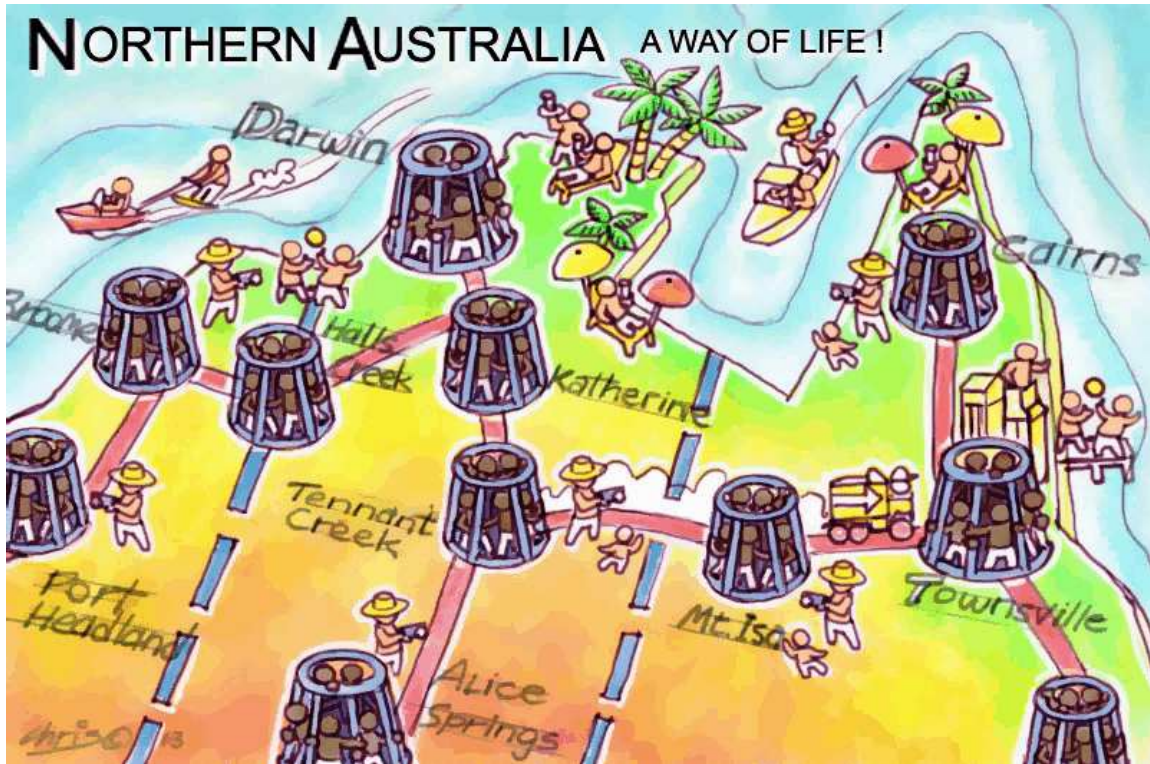


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## Human faces of Monet's demons

### REVIEWS

*Benedict Coleridge*

The other night I scored a ticket to the MTC's production of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*. The play depicts 17th century Salem's descent into chaos as women are suspected of being witches and of practicing the dark arts on God-fearing puritans. In one memorable scene three women appear to be terrified out of their wits by a demon climbing along a roof beam — it seems they're possessed, the demon taking control of them.

The vision of people being possessed by demons elicited laughter from the audience, as did the 'irrational' fear that the spectacle drew from the other characters in the play, the judges, ministers and men of authority who scampered hither and thither.

*The Crucible* dramatises a time when people thought of the world as full of competing forces, spirits of good and evil, clashing around them. And they understood themselves in terms of what Charles Taylor calls the 'porous self' — a self that can be invaded and controlled by these external forces raging through the universe.

I suspect the laughter of the audience speaks of a modern understanding of the individual as self-contained, a self that isn't preyed on by forces at large in the world but that can be developed and shaped at will by the individual.

The American sociologist Robert Bellah calls this the 'therapeutic self': if an individual has problems, these can be resolved by 'therapy' of various kinds. The self can be built, enhanced and shaped as we like. So the splendours of our Facebook pages or LinkedIn profiles become means of building the self — changing its contours and shading, shaping other people's perceptions of us so that, in turn, we can think differently of ourselves.

This understanding easily directs us towards fantasy — people have dreams of turning themselves into the embodiment of certain 'forms'. That's why you have the well-worn tropes of 'social change activist', 'incredible young leader' and 'visionary' — those self-descriptive taglines that run across countless Generation Y Twitter feeds, Facebook pages and personal websites.

We can think of this as a process of self-administered therapy — all of these new media allow us to project ourselves onto a social screen to be received and critiqued. They can be used as means of convincing ourselves that we match up to the fantastical self-images we aspire to and they become a way of communicating our confidence that we can determine the shape of our lives.

But interestingly, there's a point at which the language of therapy seems inadequate, a line beyond which the self seems so uncontrolled and unruly that we

return, like the Salem witch hunters, to the language of 'demons' to describe it. In fact, over the last decade demons have been plaguing the world — celebrities across the planet have been waging a war against these diabolical spirits.

According to the headlines Keith Urban 'battled his demons', Heather Mills urged Macca Paul McCartney to 'confront' his, Brendan Fevola was advised to 'excise' the demons possessing him, and Robbie Williams went all the way and 'exorcised' his resident spirits. And I thought exorcism wasn't in fashion!

Pondering this Salem I found myself some days later at another Melbourne cultural offering — the National Gallery of Victoria's Monet exhibition. Everybody loves Monet, his work has therapeutic qualities — his waterlilies draw the world up close, enfolding the viewer in a matrix of colour and sensation.

But one of Monet's works stood out in a different way — the portrait of his young son Jean Monet, painted soon after his mother Camille had died. The little boy gazes at the viewer with a bewildered sadness in his eyes. It's the kind of image that draws one away from fantasy, the fantasy of strongly independent selves and Facebook visionaries and even the fantasy of Monet's garden.

In the medieval world, at least in urban settings, people living outside of the decorative centre of town wouldn't have seen much in the way of colour. But walking into a church they would have been met with the splendour of icons, rich with colour. The icons weren't just pretty, they pulled people into relationship with their subjects — you can't stand in front of an icon and not be engaged by the eyes and face. As Rowan Williams writes of Byzantine icons, 'the image gives directions, it essays a way of bringing you into a new place, a new perception'.

For me, standing in front of Jean Monet was equally engaging. One walks in from the outside world, perhaps composing a tweet, and then there is Jean Monet who just lost his mother and doesn't understand it, whose eyes speak of regret and confusion. Only a year before, Claude Monet painted a portrait of his wife lying on her deathbed. In the painting Camille Monet looks as though she is wrapped in a shroud, or covered by flowing water. Here is an image at once full of stillness but alive with motion, the body is still but life flows outwards towards the edge of the picture — it's a deeply meditative piece of art.

And it comes to mind that Monet, in a period of deep grief and loss, made what was in his career a rare decision: to paint other people. The artist forgot himself in contemplating the faces of his wife and his son, in depicting the faces of death and of incomprehension. And it struck me that we need icons like this — icons of incomprehension, reminders of the fragile self that, behind its virtual armour, is beset by doubt and demons.

## Civil liberties in a grave new world

INTERNATIONAL

*Bill Calcutt*

Since the Second World War, Western democracies have championed human rights, decrying the abuse of civil liberties in undemocratic states. A defining feature of the Cold War was trenchant Western criticism of the pervasive surveillance of citizens in authoritarian Eastern Bloc states. In stark contrast Western democracies took great care in seeking to balance national security and civil liberties, often reflected in detailed legislation circumscribing the powers of intelligence agencies and upholding the rights of individuals.

Australia operates under a Westminster system of democratic governance that is intended to provide checks and balances against the concentration and abuse of power. Justice Robert Marsden Hope showed great foresight in crafting Australia's unique intelligence architecture, institutionalising the separation of information collection and analysis, national and foreign intelligence, and advisory and decision-making functions.

While Hope recognised that national security agencies need to operate under the cloak of secrecy to be effective, he established mechanisms to ensure proper oversight and accountability. He emphasised the intrinsic fallibility of intelligence advice (intelligence always involves an element of interpretation and subjectivity) and its limited utility as evidence in legal proceedings or as the sole basis for executive action.

Since the turn of the millennium three major technology-enabled developments have significantly altered the balance between national security and civil liberties. The first is that virtually universal access to information and communication technology has empowered individuals and groups to communicate and organise. This development, most graphically illustrated in the social revolutions in the Middle East (the Arab Spring), seems to represent the disaggregation of power from traditional state institutions to the broader community and diverse media outlets.

The second development is that technology has dramatically increased the capacity of the state to remotely surveil its citizens under the aegis of national security. As revealed by US National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, ubiquitous electronic linkages and a largely unregulated cyberspace make it technically possible for the state to monitor and collect virtually every single piece of personal digital data created knowingly or unknowingly by every citizen, potentially rendering existing legislative frameworks regulating national security activities obsolete.

The third and arguably most significant development has been the rise of the threat of international terrorism, with violent individuals or groups able to



engender global fear through the leverage of extensive real-time media coverage. Terrorism explicitly seeks to elicit a disproportionate state response, catalysing major social and political change. The 'global war on terror' in response to 9/11, and the threat posed by Al Qaeda, effectively shifted the focus of national security activities in many countries to counter-terrorism. Under emergency 'wartime' conditions, traditional civilian/peacetime constraints on military and intelligence activities are largely subsumed.

In fact the threat of international terrorism was perceived as so serious that many long-standing international conventions governing the treatment of lawful combatants, use of torture, resort to extra-judicial killing, exceptional rendition and incarceration without trial were suspended.

In pursuit of terrorists, new military technologies have been developed enabling precision/surgical strikes against military and intelligence targets using remote-controlled drones or special operations forces. States have developed paramilitary capabilities that can be deployed covertly virtually anywhere in the world, unconstrained by the international laws of war. Recent revelations indicate that states have also developed powerful global surveillance capabilities under the auspices of counter-terrorism.

Australia's counter-terrorism responses post 9/11 have been significant. Beyond the commitment of military forces to conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, expenditure on our intelligence capabilities has quadrupled over the last decade to over \$1.4 billion. At the same time the legislation governing the operations of the intelligence agencies has been amended to add additional powers to respond to prospective terrorism threats.

