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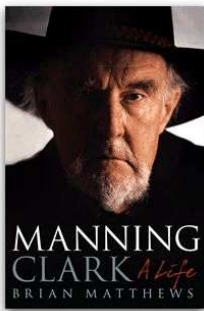
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Secret life of a bullied writer

BOOK FORUM

Andrew Hamilton

Matthews, Brian: *Manning Clark: A Life*. Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2008. ISBN 9781741143782, \$59.95



Brian Matthews' book on Manning Clark is modestly subtitled *A Life*. It is one of many possible lives. It could also have been titled 'The inner life of a writer'. The notable events and circumstances of Clark's life are well described. But the focus is on the relationship between his writing and his dramatic inner world.

The key which Matthews uses to unlock Clark's inner life is the diary that he kept intermittently in his earlier years and faithfully in his maturity.

In it he records his anguish, struggles with faith, guilt at drinking and infidelity, sense of rejection and self-laceration, particularly in the years that he prepared for and carried out his major writing: the six-volume history of Australia. These dramatic preoccupations often colour his historical and autobiographical writing.

The great virtue of Matthews' work is his attentiveness to the text of Clark's private and public writing. He weighs the text for meaning and for rhetorical colour. He does not simply claim connections between the diary and the history, but demonstrates them.

He also illuminates Clark's writing by comparing it with similar passages from other writers, like Lawson and Orwell, with whom Clark identified himself. He explores the way in which Clark's imagination worked, putting his own gifts of style totally at the service of exposition.

To carry out this delicate task, Matthews needs, and deploys, the skills of a trained reader. But he goes beyond literary criticism in his work. He inevitably invites the reader to pass judgement on Manning Clark as a human being.

Matthews is anything but judgemental, and his work finally evokes admiration of Clark and sympathy for him. The life of one who could be drawn to such a huge enterprise as the history of Australia, and who over two decades could carry it through in the face of such constant and terrible self-doubt, sensitivity to criticism, and self-laceration, is a life to be celebrated.

If Clark was oversensitive to criticism, he was also strongly, sometimes brutally, criticised by his peers and by journalists. He was an early target in what have come to be called the history wars. Matthews quotes Clark's critics, and for the most part allows their comments to

judge themselves.

But the quality of his biography suggests how destructive it is to describe arguments about history or culture as warfare. The noisy and aggressive have appropriated the term to justify their using words as clubs on more reflective scholars.

Matthews' own work sets the proper standards for those who read and pass judgement on a writer's work. His example suggests that it is a prerequisite to read arguments from within the author's own perspective before criticising their work.

Many of Clark's critics did this. Their punctiliousness did not prevent him from being hurt. But other critics would have later been ashamed, one hopes, to read again what they had written.

This kind of bullying is never excusable. But when we read some of the responses to Manning Clark's work, we might be tempted to ask, as school teachers often do, whether something in the way some people present themselves attracts bullies. Was there something in the way in which Manning Clark presented himself personally and in his writing that brought the inexcusable worst out in many of those who wrote about him?

Matthews rightly makes much of Clark's enduring preoccupation with Christ. Christ was for him variously a symbol of religious faith, of any standing point that might give confidence in living, of grounds for hope in the face of all the things that kill it, of the possibility of self-acceptance and forgiveness, of an integrated life. This was a symbol that fascinated Clark, but one to which he always felt an outsider.

That is understandable. His use of the symbol evokes the different cultural worlds of Luther, Matthew Arnold, Cardinal Newman, Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard. To have appropriated and integrated the symbol as his own would have meant reconciling great tensions. His energy went into reconciling them in his history, not in his life or his religious belief.

Matthews' life of Manning Clark, as a good biography should, leads its readers to realise that they have only begun to know its subject and to want more.

At Clark's funeral, a colleague praised his gift for friendship and as a teacher. I found this surprising. From Clark's repeated lament in his diaries that he was a failure, misunderstood and unsupported by his friends, we might have been led to believe his gift was for losing, not winning or retaining friends.

It would be good then to have another life that will describe Clark as friend and as teacher with the same attentiveness as Matthews gives to his inner life and to the wellsprings of his writing.

