my previous research into such incidents that there is a large back story yet to be told. We have not been advised that Customs' first knowledge of the boat was on 7 May. If Customs had earlier intelligence of the boat's presence, the failure to conduct search and rescue operations sooner would be reprehensible.

Our country's obligations to rescue people in distress at sea should have nothing to do with policy to deter asylum seekers. *Every* person in distress at sea deserves prompt rescue action within our resources. Something went badly wrong in this case. It is incumbent on Clare to ask his Departmental secretary Michael Pezzullo for a full briefing on all prior Customs and Border Protection knowledge of this boat in the ten days before 7 May.

We can see from a [photo](#) taken from *MV Aeolos* that the boat was displaying an SOS sign on its roof.

Clare needs to ask Pezzullo why Australian search and rescue action was apparently delayed for so long — possibly, it would seem, until an Indonesia-bound cargo ship was conveniently nearby?

Only two people died, but the toll could easily have been far worse. This life-threatening history of an apparently mishandled rescue at sea needs to be held to public account. An election is only four months away. Whoever then takes government needs to inherit a border protection system that has clean hands.