It seems likely that a number of the careful security/liberties balances institutionalised by Hope have been compromised in a utilitarian response to the threat of terrorism. Pressures for the integration of military, police and intelligence functions and for the inclusion of secret intelligence as evidence in public legal proceedings directly challenge the essential checks and balances that are an integral part of Hope's intelligence model.

As noted earlier the goals of terrorism are to engender widespread fear and a disproportionate state response. In Australia counter-terrorism has proved to have powerful political connotations. Fear has great political currency here, and any suggestion of weakness on national security (or law and order) can be political poison.

This intense environment has made temperate and informed public discourse on appropriate risk-based national security priorities difficult, particularly in the context of the secrecy, misinformation and sense of urgency that inevitably accompanies consideration of counter-terrorism issues. Counter-terrorism remains a potent rationale for many of the state's most secret activities, with ongoing demands from agencies for additional resources and unfettered access to

increasing circles of data.

The hyper-politicisation of national security finds voice in the current discourse on the issue of border security, turning a complex humanitarian and policing challenge (asylum seekers arriving by sea) into an enormously controversial and expensive imbroglio. Government has legislated to add the protection of border integrity from serious threats to the definition of security, potentially enabling the deployment of intelligence and military resources against people desperately seeking humanitarian refuge in this country.

## Crime kids served celebrity gods

### REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***The Bling Ring* (MA). Director: Sofia Coppola. Starring: Katie Chang, Israel Broussard, Emma Watson, Claire Julien, Taissa Farmiga, Georgia Rock, Leslie Mann. 90 minutes**

*I think this situation was attracted into my life because it was supposed to be a huge learning lesson for me to grow and expand as a spiritual human being. I see myself being like an Angelina Jolie, but even stronger, pushing even harder for the universe and for peace and for the health of our planet. God didn't give me these talents and looks to just sit around being a model or being famous. I want to lead a huge charity organisation. I want to lead a country, for all I know.*

Vanity, vapidty, denial of responsibility (the situation 'was attracted into my life'), the assumption of a movie star as the ultimate object of emulation — as a thematic précis of Coppola's (*Lost In Translation*, *Marie Antoinette*) latest film about young women steeped in the malaise of affluence, the above quote captures it perfectly. The film takes the true story of a group of rich teenagers who burgled a number of celebrities' Hollywood mansions during 2008 and 2009, and turns it into a hilarious and unsettling satire of materialism and celebrity worship.

Drawn from the 2010 [Vanity Fair article](#) that inspired the film, the quote is recited with perfectly affected sincerity by Watson. She is the film's most bankable star, but receives only third-billing; a fact that would no doubt irk the woman who originally spoke those words, then 18-year-old Alexis Neiers, whose trial as a member of the 'Bling Ring' was captured in the short-lived reality TV series *Wild Teens*. Her name has been changed too (to Nicki), as have all the characters' names; perhaps as a tacit rejection by Coppola of the equation of notoriety with celebrity.

These then high school students stole up to \$3 million worth of jewellery, clothes, shoes and other items from the homes of celebrities including Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan and Orlando Bloom. They described the process as 'shopping'. Disturbingly for all proponents of privacy, they used simple internet searches to locate the hallowed houses and ascertain when their occupants would be absent. *The Bling Ring* portrays this pastime as an outcome of a kind of materialistic cult of want, centred on a distinctly American obsession with celebrity.

Coppola depicts these young people as inhabiting a world where meaning and morality have been supplanted absolutely by material longing. It is highly individualistic, and there is a performance element to it — several times we see well-dressed characters seated before webcams, not communicating, simply pouting and posing. They've been conditioned to see the profligate lifestyles of Hilton, Lohan et al. as the ultimate aspiration; they want to hang out in the clubs



where they hang out, and wear (in this case, literally) the clothes that they wear.

This is not, of course, solely an American epidemic. But these rich Hollywood kids are at the epicentre. They boast about their exploits at parties, revelling in the reflected fame, as if burgling Paris' house is next to being her BFF. Once the law closes in on them, even loyalty to each other proves fickle in the face of self-interest, yet they remain staunchly deluded by their obsession with fame — Nicki tries to use the controversy to propel her career, while the ringleader, Rebecca (Chang), during her interrogation, is eager to know if 'Lindsay' mentioned her.

Through all of this they show no sympathy for their victims, or even a passing concern for their privacy, a trick they no doubt also learned from the media — the notorious celebrity gossip network TMZ features prominently. Not that the film is interested in bemoaning the exploitation of the filthy rich by the slightly less rich. Far from it, as Coppola has plenty of satirical darts for the celebrities themselves too: the walls and sofas of the mansion owned by Hilton (who, to her credit, agreed to a cameo appearance in the film) are adorned by Hilton's own face.

But it illustrates the extent to which their perception of reality and discernment of right and wrong have been distorted by the celebrity worship that has stood in for a proper moral framework. They are not entirely to blame, either; it's a cultural sickness to which even their parents are not immune. Nicki's mother (Mann) 'home schools' her in the new age philosophy 'The Secret', and it is she who offers up Jolie as a paragon of virtue. She asks which characteristic of Jolie Nicki admires, no doubt alluding to the actress' charity work. 'Her hot bod,' Nicki replies.

## When mines and football clubs betray the common good

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*

The common good can seem a very milky-tea concept — too bloodless for the real world. That suspicion might grow when we realise it is central to Catholic Social Teaching, even if it now more often appears under its more martial name of solidarity.

But for all that it is an important idea, one which we need if we are to make sense of phenomena as disparate as the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) findings on corruption in the awarding of mining licenses, the initial report of the NSW chief scientist on coal seam gas mining, and the daily alarms and excursions in the drugs and footballers epic.

Behind the notion of the common good lies the conviction that human beings are not simply individuals who choose to opt into society, but are social beings who thrive only through their relationships with other human beings. A consequence of this insight is that society needs to be ordered in such a way that the good of each and all of its members is secured, especially of the most disadvantaged.

It follows that all human organisations have social responsibilities that extend beyond the members and shareholders to all whom they affect by their actions, and so to society as a whole. In a word they must serve the common good.

Although the social responsibility of business is often dismissed as a utopian principle, its importance can be seen when it is flouted.

The ICAC report [describes](#) corrupt dealings in which a government minister acted to benefit a colleague and a friend in granting a mining license. Four businessmen were also found to have acted corruptly in concealing, for personal gain, relevant information about a company in which they were major investors from the director of a company of which some were also directors.

The heart of this affair is the assumption that representatives of government and members of parliament will not serve their private interests when carrying out their office. Nor will officers of public companies for their individual or group interest conceal information to which others have a right.

People's trust in government and in commerce depends on the respect that their representatives show for the common good. If that trust disappears society will be fragmented. For that reason the corrupt behaviour of business people and of government ministers is seen as a betrayal of trust and is held in public opprobrium. It undermines the common good.

The initial report of the chief scientist of New South Wales into coal seam gas mining is notable because it is a [model](#) of how the pursuit of the common good

should be conducted.

The enquiry followed widespread public controversy. Landowners, farmers, local communities and environmentalists expressed their concern at the effect of mining on health and on water supplies. Others saw its economic benefits both through local employment and for the public purse. The enquiry had to sift the claims of each group and assess under what conditions, if at all, the risks of mining would be overcome.

The interim report paid careful attention to the issues and the risks involved in mining, asking how they could be minimised. It recommended that before mining began conversation should involve all interested parties, and that thorough research should be done on aquifers and on the geology of the local area. Information should be shared to form a data base from which the effects of mining could be measured.

The report is exemplary in asking how the good of each person and group can be sought within the framework of serving the present and future good of society. It tellingly emphasises respectful and effective communication with all the people affected by mining, transparent sharing of information and effective regulation. These things are the stuff of service of the common good.

After these examples of how the common good is betrayed and how it is pursued, a trivial example of the shambles that its neglect leaves behind. The drugs in football affair illustrates what happens when the interests of one particular team are put ahead of care for its players and for the competition of which it forms part. Eventually the group allegiance crumbles as individuals look out for themselves.

Winning is not everything. To win you need people who will want to play with you and a safe place to play.

## **Pilgrims walk with shadow of Church abuse**

RELIGION

*Ailsa Piper*

I grew up in outback WA, where there was no church, or neighbour, within easy driving distance. Stories were what we had, and they were sacred.

Some were poems — ‘The Owl and the Pussycat’ may be responsible for my wanderlust, forever seeking that land of bong-trees. Some were from the Yamiji people — they instilled reverence for this land over which we stomp. Some were Bible stories — angels, miracles, water to wine and dead men walking. Those stories helped form my wish to live an honourable life. To ‘do unto others’.

Later, at convent school, while I resented not being allowed to serve on the altar, I did love the rituals and the rosary’s mantra. I also loved one Q and A from catechism:

Q: What is God?

A: God is love.

As I grew, I reassessed. My mother insisted I make my own choices on morality, faith and ethics. I was not to parrot inherited stances, but to form opinions based on experience and listening.

I’ve always had a pull toward the numinous, and felt a wish to serve, but through my teen years discord grew between those yearnings and the Catholic Church. It said it welcomed everyone equally, and yet treated me differently to my brother. Why, I wondered, were women not able to be priests, or take leadership positions in Catholic hierarchy? Why were gay friends not welcomed fully? Why was it that men who wanted to serve as priests couldn’t have partners or families if they wished?

So much seemed punishing. Unequal.

By my 20s, I felt that my moral framework made it impossible for me to align myself with the Church of my childhood. Ironic, when that framework had been, in part, formed by Catholicism.

Fast forward to 2010 when I hear a call. ‘Walk with sin!’

The premise of my book [\*Sinning Across Spain\*](#) is that in medieval times, a pilgrim could be paid to carry the sins of another to a holy place, and on arriving, the stay-at-home would receive absolution.

That may sound like hocus-pocus. But it was also a call for empathy, for shouldering the burdens of others, and for re-examining my beliefs. I asked people to donate sins. They did, and I walked with them.

One sin I carried was anger. I met it many times during that 1300km slog, in

myself mostly. The most potent occasion was in company with a Spanish man. He was walking in memory of his brother, who had suicided some years earlier. We'd already discussed whether that suicide might be a sin, but I hadn't known the circumstances leading to it. One day, my amigo turned to me. He asked me to tell him the sins I carried, and I said I couldn't.