At the centre of the book, too, is a shadowed figure who begs for illumination. This is

Manning Clark's wife, Dymphna Lodewyckx, who is constantly mentioned and called upon in the diary but who is herself reticent. She comes to fascinate the reader, and I suspect Matthews himself, even more than her husband.

Australia shamed as climate reaches turning point

ENVIRONMENT

Tony Kevin

Environment delegates are meeting for two weeks (1–12 December) at the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) in Poznan. With a large accompanying NGO and youth presence, this Polish city is hosting 11,000 visitors for a preparatory meeting for the next major UN conference on climate change in Copenhagen in December 2009, tasked to negotiate a new treaty to replace the Kyoto Treaty, which expires in 2012.



Poznan seeks agreement on a 'vision' and concrete agenda for Copenhagen. Environmentalists had hoped Poznan would see announcements by major Western nations of aspirational numerical targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. The European Union showed early leadership by [committing](#) to reduce its emissions by at least 20 per cent of 1990 levels by 2020.

The Bush-administration US delegation, which wouldn't quantify targets, is ignored. But Obama's name is everywhere. He [pledged](#) last month to set the US on course to reduce emissions to their 1990 levels by 2020, and reduce them an additional 80 per cent by 2050. He sent an inspiring message to the Poznan meeting:

'Now is the time to confront this challenge once and for all. Delay is no longer an option. Denial is no longer an acceptable response. The stakes are too high. The consequences are too serious.'

So the heat is off the US. Meanwhile, Australia, Canada, Japan and Russia are still refusing to put national numerical GGE targets on the table. As resources exporters and/or major coal users, they are reluctant to match the ambitious EU 2020 target. All are waiting to see what others say.

The influential Australian coal industry and supportive industry lobbies would prefer much lower targets for 2020. They appear to have prevailed. Marian Wilkinson [reported](#) on 1 December that Minister Wong had reversed her previous public commitment to announce Australia's 2020 target at Poznan.

Wilkinson reported predictions that on 15 December, Wong will announce a 2020 cut of between 5 and 15 per cent. [Reaction](#) from more than 50 climate groups in Australia was swiftly condemnatory.

In Poznan, South Africa has now [named and shamed](#) Australia, Russia, Canada and Japan for not declaring 2020 targets. China has [called](#) on developed countries to offer a 25 per cent cut.

These numbers matter internationally. By not supporting a the generous stance of developed countries at Poznan, Australia is making it less likely that developing countries led by China, India and Brazil will respond generously in Copenhagen.

Garnaut's Report explained cogently, in classic prisoner's dilemma game-theory analysis, why the developed West must make the first offers. Rudd and Wong seem to be ignoring his advice for domestic political reasons .

A more optimistic interpretation is that Rudd needs evidence of strength of international feeling at Poznan to convince opponents at home that a generous Australian 2020 target is needed. Maybe Australia will, in the end, come up with a 20 per cent offer. But such risky gamesmanship leaves all the heavy lifting at Poznan to the EU, which itself is having difficulty convincing its reluctant poorer East European members.

In true Howardian style, Australia is again, by sitting on the sidelines, sabotaging Poznan-Copenhagen's prospects of real-time progress.

Outside the conference, young NGO activists engage in imaginative street protests and climb coal power station chimneys. How long before their desperate last-ditch energy and enthusiasm for Poznan-Copenhagen curdles into desperation, perhaps even eco-terrorism, if real international progress is not made?

This meeting marks a turning point. At the now-advanced stage in global warming towards irreversible climate tipping points, not to decide is to decide. The protesters see that if rich governments continue to prevaricate, wasting precious time for amelioration and adaptation, these governments betray their responsibilities to the next generation. Our economic models just don't take proper account of our children's future environment.

Back home, Rudd and Wong walk a policy tightrope. They have managed to make the public temporarily forget global warming, hardly heard of in Australia since September, when Garnaut [issued](#) his final report and the economic crisis broke. Behind the scenes, pro-coal lobbies put ferocious pressure on our government to downgrade targets.