'But I don't know these people,' he said.

'I made a promise,' I said. *Una promesa*.

We walked on, picking fennel-tops to chew and rosemary to sniff.

He said there was something he had never told anyone, and proceeded to describe events from decades earlier. I listened, but could make no sense. His casual tone didn't fit the words I was translating. I asked him to repeat. Questioned him.

Eight?

Yes, eight.

Every night?

Yes, every night.

I had to ask him to show me what he meant, my brain was so unwilling to process the story. Finally, watching the mime I'd requested, I could no longer deny what I was hearing. Under an electricity pylon, I sunk to the ground.

A religious man of the cloth had forced his penis into the mouth of my amigo's then eight-year-old brother. Night after night.

His brother told my amigo about it one evening after they had been watching their sons play football. Then he swore my amigo to secrecy in order to protect their parents. *Una promesa*. It was never spoken of again.

My amigo sat beside me, his citrus scent mixing with the aniseed of fennel, and apologised for speaking of his sin.

'*No es tu pecado*,' I said. It's not your sin.

'*Es mi secreto*.' It's my secret.

I pictured that little brother, grown to manhood, and his fears for his sons. I tried to imagine the story my amigo had invented for their parents, and his brother's wife and children. I wondered about the weight of all those lies.

What I remember most is the anger. Like a tsunami.

And I absolutely do not believe that anger was a sin.

How could I not feel angry with the Pope, the bishops, the cover-up, the refusal to take responsibility for those little people, grown large, blaming themselves in

stifling silence? And for those who loved them and were helpless to ease the pain? Anger seems a fitting response when hope is killed. Surely the theft of innocence warrants rage?

We're all losing our innocence now, hearing stories that frighten and appal, disgust and repel us. Many — within the Church and also outside it — would prefer to look away, hoping that somehow things can go on as before.

But we can't. We mustn't. My amigo is healthier for telling his brother's story — I know that from his letters — and I'm a bigger human for hearing it.

We must all listen, no matter how painful. Child abuse is epidemic in Australia, and not only within organisations. If we are to look after our children, we must pay attention to them.

Since my book was published, people have told me many abuse stories — of their children, their friends, their parents. One of Victoria's worst offenders was my local parish priest. Neighbours' sons were affected. I can't look away, even when I want to.

But the book also brought me into conversation with many who want the Catholic Church to live up to its original promise — to love one another. The fact that they continue to believe in it is, to me, miraculous.

Belief. I thought I knew the meaning of the word, but a friend explained it to me recently. It comes, he said, from an old English word 'lief', which can be translated as 'love'. Belief, at its heart, is to-be-in-love. Faith, he says, is paying endless loving attention.

If we are to pay such attention, then we must look with an unflinching gaze, and the Church should lead the way, beginning by examining itself. It's time for it to mature, to 'walk its talk'. To acknowledge all people are equal, and to give love to all. Tough love, in respect of itself. Very tough. That may be the most Godlike love.



## Australia's human dumping ground Nauru

INTERNATIONAL

*Walter Hamilton*

Welcome to Nauru. Land area: 21 square kilometres, the world's smallest republic. Permanent population: around 10,000. Temporary population: name any figure — or, better still, don't name one. Chief natural resource: bird droppings (until it was exhausted in fertilising Australia). Chief economic activity: human dumping ground.

Nauru has joined Papua New Guinea in the Cohort of the Willing — willing, that is, to take dollops of Australian money to hide away an Australian problem. Substitute 'asylum seekers' for 'convicts', and it recalls the way Australia was used by Great Britain in the 18th century to dispose of a British problem. The distinction between convict and asylum seeker is largely semantic since some of the money changing hands will be used to build a new prison on the island.

Nauru supported a native population for three thousand years. The British sea captain who first sighted it in 1798 named it Pleasant Island. Then came the phosphate miners who, within a century, had carted away all the usable guano and left 80 per cent of Pleasant Island scarred and barren. In recent years, the country has resorted to other means to generate income, including selling passports, offering a tax haven and facilitating money laundering. (Nauru, along with Kiribati and Tuvalu, uses the Australian dollar as its official currency.)

After serving variously as a watering hole for British whalers, a Germany colony, a UN-mandated territory under Australian administration and a Japanese air base during the war, Nauru's mainly Micronesian population gained their independence in 1968. A trust fund was set up to receive a share of earnings from phosphate mining, as an insurance policy for the future, only to have most of the money lost through bad investment decisions. Over the past decade, fund assets have been sold off to meet current expenditures.

Today, more than ever, Nauru depends for its existence on Australia, and specifically the detention business. Any form of bilateral negotiation must be compromised by this dependency. The \$30 million dollars it is due to receive under the latest refugee diversion scheme is equivalent to nearly 50 per cent of GDP (already inflated by previous 'Pacific Solution' money). Australia also supplies Nauru's defence needs, its court of last appeal for criminal cases (the High Court of Australia) and its most popular sporting pastime (Australian Rules football).

But according to data published by the UN, social indicators for Nauru are in stark contrast to Australia's (figures in brackets). Population below the age of 15: 35 per cent (19 per cent); male life expectancy: 55 years (80); infant mortality: 46 per 1000 live births (five); gross school enrolment per 100 persons: 74 for males and 83 for females (115/118). Nauru's rates of obesity and type-2 diabetes

are the highest in the world. Nauru has had 22 changes of administration in the past 24 years, with the current president elected to office just three months ago.

The vulnerable nation has many legitimate needs; turning it into a place of exile for hundreds, potentially thousands, is a shameful quid pro quo for development aid. In the words of Amnesty International, Australia has created 'a toxic mix of uncertainty, unlawful detention and inhumane conditions'. The notion that the tiny island offers a suitable home for the permanent resettlement for any significant number of refugees — one provision of the new deal — is risible. Such a flawed arrangement must inevitably produce compounding problems.

The 129 asylum seekers charged following the riot and arson last month have swamped the Nauruan judicial system. The two Australian lawyers available to offer the accused pro bono assistance cannot cope with the workload. Bail hearings are being conducted in batches of ten. Having supposedly handed over the problem to this sovereign nation to deal with under its own laws, calls are now going out for more Australian aid to ensure the accused can receive a fair trial.

The false dichotomy used to justify this policy — indefinite detention is preferable to drowning at sea, the 'lesser of two evils' logic — needs to be exposed for what it is. The belated concern being expressed over loss of life does not ring true. After all, the SIEV-X tragedy, the worst known sinking, in which 353 drowned, happened as long ago as October 2001. Setting the bar for a 'solution' just above the threshold of death has a chilling precedent in the ghettos, gulags and concentration camps of other days, other places.

Australia is surrounded by a host of under-developed states reliant upon foreign aid; their vulnerability is due, in part, to a defunct colonial structure from which Australia once profited. To make our response to the humanitarian needs of Papua New Guinea and Nauru conditional on their playing a quasi-colonial role as a refugee staging ground or place of final resettlement is to convey an image of Australians as a patronising people who do not hesitate to wash their dirty linen in their neighbour's stream.

## **Migrant factory worker's story**

CREATIVE

*Various*

### **Overalls**

For twenty-seven years she wore them. The factory thrust its bloody quota past her six days a week, and she did what she had to. The gloves and boots and heavy denim became first and last lines of defence. She lost a thumb once, then a fingertip a year later. Language didn't come into it. She got sick and sacked in the same fortnight, then lay doggo for a decade. When the bewildered husband finally gave out, she hid behind her embarrassed teenagers until, at last, they went too. She appeared in language classes where she made friends easily; one in particular. They married. She persevered with speaking and listening, wrote when needed, didn't read. Today, she finds a picture on a vocabulary sheet and tells the class all this. She's lucky, she says.

*Frank Abel*

### **Interval**

As Stephen Boros told me  
when I was settled in his office,  
the world doesn't stop  
for Stephen Boros,  
yet as he mildly peddled  
a plan for superannuation  
I felt a soft suspension  
or an idling of the clock.  
A photograph in silver gilt

conspired to inspire admiration  
of the Boros family life:  
two tots anyone  
would be a sucker for,  
an adolescent wife pouting  
and in slanting, smoky sunlight —  
a claw of golden proteas  
glowing in a pot. So who in  
all the world could say  
that the world had never stopped  
for Stephen Boros?

*Ross Jackson*

**hospice**

your hand  
in her  
hand, some  
fluttering wilderness  
behind her  
eyes that you  
can't walk  
through  
& we talk  
about a visit  
& a goodbye  
from the gaps  
of years  
& circumstance  
because of a past  
& this present  
this time

the way things are

*Rory Harris*

## Election coverage you can trust

### MEDIA

*Michael McVeigh*

As we begin the final dance after months of pseudo-campaigning, one of the biggest questions both political leaders will be posing in this election is, 'Whom do you trust?' It's an important question in more ways than one.

Today's editorial from the *Daily Telegraph* makes it clear that they believe only one party is worth your trust. While it's common for newspapers to make a stand for one party or the other come election time, it's rare that it happens on the first day of the campaign, even if the *Telegraph's* editorial is hardly surprising for a newspaper that had Labor in its crosshairs well before Kevin Rudd took office.

One of the things we expect from our media is that they will ask the hard questions on an election trail. Additionally, trustworthiness in reporting is one of the few advantages that our mainstream media outlets can claim over the blogosphere.

While the *Telegraph's* editors might claim they will still place the Coalition's policies under the same level of scrutiny as Labor's, by taking such a strong editorial stand they have at the very least undermined this claim. There are also [questions being raised](#) as to how much all of the News Limited publications are being influenced by Murdoch's fear of the NBN's impact on his businesses — a commercial interest that few Australians will share.

While *Eureka Street* could never claim to be without bias in its coverage of issues, its agenda is driven by a concern for social justice and the impact of policies on the poorest and most vulnerable. This means it must hold all parties up to scrutiny. There are serious questions that need to be asked of both major parties, and their leaders, over the next few weeks. And with many disaffected Labor supporters considering voting for the Greens in this election, there are many hard questions that need to be asked of them, too.

If the mainstream media can no longer be trusted to ask the serious questions of both parties, perhaps it's time for the game to move elsewhere. Understanding this, Rudd has brought in social media strategists who worked on the Obama campaign in the United States to advise Labor. Social media has become a powerful tool for politicians, offering unmediated access to constituents and bypassing newspapers and television bulletins entirely.