Minister Wong now goes to Europe for a high-level Poznan wrap-up meeting. I hope whatever she says there will be closely scrutinised. It is even more important, in the current economic crisis, that strong foundations be laid in Poznan and Copenhagen for the speediest possible decarbonisation of the world economy, if we are to be spared the most catastrophic consequences of climate change.

Our Federal Government hands out money and advises Australians to spend it, when instead it should be using that money to build solar and wind driven power stations, and to help Australians insulate their houses, install solar hot water and fuel cell technology and water tanks, re-learn the arts of self-reliance and living sustainably within one's means.

But this does not fit the government's consumption-driven growth model. Perhaps after a

year of predicted recession, such ideas will start to be looked at more seriously by Australian governments.

Thai airport protesters' victory short-lived

POLITICS

Nicholas Farrelly and Andrew Walker



After months of escalating protests in Bangkok, the anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy has demonstrated an almost mythical capacity for extreme provocation.

Their impunity has been astounding. The courts have failed to stop their illegal actions. And now the Thai judiciary has taken a key step in the wider campaign against the elected government.

On Tuesday 2 December, the Constitutional Court dissolved the ruling People Power Party and banned the prime minister from politics for five years. The protesters, who have occupied Bangkok's airports for a week, are claiming a victory in their 'final battle'. Amidst their cheers they have agreed to end their airport occupations.

Taking over the Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang airports was the most recent act of brinksmanship in a series of audacious attacks on the government. In many other countries the continuation and escalation of such attacks would have been impossible. The police and army, at the first hint of an attempt to seize such crucial national infrastructure, would have quickly called for reinforcements.

Those reinforcements would likely have come with water cannons, tear gas and truncheons. In some countries tanks may have been mobilised. Riot police, bristling with firepower and government backing, would have moved, within hours, to re-take the physical, if not the moral, high ground.

Under such circumstances, there would have been little restraint. In fact, in some countries the invasion of airports by well-armed protestors would be considered an act of terrorism.

The Thai security forces have not seen it that way. In fact, with the latest court ruling, it is the government, and not the protesters, that attracted the most serious judicial ire.

But this is far from the end. The government is down, but not out. It has survived previous judicial, military and protest action against it. Even after the most recent setback in the Constitutional Court it will not shy away from a fight.

The prime minister and 12 cabinet members have been banned from politics for five years because they are on the executive of the dissolved ruling party. But most of the government MPs escaped the ban and they will now quickly move to join a new party that was specifically set up for this eventuality. All the signs are that the government will continue to hold a majority of the seats in the parliament.

So, the protesters celebrations may be short-lived. The prime minister is gone, but the government remains in place. After a respectful lull for the king's birthday, which falls tomorrow, they will probably resume their protest action to get rid of the government once and for all.

They will launch yet another phase in their 'final battle' to institute 'new politics' where elected politicians play a subordinate role to unelected statesmen, judges, civil servants and military commanders. This is the anti-democratic agenda of the People's Alliance for Democracy.

With that agenda on full public display, Thai politics has now entered a new and unpredictable phase. Analysts speculate that the courts may go beyond party dissolution and completely overturn the result of the December 2007 election.

If that happens, or if the military stage a coup to prevent further deterioration in civil order, the anti-government protesters would push hard for an appointed government. Thailand would be staring down the barrel of a future without scheduled elections.

This would almost inevitably bring pro-government forces onto the streets in massive numbers. So far their rallies have been largely peaceful but their restraint in the face of anti-democratic provocation and impunity surely has its limits. If the pent-up fury of the pro-government forces is let loose then things could get very ugly indeed.

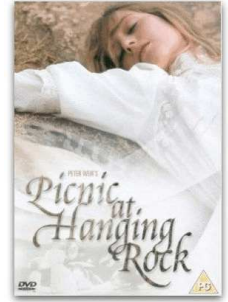
Good Aussie films a thing of the past

FILM FORUM

Ruby Hamad

On 6 December, four films that few Australians have seen will vie for top honours at the 2008 Australian Film Institute Awards.

The Jammed, *The Black Balloon*, *The Square* and *Unfinished Sky* all received outstanding reviews, yet their combined box office takings were a paltry \$3.9 million. Compare this with the Will Ferrell vehicle *Step Brothers*, an American comedy that was panned by critics, which alone took \$8.7 million in this country.