As a venue for political discussion Twitter is far from perfect. We're yet to see it used to really force a politician to account for their policies. But it does have the potential to be a game-changer for political campaigning. Previously, access to politicians was only given to those in the party faithful who attended the events, and the media members privileged enough to be allowed to accompany politicians on the trail. On social media, everyone can participate in the process.



Whether it's conducted on social media, sites like *Eureka Street*, or in mainstream media, the terms of this contest shouldn't be set by organisations with an admitted preference for one party over another, but by individuals or organisations whose concerns are for the greater good of Australian society. If our mainstream media outlets have given up that aspect of their mission, then other individuals and media outlets need to step into the gap.

Both parties will try to make this a personality-based campaign, calculating that their leader's attributes (or the other leader's failures) will swing the difference. If this election is allowed to become a slanging match between parties, then the *Telegraph* will continue to sell its newspapers, but they will be the only winners.

The only way the Australian people can win in this election is if it becomes a real discussion about the kind of country we want to live in. For that conversation to happen, we need a media we can trust.

## **Vulnerable are victims of the federal game of thrones**

AUSTRALIA

*Andrew Hamilton*

It is hard to imagine anything seriously surprising, any dramatic change of pace, emerging from the election campaign. If the last three years have been like the first three years of the First World War — with continuous mud, shelling, poison gas met by poison gas, unburied bodies, and vast human resources sacrificed for small gains — then now is the time for a final blitzkrieg, with the foot soldiers of both sides regularly going over the top, propaganda sheets running hot off the presses and the generals meditating victory.

It is also hard to imagine a victory to either side that will bring great benefit to Australia. The last weeks have revealed the lengths to which both parties will go to bring misery to vulnerable, unpopular groups of people who call out for help. The PNG solution is trumped by tent cities on Nauru and Manus Island, soon to be overtrumped by further brutalities. The columns of refugees who fled from the battlefields of Europe were usually strafed by only one of the combatants. In Australia both sides fly sorties around the clock.

The treatment of people who seek protection in Australia is not simply one of many election issues. It is a measure of how far each political party will go, how much damage each will be prepared to do to Australia's honour, reputation, economic interests and relationships in order to gain and hold power. Who can doubt that, if it is electorally advantageous to target other such unpopular groups in Australia and people who are unemployed, homeless and belong to minority ethnic or religious groups, our political parties will be prepared to do so?

And who could believe the claims of either party that it will deliver good economic management, when both are willing to spend billions of dollars on measures whose practical effect will be to blight the lives of innocent people and damage Australia's international reputation without gain other than at the ballot box?

An election campaign that has begun with such intense focus on the political interests of both major parties and their leaders will no doubt continue in the same way. It will understandably be about politics as politics, not about politics as the art of good government in the national interest. Policies will be reduced to slogans, deliberation to being on message, character to media persona and wisdom to avoiding gaffes. And one leader will emerge victorious and will need to think about governing.

We should focus our attention on that point rather than on the games that will be played during the election campaign. There are many opportunities and risks facing Australia over the coming years which will require wise and ethically principled government. Elections are about the short-term. Our thinking should be

correspondingly long-term. That will have the fringe benefit of helping to endure the longueurs of the coming month.

A few of the larger questions that will shape Australia are an ageing population and the need for immigration, the effects of globalisation on Australia's revenue base and on the industries that provide employment for Australians, the kind of education that will encourage the reflectiveness and provide the skills in languages and computers that foster creativity and trust in business, the encouragement of thoughtful communications, ways of responding to the harsher climatic conditions that seem inevitable, and how to ensure transparency in the management of security.

For a month we shall endure an election campaign for which the well has been poisoned. But there will come a time when pure water will be necessary. We should keep our minds and hearts clear so that we shall recognise pure water when we see it.

## Australian republicans demand satisfaction

AUSTRALIA

*Ray Cassin*

In the tsunami of syrup that gushed from the world's media in the wake of the royal baby announcement, a few enlightened flames briefly spluttered.

There was *Private Eye's* reality-check headline 'Woman has baby'. And here in the remote Antipodes, there was constitutional lawyer Anne Twomey's reality-check answer during an interview with Michael Rowland of ABC News Breakfast. Noting that it might be 70 years before the new prince, as third in line of succession to the Queen, becomes king, Twomey added the sensible caveat: 'What are the prospects of Australia still having the king of the UK as its sovereign in 70 years time? I sort of suspect not great.'

Take the long view and the absurdity of an independent nation retaining a foreign monarch as its head of state is instantly apparent. But it's absurd now, too, and for the same reasons as it would be absurd 70 years from now.

Even avowed monarchists know it's absurd. Remember the 1999 referendum, when no one mentioned the Queen? Monarchists — then a minority — posed as defenders of the constitution ('if it ain't broke don't fix it') rather than the monarchy, while the rest of us argued about whether the republican model on offer was sufficiently democratic. The three-way debate felt acrimonious at the time, especially to those of us publicly engaged in it, but in retrospect it seems bizarrely polite. No one mentioned the Queen.

The oddity of Australia's republican debate is that so many people readily agree that becoming a republic is desirable and even inevitable, while in the same breath insisting that it can't, or shouldn't, happen yet. This preference for deferred satisfaction, so strange in a political culture in which almost every demand is for immediate gratification, is the chief reason that the republic hasn't happened yet. If the preference persists, 70 years from now Australians might well be subjects of King George VII.

Deferred satisfaction is now the default position among Australian politicians who call themselves republicans. Whatever else Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard have disagreed about, they've always been in accord on this. The 2020 summit, which the first Rudd Government convened in 2008 'to help shape a long-term strategy for the nation's future', placed the republic at the top of its recommendations for reforming governance. I have never heard a prime minister sound less enthusiastic about a proposal he notionally supports than Rudd did about that one.

And Gillard, when asked about the republic during her tenure, always found reasons for answering 'not yet'. In her case and in Rudd's, 'not yet' effectively means 'it's not worth the effort', which as a line of argument is close in spirit to 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'.

The most common form of the delayed-satisfaction argument is associated with Coalition frontbencher Malcolm Turnbull, who led the Australian Republican Movement during the '99 referendum. Turnbull hasn't given up hope: he and former deputy Labor leader Wayne Swan have contributed forewords to [\*Project Republic\*](#), a book of essays aimed at rekindling the republican cause. But he now thinks that the republic will have to wait until the death of the present monarch, because we apparently hold her in such high regard.

The thought is encapsulated in a neat Turnbullian turn of phrase, which he has used in several speeches and repeats in *Project Republic*: 'There have always been many more Elizabethans than monarchists in Australia'.

Have there? Perhaps. But respect for the way in which Elizabeth Windsor has conducted her office, and even affectionate regard for her as a person, were also widespread in Australia during the referendum campaign in 1999. Republicans did not then think of such sentiments as an obstacle, and the reluctance of monarchists to mention the Queen suggests that they agreed. So why should they be treated as an obstacle now?

No one, in 1999 or since, has been in any doubt that the referendum failed because voters did not like the model. The result had nothing to do with lingering affection for the Queen who did not get mentioned in the campaign. In 1999 polls indicated majority support for a republic and a wider majority in favour of popular election of the head of state. In other words, even some voters who preferred the status quo wanted to be able to participate in choosing the head of state if the system was going to change.

If the referendum model had matched the popular mood, offering an elected rather than an appointed presidency, Australia would be a republic now.

Fourteen years on, support for a republic has dropped below 50 per cent. The appearance of *Project Republic*, whose contributors range across the political spectrum and across the elected/appointed presidency divide, is a welcome sign that republicans do not intend to let support drop even further.

The book is not without rancour: Turnbull and some other contributors blame direct electionists who supported a 'no' vote in 1999 for the languishing of the republican cause. Theirs was a dishonest campaign, Turnbull maintains, for they promised they would continue to advocate a republic after the referendum but have done nothing.

I know from personal experience that this accusation is false. I and other direct electionists did continue to write and speak publicly after 1999, and in doing so we made common cause with many who had supported a 'yes' vote, including contributors to *Project Australia* such as the historian John Hirst and the late George Winterton, the constitutional lawyer who was the principal architect of the referendum model. It is the politicians who have been largely absent from this debate, and who consign the republic to irrelevance each time they say 'yes, but

not yet’.

Until there are political leaders who are willing to treat the republic as a matter of urgency, it will remain in the too-hard basket and voters will continue to lose interest in it.



## Australia's shrinking moral and intellectual horizons

AUSTRALIA

*Ray Cassin*

Let us start with what is known.

First, it is still more likely than not that the federal election campaign that is now under way will result in the election of a Coalition government on 7 September.

Kevin Rudd's second coming as prime minister has staved off the threat of electoral catastrophe that loomed under Julia Gillard, when the ALP faced the loss of almost half of the 72 seats it holds in the House of Representatives. That prospect has now receded, and even the gloomiest predictions for Labor — those derived from betting odds rather than opinion polls — now envisage the party winning up to 65 seats. But in a 150-seat chamber that still means a clear and comfortable victory for the Opposition.

This is not to say that it is impossible for Labor to cling to office. To do so, however, it will have to win seats, not merely retain those it now has, and the last time an Australian government successfully did this was in the extraordinary circumstances of World War II. If the Rudd Government is to emulate the Curtin Government's achievement, it will probably have to do so by picking up enough seats in Queensland to compensate for those it could lose in Tasmania, Victoria and NSW, and also deliver a majority.

That Labor can even consider fighting a campaign on that basis is a measure of the difference the leadership change has made to the party's confidence and its standing in the electorate: under Gillard, Labor was expected to lose all its Queensland seats except for Rudd's. Nonetheless, the electoral momentum remains with the Coalition.

So why does Rudd apparently think he can win against the odds? It is not only an ego-driven assessment, considerable though his self-regard is. The most important indicator of voters' intentions, the two-party-preferred vote, has wavered in recent polls between a 50-50 split and 52 per cent for the Coalition and 48 per cent for Labor. Rudd, however, is relying on the indicator that has consistently differentiated him from both Gillard and Abbott: preferred prime minister.

He was usually way ahead of Gillard on this poll question and is way ahead of Abbott now. In the latest Newspoll, 47 per cent of respondents preferred Rudd as prime minister, compared with 33 per who preferred Abbott. The margin varies from poll to poll — a fortnight ago 50 per cent preferred Rudd — but Abbott has never closed the gap. Even when Rudd's fortunes were at their lowest, at the time he was deposed by his caucus colleagues in June 2010, 46 per cent of Newspoll respondents preferred him as prime minister compared with 37 per cent for

Abbott.

Rudd's belief that voters will stick with him rather than install Abbott as prime minister explains the rhetoric he used when announcing the election date on Sunday. Without naming the Opposition Leader, he said Australia was too open a nation to retreat into a 'tight little ball of negativity' and declared that the election would primarily be about whom voters trust to govern. Abbott's response, that it will really be about whom they regard as 'fair dinkum', sounded lame and clunking by comparison.

So expect more of the same in the next five weeks. Rudd will do everything he can to draw his opponent into debate on his own terms, and the more Abbott seeks to avoid head-to-head clashes the more he will confirm the tight-little-ball-of-negativity image. The strategy might, just might, deliver Rudd the victory against the odds he is seeking, thereby enshrining him as a Labor saviour; though if that happens those in his party who continue to nurture hatred for him will be extremely reluctant to concede him that title.

Many members of the commentariat will lament the Rudd strategy as a further lurch towards presidential-style electioneering. They will not explain why this is a bad thing, however, since they themselves are enmeshed in such electioneering and have been ever since the emergence of television as the dominant influence on modern campaigns. Anyone old enough to remember the contrasting styles of Robert Menzies and Arthur Calwell knows 'presidential' campaigning is nothing new. And anyone who follows politicians on Twitter knows it's here to remain.

Rudd was also correct in saying that the election will be decided primarily on the question of whom voters trust to govern. That, as I've [argued](#) in an earlier article in *Eureka Street*, is a truism of elections, which are not typically referenda on rival sets of policies. But recognising that to be so does not imply that the policies adopted by parties and candidates are of no consequence. And if this campaign, like its mean-spirited predecessor in 2010 and the hung parliament it produced, fails to inspire many voters and drives some to disengage from the political process, it will be in large part because of where the contending parties stand or, more importantly, refuse to stand.

I am not referring only to the punitive policies that both major parties have set in place in regard to asylum seekers who arrive by boat. Those policies shame the nation, but they are only one instance of a shrinking of intellectual and moral horizons in which all parties — and not just the majors — have been complicit.

Think, for example, of the debate about revenue, which has been allowed to frame the wider debate about the economy. It is economically illiterate nonsense to equate the state of the budget with the state of the economy, yet Labor and the Coalition have acquiesced in the view that delivering a surplus is the sole indicator of responsible economic management.

That acquiescence, in turn, means Australia's relatively low level of net public

debt is inevitably portrayed as a stumbling block for whoever governs, while curtailing spending invariably takes priority over investment in education, health and infrastructure even when these are required to ensure national prosperity in the longer term.

Nor is it acceptable, in this narrow neoliberal view, to raise more revenue through raising taxation rather than cutting spending. In the past month, for example, we have witnessed the astonishing spectacle of a government being lashed by its opponents for increasing the excise on the sale of a leisure drug that is a risk to health, namely tobacco in the form of cigarettes, and for insisting that fringe benefits claimed by some employees should actually be used for work-related purposes.

When the limits of what is considered acceptable to discuss are so constrained, it is no surprise that we do not even have a proper debate about how revenue should be raised and what it should be spent on, let alone an informed debate on the economy. If some other forms of revenue-raising were on the table — inheritance taxes, for example — the return of the budget to surplus might not seem such a distant prospect.

But they won't be on the table, not in this campaign nor anytime soon.

## Abused girls' institution trauma

AUSTRALIA

*Madeleine Hamilton*

On Fridays, when I push my two preschoolers in their double stroller to the Preston market, I pass the Anglicare office in Murray Road. Outside is a billboard featuring a miserable, heavily-mascaraed teenage girl and the message, 'Foster care: Changing her life ... and yours.' 'I'm sorry,' I always think sadly, 'we just can't.'

With a chronic shortage of foster families — particularly ones prepared to accept 'damaged' adolescents — the prospect of a stable home for girls like the one on the billboard is slight. However, the present system in Victoria — whereby adolescent girls at risk of abuse and neglect are placed by the Department of Human Services (in partnership with agencies such as Anglicare) in either kinship, foster, or residential care — reflects an evolution in youth justice and child protection policies.

In the past, such girls were frequently sent to the Winlaton Youth Training Centre in Nunawading. This institution was established by the State Government in 1956 to contain female juvenile criminal offenders, wards of the state, and girls under protection orders (those deemed 'uncontrollable' or 'in moral danger'). Many already had long experiences in orphanages.

Unlike their male counterparts, 'delinquent' girls who repeatedly ran away from violent, dangerous environments were frequently incarcerated because it was perceived that they might be sexually active and fall pregnant. Rather than being offered safe and therapeutic alternative homes, they were placed in an under-resourced, overcrowded institution and treated like a difficult herd to be 'managed'. Regardless of the state's intention to protect and rehabilitate, Victoria's most vulnerable girls were punished for the transgressions perpetrated against them.

Before a series of significant reforms undertaken by Winlaton's management in the mid-1970s restricted such intrusive and humiliating practices, new 'trainees' were routinely de-loused, strip-searched, and scalded in boiling Phenol baths. They were also bussed to a clinic in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, to be checked for any signs of venereal disease or pregnancy.

For Joan\*, who spent her entire adolescence in Winlaton after being made a ward of the state in 1964 at age 12, the psychological impact of being internally examined by an unsympathetic doctor has been long-lasting: 'What on earth were they looking for at 12? If you cry, you're told to shut up. To me that's sexual assault.' A habitual absconder, Joan was subjected to the same traumatic process each time the police returned her to Winlaton.

The callousness and brutality of the institution did very little to rehabilitate girls

who had run away — or been officially removed — from abusive and dysfunctional families. After hitchhiking from Brisbane to Melbourne in the early 1960s to escape her alcoholic parents, 13-year-old Karen\* was soon picked up by police off the city streets. From the Russell Street cells, she was taken to Winlaton. There she recalls being belted with 'wet sand shoes', locked in her room, and forcefully injected with tranquillisers.

To perhaps scare her straight, she was once sent for a couple of nights to the Fairlea Women's Prison.

For Gillian, who was admitted to Winlaton in 1972 at age 15 following a suicide attempt, the few months she spent there were characterised by utter boredom, punishments such as being forced to scrub the recreation room floor with a toothbrush, and neglect. After falling ill, she was ignored for days until she was finally rushed by ambulance to hospital. A strep infection had evolved into rheumatic fever — an illness usually only diagnosed in the most poverty-stricken, overcrowded communities of Australia. She suffered permanent heart damage as a result.

With little education or meaningful recreation offered, some girls sought to alleviate their boredom through violence. Merlene Fawdry recalls in her memoir, *The Little Mongrel*, that in the remand section 'there were no books to read, newspapers and radios were not allowed, so inmates just sat around and talked. This often led to disagreements and fights, where frustration and futility gave power to fists and feet and teeth.'

Tattooing was another common way to pass the time and rebel against 'the screws', but the future employment prospects and self-esteem of Winlaton girls were compromised by these amateur inkings.

For many of the women who spent time as juveniles in Winlaton in the 1960s and early '70s, life has been far from easy. Gillian supported a heroin addiction by working St Kilda's streets as a prostitute, Joan endured decades of agonising separation from the daughter she was forced to relinquish as a 16-year-old, and Karen escaped both her family and institutions by marrying at 17. After years of feeling like 'a reject from the conveyor belt of life' Fawdry regained her self-esteem by mothering seven children and qualifying as a youth social worker.

A tiny sample of the hundreds of adolescent girls who passed through Winlaton and survived into adulthood, these women demonstrate the wide-ranging effects of ruptured family life and subsequent institutionalisation. They also express a common hope that their stories may prevent the future unnecessary incarceration of vulnerable youth.

Though subjected to sexual double standards, and confused messages in mainstream and social media regarding the value of young women's bodies, rebellious Victorian girls who are possibly sexually active are no longer routinely punished with institutionalisation. For this, at least, we can be grateful. The

ongoing problem of providing meaningful care to abused and neglected girls is, however, an ongoing conundrum.

## Community fear feeds Fox News Muslim bashing

### RELIGION

*Ruby Hamad*

The fallout from the notorious Fox News interview with noted academic Reza Aslan continues. The ten-minute segment in which host Lauren Green repeatedly [quizzes](#) Aslan as to why he, a Muslim, 'would be interested in the founder of Christianity' is mind-boggling in its casual religious persecution.

Buzzfeed calls it 'the most embarrassing interview Fox has ever done', Slate says it is 'cringe-worthy', and *The Washington Post* is [calling](#) for Fox to apologise to Aslan, who was promoting his new book *Zealot: The life and times of Jesus of Nazareth*. Aslan has [benefited](#) from the publicity, hitting number two on the *New York Times* best sellers list and number one on Amazon.

Green has been roundly criticised for implying that Aslan, despite his numerous degrees in religious studies including a PhD, is incapable of providing an objective and scholarly account of Jesus because of his Muslim faith. While much of the [criticism](#) centres on the right of someone to write about a group to which they do not belong, in reality, this goes far deeper than that.

The most troubling thing about Green's performance was not that she had an issue with a non-Christian writing about Jesus, it's that she had an issue with a *Muslim* doing so. In Green's world of privileged western Christianity, a Muslim, even one who has dedicated his working life to studying major world religions, cannot possibly write about Christianity without an ulterior motive.

While Fox is not representative of the entire US population, this distrust of Aslan is symptomatic of a culture, helped by movies and TV shows such as [Homeland](#), that still continues to paint every Muslim as a potential threat.

Unsurprisingly, Green has no issue with Christians writing about Islam. Her 2011 interview with Barry Van, a Southern-Baptist minister and author *Puritan Islam*, was spent [discussing](#) the stealthy ways Muslims with terrorist sympathies 'can be your neighbours ... they can be in a suburb of Cincinnati ... they can be medical doctors'. But that is how privilege works; it is the assumption that what applies to other, minority groups does not apply to you.