As an aspiring filmmaker, one of my primary concerns is that I am competing with a large pool of very talented filmmakers for a very small share of the Australian box office.

At present Australian films garner only 4 per cent of box office takings. This leaves us in a bit of quandary over whether we should make films that are true to our personal vision or try to give the audience what we think they want.

At present it appears that what the film industry thinks they want is American style blockbusters and comedies. Hence, the proliferation of comedian-driven vehicles such as *Takeaway*, *Boytown* and *The Nugget*. These films had fairly large budgets by Australian standards, yet all failed at the box office.

I believe they failed because they attempted to exploit the earlier success of films such as *The Castle* and *Crackerjack*. But what these two films had which others do not is true to life characters and a genuine premise; in other words, character and script development.

Both these films told uniquely Australian stories and both were driven by an underlying message the filmmakers were keen to relay to the audience. In other words, the filmmakers had something to say.

Compare Australia's current crop with the Australian 'New Wave' of the '70s and '80s. Films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Breaker Morant* and *My Brilliant Career* appealed to audiences and critics alike, not only here but overseas.

Back then, *The New York Times* put such films' appeal down to their 'distinctive national flavor, most obvious in their rich visual texture ... in a recognisably American format. Locale, custom and accent may differ, but the cinematic language does not ...

'Indeed, the solid, well-crafted plots, believable characters and naturalistic dialogue of the best of these films recall American movies of an earlier era.'

In other words, the films of the New Wave were better received because they were better made.

‘It is a shame,’ *The Jammed* director Dee McLachlan said of the modern day struggle for a slice of the Australian box office pie, ‘because we’re competing against American, big star, \$100 million films.’

Of course, it isn’t fair to compare Australian films to American product, since we are not even playing on the same financial field. We can never compete with Hollywood on its own terms (perhaps with the exception of Baz Lurhman, whose epic *Australia* was largely financed by US 20th Century Fox).

But blaming the dominance of American films for the lackluster Australian field is also somewhat of a cop-out. American films dominate the box office in virtually every country they get a release — it’s not as if Australia is an anomaly. Yet other countries, such as France, England and Germany, also have a healthy local industry.

In 2007, Australian films took 4 per cent of the box office, American films took 77.7 per cent, with the remaining 18.3 per cent going to foreign films. Perhaps it is this last category of filmgoers we should be aiming for: audiences that are drawn to foreign films.

It is this share of the audience that made *Lantana* one of the most successful Australian films and who will support other Australian filmmakers who seek to tell real stories, not simply churn American style movies with an Australian-style budget.

‘Australians want to see Australian films. But they only want to see good ones,’ says Melanie Coombs, Oscar winning producer of short animation *Harvie Krumpet* and upcoming feature *Mary and Max*.

It’s time to stop blaming audiences for not watching our films and start giving them more reasons to do so. It’s time to go back to the ‘solid well-crafted plots’ and ‘believable characters’ without relinquishing our ‘distinctive national flavour’.

When Australian filmmakers hit these marks, we produce world-class films that our audiences flock to: *Lantana*, *Muriel’s Wedding*, *Babe*, even *Wolf Creek*. It’s been done before, and it can be done again.

Workers' solution for fallen childcare empire

ECONOMICS

Cameron Durnsford



The monumental collapse of the ABC Learning empire — much like the economy that incubated its malignant growth — should not be seen as a total calamity, despite the obvious potential for fallout.

Regardless of the Federal Government's bailout package, the debacle is only beginning to reverberate through our community. The revelation that almost 400 ABC Learning centres may close clearly brings dire consequences for staff, parents and 30,000 children at ABC. Not to mention shareholders.

Receivers McGrathNicol have looked at the figures and decided that more than one in three of ABC's profligate centres [aren't sustainable](#), despite the essential nature of childcare in today's economy. The effect this will have is palpable. The first news of ABC's woes brought a rush on community-based childcare, while this latest announcement's timing is drawing an impassioned response from [parents](#) and the [media](#).

Beyond further government lifelines or a rival's takeover of these centres, what hope is there for families and workers in places as disparate as Central Sydney and Innisfail?