Aslan is not alone in experiencing this type of persecution. Huma Abedin, one of Hillary Clinton's closest aides, is the focus of an attack by former Republican presidential candidate and congresswoman Michelle Bachman, who, along with four other Republicans, is [accusing](#) Abedin — who, like Aslan, happens to be a Muslim — of having ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Other prominent Republicans, including John McCain, have denounced the claims. Keith Ellison, the US's first Muslim member of congress, warns of a dangerous step towards McCarthyism.

Although *The Atlantic* has [debunked](#) the claims, that hasn't stopped others from

jumping on the bandwagon. Abedin is married to Anthony Weiner, the disgraced Democrat candidate for New York City mayor who is currently embroiled in a sexting scandal, leading some Fox News commentators to [query](#) the media interest in Weiner when Abedin's connections to 'people who want to kill us' is 'the real story'.

It seems a Muslim cannot be in the public eye without being accused of harbouring terrorist connections. When Rima Fasih became the first Muslim Miss USA in 2010, some conservative bloggers [dubbed](#) her 'Miss Hezbollah', claiming she had ties to the radical group. Her skimpy pageant outfits were nothing more than an elaborate attempt to fool Americans into thinking she had assimilated, demonstrating that whether in hijab or a bikini, in the eyes of some, a Muslim woman just cannot win.

It's a mistrust from which Australia is not exempt as the Ed Husic debacle recently [demonstrated](#) . Some Australians just couldn't accept that a Muslim, even one who sits on the Government front bench, can be committed to both Australia and to his religion.

Of course, the less devout are not spared either. I would describe myself as, at best, a non-practising Muslim, but that doesn't stop the hostile distrust I encounter when I write on certain issues. When I [criticise](#) Israel's treatment of black Ethiopian Jews, readers, purely on the basis of my surname, blithely dismiss me as 'biased' and 'pushing another agenda'. When I write about the practice of 'white-washing' in Hollywood films, I am [accused](#) of 'playing the race card' and having 'an ulterior motive'.

And when I, as an Australian citizen, [lament](#) the direction of Anzac Day commemorations, which I feel have gone from solemn remembrance to glorification of war, furious readers inform me that as a 'foreigner' I have no right to talk about the Anzacs, and demand to know why I 'even came here'.

I have come to accept that some people will always regard me with suspicion, but that doesn't make it any less shocking when you see this hostility exhibited so blatantly and unapologetically as it was by Green to Aslan. Sure, Fox News doesn't speak for everybody, but as Aslan himself has since [noted](#) , they have created a successful brand based on a widespread fear that already exists in the community.



## **Australia complicit in PNG's Bougainville blight**

INTERNATIONAL

*Ellena Savage*

The PNG Solution is in breach of international law. It does not serve the best interest of the asylum seekers it will affect. And the Department of Immigration and Citizenship is taking grossly insufficient responsibility for the safety and security of its detainees on Manus Island. But the PNG Solution is just another in a long line of 'border control' solutions which are in breach of legality and morality. There is nothing new about it.

Much has been made of PNG's poverty and gender-based violence, but even more disturbing is its military and police human rights record. Evidence of abuses in the form of a military blockade, massacres, rape and torture during the Bougainville Crisis, the civil war that spanned the 1990s, are well-documented.

This conflict was sparked by what local communities saw as profound environmental and economic damage perpetrated by Rio Tinto's copper mine at Panguna. What began as civil disobedience quickly descended into civil war, and Rio Tinto was subsequently taken to a US court, accused of genocide.

In 1990, the island was subject to a state-sanctioned blockade that lasted six years, during which time no trade in or out of the island was permitted. This prohibited the import and export of information (media blockade), energy, medical supplies and clothing. A generation of young people were denied formal schooling, and preventable illnesses killed young and old in the thousands.

Councils and organisations emerged to provide education and natural medicine, hydro- and coconut-based power was ingeniously created, and radiowaves were hijacked by rebels for communication. Yet accounts from this time paint a terrifying scene. One witness wrote that the scarcity of clothes led some elderly people to remain inside their homes for over a year because they were ashamed of their nakedness.

'Corruption', which is well-documented in PNG, sounds empty. But its outcomes are disturbing. State corruption produces a culture of corruption at every level. People with power are not held accountable. In times of disaster, people with power who are not held accountable are liable to perpetrate violence against vulnerable people.

The Bougainville Crisis made exiles out of many civilians. Some fled to Port Moresby or Australia if they got out early and had the right resources. Others sought asylum in the Solomon Islands. In documentation of the conflict, witnesses recall the PNGDF gunning down Red Cross boats as they smuggled people, clothing and medical supplies to and from the Solomon Islands. These violations have yet to be acknowledged by the PNG government. This tragedy happened right under our noses. What's more, Australian funding was used by the PNGDF to

perpetrate it.

This morsel of history makes two important points. Firstly, that the PNG government is not capable of caring for its most vulnerable citizens due to systemic corruption. Secondly, that when human rights abuses occur with our complacent knowledge, we acquire some moral responsibility.

A few days ago I sat and listened to an older Aboriginal woman tell stories about her life. Throughout her childhood, she had been terrified of being stolen from her mum, as her mother had been stolen from her grandmother. She spoke of her lifelong struggle to trust people who had not shared her experiences growing up. She said that her children suffered as a result. The point is that clever, crowd-pleasing policy that is predicated on the suffering of others today will have negative impacts for generations.

Bernard Keane [argued](#) in *Crikey* that the left's answer to asylum seekers is to 'let them all in' at any cost, and that this is in contradiction to any reasonable policy outcome. His argument draws asylum seeker rights as simply vain, empty gestures of the left, rather than the legal and moral entitlements of survivors of persecution. If it is culturally impossible to develop policy that is democratic and respectful of people's right to safety and dignity, then we simply need to give up on the idea that we live in a liberal democracy.

The management of asylum seekers in Australia is a question of careful policy, but policy-making is not a zero-sum game. Do we remember the Stolen Generations as a careful maintenance of the bottom line?

History will not be kind to us. The details of mass human rights violations have a habit of coming to the fore eventually. In the future, perhaps after an inquiry, maybe a formal apology, our antecedents will wonder: how did they let this happen?

## Flawed humanity of a police shooting martyr

### REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Fruitvale Station*. Director: Ryan Coogler. Starring: Michael B. Jordan, Octavia Spencer, Melonie Diaz, Ariana Neal. 85 minutes**

A world famous drag queen is reunited with his conservative mother after decades of estrangement in the documentary *I Am Divine*. A Korean orphan dreams of his biological mother and ruminates on his strained relationship with his (Belgian) adoptive mother in the animated memoir *Approved for Adoption*. A woman goes to great lengths to protect her adult son, after he accidentally kills a child with his car in the drama *Child's Pose*.

Sometimes at film festivals, connections emerge between what at first appear to be utterly dissimilar films. All of the films I have seen so far at this year's [Melbourne International Film Festival](#) have been concerned, substantially if not centrally, with the relationship between mothers and their sons. All reveal the bond to be both singularly resilient and highly susceptible to fate and human foibles.

This is evoked most powerfully in *Fruitvale Station*. The film is a dramatised account of the last day in the life of 22-year-old Oscar Grant, who was shot dead by police in the early hours of New Years Day, 2009, in Oakland, California. The death of this young, unarmed African-American man sparked protests and riots, and renewed tensions around race and fraught debates about police training and procedure.

*Fruitvale Station* though is largely divorced from this politicised context. First-time director Coogler has said he wanted to give an account of these events that got beyond headlines to humanity. 'When you know somebody as a human being, you know that life means something,' Coogler told the *New York Times*. His film builds a portrait of Grant's decidedly flawed humanity via snapshots of the intimate relationships that populate his life.

Grant's death was captured by camera phone; a fact that all but assured his status as a martyr for the cause against racial violence. Coogler's film opens with this footage before flashing back to the previous morning. Mobile phone technology is a central motif throughout the film; phone calls, and text messages which flash up on the screen, provide forensic signposts to the events of Grant's day.

This underpins the film's documentary style, but the focus on communication is also a focus on relationships. Grant calls his mother Wanda (Spencer) for her birthday, and she chides him for talking on his phone while driving; he is both a caring son, and cared for. He sends a text message to his girlfriend Sophina (Diaz) to invite her to lunch, and is disappointed to learn that she has already eaten;

their relationship is lately strained, but essentially loving.

Jordan plays Grant as a man seeking redemption for the mistakes of his past, though his approach is not always commendable. Recently unemployed, he goes to plead for his job, but in his desperation ends up threatening his former employer. Later, we are given an extended flashback of a past experience of prison, in which Wanda pleads with Grant to turn his life around; back in the present day, we see him dispose of drugs that he'd intended to sell.

Wanda and Sophina, along with Grant and Sophina's young daughter Tatiana (Neal), are at the heart of this quest for redemption. But the film is full of foreboding that never lets us forget how this hopeful day will end. Spooked by New Years Eve firecrackers, Tatiana tells her father she is frightened of the 'guns'. 'You're safe inside,' he tells her. 'But what about you daddy?' He is about to catch a train into the city, and does not know he will never return.

A review in *Variety* [described](#) the portrayal of Grant as 'relentlessly positive'. 'Generally positive' would be more accurate. *Fruitvale's* Grant is certainly not perfect. In both the supermarket scene and the prison flashback we glimpse the incipient violence that is in him. This contrasts with the pure and adoring affection he shares with Tatiana, and the more robust love he shares with Wanda, which has been tested by past events and survived.

That Tatiana loses a father, and Wanda a son, is the film's ultimate tragedy. The prison encounter ended with Wanda walking away from her son — a gesture of tough love that clearly hurt her as much as it did him — while he wailed at her to come back and hug him. In the film's closing moments, it is Wanda who pines to hug her dead son one last time. She feels she has failed to protect him. Even martyrs are human — and so are their mothers.

## Pope's Catholic health check

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*

World Youth Days stir some and leave others untouched. But they are always interesting because they allow the Pope to address enthusiastic young people in a variety of contexts. He has the chance to talk of what he believes important to pass on to the next generation. In the talks the distinctive themes of a papacy can emerge.

So it is instructive to compare the way in which Pope Francis addressed the young adults at World Youth Day in Brazil this week with Pope Benedict's style of address. Unsurprisingly they have much in common. Both men emphasise that Christian faith in the Catholic Church is the privileged way of finding meaning in life. Both compare Christian faith with other competing ways of finding meaning. Both call for a deeply grounded faith and solid formation in it.

But within these shared themes there are differences. They are of style, but substantial. To hear the two men speak is like hearing sermons from a representative of the Evangelical wing of the Anglican communion and one from the Anglo Catholic wing. Both commend the same Gospel, but they differ particularly in the centrality that each gives to the Church and its traditions.

The differences can be best understood through images, inadequate though they are. Benedict might picture the Church as a museum or treasury of all the beliefs, relationships, liturgical details and traditions that compose its life. He tries to draw young people into the treasury to appreciate its beauty and coherence and to find in it a home. In his language he puts on display the rich symbolic resources and intellectual power of the Catholic inheritance, just as in his celebration of liturgy he brought out significant treasures from the Vatican vaults.

He sees the enemy of the Church to be impoverished intellectual traditions which seduce people and have to be combated with robust intellectual argument. These alternative treasuries promise much but are empty.

The task of the curators of the treasury — bishops and priests in particular — is to be present in it and safeguard its contents. They are also to draw people in by their enthusiasm for the beauty of what it contained, and are to explain faithfully the living connections that unify the collection.

Francis might imagine the Church as like a dispensary from which health workers go out to share their life saving medicines. They have something precious to offer people, too precious for them to waste their time in the dispensary. In Brazil Francis urged the young people repeatedly to go out among people, to take risks, even at the risk of annoying their bishops. This has been a constant theme of his pontificate. He speaks in the salty, epigrammatic and concrete language of the market stalls.

For him the enemy is not intellectual systems but concrete things like money and wealth and security that crush people's ability to see what matters more deeply. These things lead people to see wealth as something for personal accumulation and not for the common good, so perpetuating human misery. The world to which he sends people out is the world in which asylum seekers are mistreated, in which there is little compassion for the poor and neglected, and where people are driven by fear of losing their possessions. This breeds fear, the globalisation of indifference, and eventually leads to violence against imagined enemies.

Francis believes that if Catholics are to commend the Gospel to the poor they must appeal to the heart, not primarily to the mind. So the Gospel needs to be presented as something joyful and simple, not in its complexity. He acknowledges the role of theologians, but it is to serve the health workers, not to mystify the medicine.

The virtues that Francis seeks in bishops and priests (and in young people) are not the curatorial gifts of security, reliability and arcane knowledge, but the entrepreneurial gifts of passion about what they have to offer, travelling light, becoming part of the people whose healing they seek. Shepherds must smell like their sheep. Their greatest failure would be to waste their time in the dispensary and to be ambitious for administrative positions.

The perspectives of Benedict and Francis are different, but each has its place in the Catholic tradition. Benedict's perspective is Benedictine, Francis' is Franciscan; one reflects the world of the monastery where the monks spend their lives, the other the world of the friary from which friars go on mission among the people. But in a world that is changing and a Catholic world that is disconcerted, the reception that Francis has received suggests that the path to Catholic renewal may be Franciscan.

## Rudd is the Greens' accidental hero

AUSTRALIA

*John Warhurst*

Kevin Rudd may have inadvertently helped the Greens. Their Senate balance of power was endangered by the prospect of a landslide Coalition victory. But a revitalised Labor will now almost certainly poll much more strongly in the Senate. This will ensure the continuation of a Labor-Green Senate majority regardless of how well the Greens themselves poll. Only three Green Senators out of nine are up for re-election. Surplus Labor Senate votes will flow to the Greens improving the chances of Green candidates even without a stronger Greens performance.

But a strong Green vote is also now more likely because of the major government policy changes to heartfelt Green concerns about carbon pricing and asylum seekers. The Greens' chances don't even depend upon majority opposition to these new policies, but just strongly-held minority views. This appears to be the case, especially with asylum seeker policy which is more clearly seen as a 'lurch to the right'.

At the moment, according to the Newspoll published in *The Australian* last week, the Greens are polling at 10 per cent, less than the 11.8 per cent vote they achieved in 2010. For some time the Greens' polling has been below their 2010 vote, but it is not that far below, and the issues are moving in the Greens' direction. Rudd has been pitching for the youth vote since his return. But his new PNG solution to asylum seeker arrivals is unlikely to be attractive to young voters, which is where Green strength lies, especially among younger women aged 18–30.

The Greens now offer a clear alternative outside the mainstream on asylum seeker policies, opposing PNG and favouring onshore processing. The same Newspoll showed considerable scepticism about the approach of the major parties to asylum seekers. Rudd has gone some way to balancing the ledger as far as Labor and Coalition voters are concerned. Voters still favour the Coalition by a seven per cent margin (33:26) but back in February it was a 27 per cent margin in the Coalition's favour (47:20).

But almost half of the electorate are still unconvinced by either of the major parties. Ten per cent favour no party, 12 per cent favour another party, including the Greens, and a whopping 19 per cent remain uncommitted. The bigger the asylum seeker issue becomes the more likely that a considerable minority of voters will look for an alternative approach. The Greens only have to attract some of these dissenters to improve their chances.

They will have supporters, including many elements of the the asylum and refugee movement who regard this political fix as inhumane. Many church-people, including the social justice wings of the Uniting and Catholic churches, are also

aghast.

This election will be a huge test for Greens' leader Christine Milne. The Rudd policy moves have set the stage for her. She has been assisted too by Gillard's removal, as she remains the last woman party leader standing on the national stage. She needs to become the voice of a compassionate alternative, as Bob Brown was previously.

But it won't be easy for Milne as this will be a 'presidential' election, suiting Rudd's style. Airtime for minor parties will be at a premium. She has to connect with voters, especially younger voters, in a personal way that she has not yet mastered. If she can't do it, other Greens, including the young Immigration spokesperson, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, must step up.

Milne will have to play her cards very carefully, because the question of what is an appropriately compassionate response to the problem of deaths at sea, is a complex one. She will need to be both positive and compassionate in the face of a big government advertising campaign.

The politics will be ugly but the polls suggest that a sizeable minority of the Australian community will now listen to a view outside the mainstream. The Greens are well poised to capture some of this minority.



## **We're all boat people after all**

CREATIVE

*Brian Doyle*

The tide of talk of refugees and boats and immigration and politicians holding refugees hostage for political capital having overwhelmed me recently, I went back to the old annals of my family, kept meticulously by my oldest brother, who recently digitised and webbed them, so that the family can access not only fact but photographs and film snippets of the Old Ones reminiscing, and I am reminded that I am the great-grandchild of immigrants, and so are you. We forget this, and it seems to me that we ought not to forget this.

On the one side my people came to America from County Clare, where they lived by the sea and eked out livings until my great-grandmother rose so high as to run a ferry between Ireland and England; a ferry used most often, I suspect, to escort exiles from Ireland to England, rather than the other way round.

On the other side my people came to America from County Wicklow, where they lived in the mountains and eked out livings which included, as my father has often noted with a smile, many years, perhaps centuries, as village seanachies, the storycatchers of old Ireland, charged with remembering and sharing stories — a crucial job, with hints and intimations of moral responsibility, although my dad, grinning, prefers to say that we have always been paid liars; as he says we have a natural gift for it and if we had only been more venal we could have sunk to being a powerful political dynasty in America, like the Bushes and the Kennedys.

A scientist friend of mine here is involved in a recent discovery that there appear to have been at least three major influxes of immigrants to North America, ten or more thousand years ago. His particular expertise is what he calls maritime strays, the evidence of additional immigrants landing along the Pacific shore thousands of years ago. Not even the First Peoples here were not immigrants, as he says — an interesting phrase to remember when the shrill arguments about who should be allowed to live here and who should not grow bitter and violent.

The same principle is true of Australia, of course, though on a far more remarkable timeline; the First Australians were also visitors to a red wonderland no man or woman had ever seen, before they stepped ashore in the north, and began to dream the oldest culture in the history of human beings.

Boat people, wetbacks, job thieves, welfare cheats; I've heard every nasty and sneering label and insult there is, bandied about freely in raves and waves, and I hear the greed and fear and incipient blood behind those words.

But lately rather than snarl myself at the crude selfishness behind our national fear of immigrants, I stare at my family annals, and read about the lanky children who came here from Ireland, utterly poor, desperately hungry, ferociously eager not so much for money but for decent work, and decent shelter, and a chance to

love and protect their spouses and children in a country without imperial police, a country where they could speak freely and worship whatever gods they pleased.

We forget this, and it seems to me that we ought not to forget this.

## A reading list for climate change deniers

### ENVIRONMENT

*Greg Foyster*

The term 'climate alarmist' is usually reserved for high-profile activists, scientists or politicians — think Bill McKibben, Tim Flannery or Al Gore — who raise concerns about the catastrophic impacts of future global warming. But with the release of some frightening reports over the last 12 months, those who deny the [scientific consensus](#) on climate change will have to expand their list of 'alarmists' to include some unlikely suspects — the World Bank, PricewaterhouseCoopers and the International Energy Agency.

The Oxford Dictionary [defines](#) alarmist as 'someone who exaggerates a danger and so causes needless worry or panic'. The key point is that the alarm is raised without due grounds. On that basis, very few activists, scientists or politicians who warn about future calamities from climate change are actually alarmist because the dangers of global warming are well established and accepted by the overwhelming majority of scientific institutions.

But in the lexicon of the climate denial blogosphere, 'alarmism' has a more specific definition, once described by skeptic Kenneth P. Green as 'the reflexive tendency to assume worst-case scenarios generated by climate models are automatically true (and to enact public policy based on that belief)'.

Under that definition, the World Bank's November 2012 [report](#) 'Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must be Avoided' could well be termed alarmist. 'It is my hope that this report shocks us into action,' reads the foreword by Dr Jim Yong Kim, president of World Bank Group. Although the global community has agreed to keep temperature rise under two degrees, the report argues that 'present emission trends put the world plausibly on a path toward 4°C warming within the century'.

In case a four-degree temperature rise sounds balmy but tolerable, the World Bank points out that the greatest warming would occur over land, with increases ranging from four degrees to ten degrees. Heat waves such as occurred in Russia in 2010 are likely to become 'the new normal summer'. The warmest July in the Mediterranean could be nine degrees warmer than today's warmest July. Other near-apocalyptic predictions include regional extinctions of coral reefs and sea level rises of up to one metre by 2100.

The summary closes with these words: 'The projected 4°C warming simply must not be allowed to occur — the heat must be turned down. Only early, cooperative, international actions can make that happen.'

But what are our chances of prevention? [Not great](#), according to a November 2012 PricewaterhouseCoopers report titled 'Too Late for Two Degrees? Low Carbon Economy Index 2012'.

The index measures the 'carbon intensity' of countries, meaning the emissions per unit of GDP. If we want to limit warming to two degrees, the task ahead of us is urgent and unprecedented: 'The global economy now needs to cut carbon intensity by 5.1 per cent every year from now to 2050 to achieve this carbon budget. This required rate of decarbonisation has not been seen even in a single year since the mid-20th century when these records began.'

If the World Bank report intended to 'shock us into action', the PricewaterhouseCoopers report must have had even more radical aims, as its foreword is unequivocally alarming: 'Now one thing is clear: businesses, governments and communities across the world need to plan for a warming world — not just 2°C, but 4°C, or even 6°C.'

That brings us to two reports from the International Energy Agency (IEA), which argue for urgent action on climate change. 'Successive editions of this report have shown that the climate goal of limiting warming to 2°C is becoming more difficult and more costly with each year that passes,' reads the [summary](#) of 'World Energy Outlook 2012'. Under the IEA's scenario to reach this two-degree target, 'almost four-fifths of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions allowable by 2035 are already locked-in by existing power plants, factories, buildings, etc.'

'If action to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is not taken before 2017, all the allowable CO<sub>2</sub> emissions would be locked-in by energy infrastructure existing at that time.' In other words, we have five years to begin a massive transition towards low-emissions electricity generation. Another IEA report, 'Redrawing the Energy-Climate Map', [spells out](#) four policies to be adopted as soon as possible, including limiting the construction of 'least-efficient' coal-fired power stations and partially phasing out fossil fuel subsidies.

What are we to make of these dire predictions? No doubt people who deny the seriousness of climate change will flock to the comments section and argue it's yet more evidence of global conspiracy. I take the more plausible view that these international institutions are finally putting forward recommendations in line with the science.

Deniers are right to argue that such reports will cause worry and panic, but not because they're wildly exaggerated 'worst-case scenarios'. In fact, the reports argue that our current trajectory will have terrible consequences. The PricewaterhouseCoopers report, for example, ends on the phrase 'business-as-usual is not an option'. When accountancy firms start sounding like environmental campaigners, the future looks very alarming indeed.

## **Bless the troublemakers**

CREATIVE

*Libby Hart*

### **Spiritus**

A stroke of wing  
cuts the field of air,  
its breath-bird  
following her wind map —  
a path of gasp and heave.  
Inhale of ebblight,  
exhale of cartography,  
when Russia falls away from her.  
And as she reaches Italy  
she is *spiritus, anima* —  
she is God's breath.  
Her lungs full with journey.

### **Necessary ritual**

Fingers dipped into holy water,  
the grain of the cross drawn on skin.  
'God speaks in silence,' he said  
with such certainty  
as if he knew all things.  
And when I rose, I found myself in prayer  
within this cathedral of wings.

### **Bless the troublemakers**

Bless the skittering swarm falling in and out of sync.  
Bless their stabbing beaks, bless their iridescence.  
Bless them when they drape the sky in feathercloud.  
Bless their grit and cunning, bless their unruly worth.  
Bless the one taken by falcon, maelstrom scattering.

Bless these ragged ravages and unwanted kin.

Call them vermin, I call them miracle.

**Storm charm**

Ink of darkness.

The wet brawl is unbounded,

tossing the tremulous boat,

its cramped cargo

of heave and white-knuckle.

A woman throws a charm overboard,  
special enough for sacrifice,

though pitch of murk grows eager still.

There's nothing more to offer it

except vigilance and entreaty.

These are the things that shall emerge from wave:

hegira, water bottles, prayer books and plates.

## Labor's performance enhancing drug

AUSTRALIA

*Michael Mullins*

We can go on acting as if the moral rectitude of our public institutions is intact when they have outrageously let us down. This week sport was once again in the spotlight, with esteemed Australian cyclist Stuart O'Grady admitting he was a former drug cheat.

O'Grady [told](#) the *Adelaide Advertiser* that he took a performance enhancing drug during the two weeks before the 1998 Tour de France. Within hours of his confession, the Australian Olympic Committee instructed him to resign from its Athletes' Commission. It said O'Grady would no longer be remembered as a 'fantastic competitor' but as an 'athlete who succumbed to the temptation of drugs in sport just to get an edge on some of his fellow riders'.

We routinely excuse young people who make poor choices for what appear good reasons. O'Grady said in the *Advertiser* interview that as a 24-year-old in 1998, he felt he had to use the drugs to be competitive in the Tour de France during what he described as the sport's 'dirtiest era'.

Arguably this is consistent with the 'winning at all costs' personal ethic that he [articulates](#) in the biodata section of his Twitter feed: 'I do everything 100 per cent, otherwise it's not worth doing'. According to his thinking at the time, everything counted as preparation, and saying no to performance enhancing drugs would have put him below the 100 per cent standard he'd set himself.

This 'whatever it takes' approach to the ethics of sport eschews the traditional personal integrity argument that it's taking part that counts, not winning. It calls to mind the legendary 'whatever it takes' approach to politics of former Labor numbers man turned commentator Graham Richardson. This still guides Richardson's thinking, and indeed it led him to heartily [endorse](#) Labor's PNG boat arrival solution in *The Australian* on Friday, when he described it as 'cruel, heartless, risky and politically brilliant'.

Like O'Grady's drugs in 1998, the PNG solution has made Labor fiercely competitive. If it gets them across the line, in years to come the party elders will perhaps look back and admit they had sacrificed what *really* counts for short-term political gain. They will ponder the principles that led many of them into politics, perhaps in terms not too dissimilar to Stuart O'Grady in his confession interview:

I spent my whole childhood dreaming of racing for Australia and every moral gene in my body was anti-doping and anti-cheating ... Then all of a sudden I was on my own in Europe getting my arse kicked and knowing it was around you (which) opened the option for bad judgement.

## **Liam Jurrah and the Northern Territory's jail-fail**

AUSTRALIA

*Mike Bowden*

Having lived for many years in the Northern Territory I have been concerned with the dramatically high crime rate and intrigued by the incarceration statistics in the Northern Territory. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics: 'The Territory's prison population has grown steadily over the last 20 years ... The Northern Territory has by far the highest incarceration rate in the country, at more than four times the national average and increasing faster than any other jurisdiction'. The rate of imprisonment in 2012 increased 1 per cent over the 2011 figure.

In other words we have a flood, and it's rising!

The year 11 legal studies text book I used to teach from suggested there are two principal functions of sentencing in the criminal court: to punish the offender, and to deter both the individual and the general public from similar acts in the future. That is, to make for a safer society.

The Northern Territory Government has legislated to direct magistrates and judges in sentencing to enforce harsher penalties to ensure that the message gets out to would be offenders that if they offend they will get the full treatment. They will go to jail and for a lengthy period. So why is the situation deteriorating?

The Law Society of the NT [suggests](#) a number of reasons, including:

erosion of judicial discretion and growth of mandatory minimum sentences; failure to offer effective rehabilitation; failure to establish alternatives to incarceration; increasing number of offences; increasing police numbers; demographic change: the Northern Territory has the youngest population of any Australian jurisdiction, with an ever-increasing cohort of people becoming old enough to commit offences; criminogenic conditions: a substantial portion of the Northern Territory population live in remote communities and town camps in a state of chronic poverty, with poor housing, health, employment and education.

The very nature of Northern Territory society — widely dispersed, with small populations living in tiny communities far from a range of essential services; experiencing a severe lack of employment and educational opportunity; and living in poorly constructed and inadequately maintained housing — has produced a marginalised population with little else to do but break the law. These are the forces pushing Aboriginal young men into incarceration.

The case of Liam Jurrah, celebrated AFL footballer, is instructive. At age 23 Jurrah had established a promising career. But in March 2012 he was charged with attempted murder in Alice Springs. After being acquitted of that crime he was arrested for excessive drink driving (0.27 per cent) in Adelaide in January 2013.



Soon after, in March 2013, he was convicted of assault in Alice Springs and sentenced to six months jail.

A [biography](#) written before these events, investigating Jurrah's transition to the AFL from a remote community at Yuendumu 250km north west of Alice Springs, is almost prophetic. Its author Bruce Hearn MacKinnon writes that 'mainstream society do not understand the general days' happenings in the remote areas of Alice Springs ... It's almost a war zone up there, these sorts of incidents are happening almost on an hourly basis day in day out.'

MacKinnon later concluded, during an interview after the conviction, that Jurrah has 'got to take some responsibility of his own actions and his own life. I'm not excusing him, but he's a victim at the same time of the sad circumstances of his community and Aboriginal people.'

Jurrah has significant resources at his disposal and good people to support him, yet he has come terribly unstuck. Consider the fate of so many of his relations. They are embedded in the institutions of non-Indigenous society. MacKinnon is right; each individual must take responsibility for their own behaviour. But so must the larger society and its institutions take responsibility to amend, repair and improve the lives of these victims of dispossession.

Instead we hear citizens call for increased police numbers because they feel unsafe. The increased police presence causes more arrests, more court appearances and more mandatory convictions. More young men go to jail. Then the government must at great cost build more prisons in Darwin and Alice, failing in the meantime to employ effective alternatives to incarceration. One of the consequences of this is the further marginalisation of prisoners, who are now cut off — in some cases by thousands of kilometres — from visits from wives, children and family.

And as the statistics show, each year it gets worse.

The prison system may well be achieving its first objective — to punish (hurt) the offender; I can't think of many ways to more seriously harm or hurt an Indigenous offender than to remove him from his country and kin for long periods of time. But on the count of deterrence and rehabilitation, the system is failing terribly. And it is possibly a result of the harm associated with imprisonment that the rehabilitation or correction element fails so significantly. The push factors are overcoming the deterrent effect.

Jurrah had his prison sentence reduced to three months. Hopefully in that short time he will not be too harmed by his experience. He will soon be free and hopefully will be given the chance to recommence his football career. But even if this happens the conditions confronting his cousins and brothers will not change.

So the prisons keep on filling — and none of us is safer.