ABC staff and parents, as much as governments and administrators, would do well to look at a phenomenon that emerged in the wake of the Argentine economic collapse in 2001. After the dust settled on [el saqueo](#) — the collective term for the devaluation of the Argentine peso, the run on the banks and the rioting, looting and death that followed — workers' collectives organised to run their enterprises autonomously.

The bosses had jumped ship. They left their workers unemployed and, in most cases, with workplaces where the assets had been stripped, sold or even smashed. But intrepid Argentines began the arduous task of getting their jobs back by [recuperating](#) the spaces left fallow by their absentee owners.

The illusion that executives and industrialists held some ethereal knowledge of business beyond the average workers' grasp quickly evaporated. Self-interest meant the workers ran the business better than the bosses who, much like ABC's [Groves](#), had been reluctant to shoulder responsibility at the time of the crisis.

Perversely, as the cooperatives proved viable and the economy turned around, these same employers came out of the woodwork and began their fight to reclaim the businesses themselves. They had varying degrees of success thanks to the Argentine government's de facto endorsement of the takeovers, in the form of the [Ley Nacional de Expropiaci3n](#) or National Law of Expropriation.

There is a considerable difference between post-crisis Argentina and still-wealthy suburban Australia teetering on the edge of recession. Militant unionism, factory occupations and violent protests aren't particularly common in Australia, just as a 'she'll be right, mate' attitude doesn't come easy when one's life savings have been halved by order of the central government.

However, the overnight disappearance of 30,000 childcare places does have serious implications for an economy already under duress. Surely some creative thinking is required.

With the Rudd government staring down the barrel of a budget [deficit](#), calls for a [nationalisation](#) of ABC seem unlikely to resonate with a cash-strapped treasury. Equally, as the private sector is hemorrhaging at an astonishing rate, finding sufficient capital to take over the old ABC centres could also prove difficult.

The community model of childcare draws almost universal acclaim from workers, parents, children and early-childhood learning academics. Indeed, the community sector's peak body, Australian Community Children's Services, identifies the community model as having been the predominant form of childcare in Australia before the Fraser government's opening of the sector to private investment.

Waiting lists for community centres are such that children registered at conception only receive places as toddlers, or later.

A full-fledged nationalisation would go some way to closing the door on the for-profit model of childcare in Australia. How would smaller private providers compete with a burgeoning community sector and an entirely public, national childcare provider?

A cooperative, worker owned-and-run model would allow space for the private sector to coexist with community care, give workers and parents more direct ownership of centres, and effectively outsource the provision of this essential service, freeing up valuable government resources.

A community-cooperative model could also allow greater autonomy for individual centres. Given the vastly different needs of communities in urban, rural and remote areas, this is particularly attractive.

ABC's demise is as much an indicator of economic structural rot as was the Argentinean meltdown of 2001. Bailouts, and to a lesser extent nationalisations, are band-aid solutions to what will be a persistent problem. The time for creativity and resourcefulness is now.

The sinking of WA Inc.

ES CLASSIC

Mark Skulley

Cycles of money-fever run through Western Australian history. Prominent among them were the gold rushes of the 1890s, Australia's first commercial oil strikes, the North-West's massive iron ore mines, the Poseidon nickel boom, diamonds at Argyle in 1980s, gold bouncing back and forth many times.

The size of the state, its resource wealth and a population of only 1.5 million have meant that all of its governments have lived cheek-by-jowl with business. Liberal strongman Sir Charles Court was such a firm interventionist that Lang Hancock, the iron-ore magnate, reckoned he was the greatest socialist of all ...

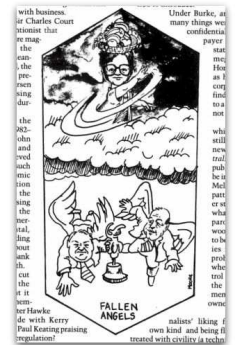
In WA, Brian Burke won office in March 1983. Burke was a former journalist who knew how to work the press, a good talker who could charm when he wished, one possessed of great political instincts. He was also suspicious and impatient, tending to revert to Tammany-hall-style tactics when cornered.

Like Labor around Australia, Burke set out to win over business. He courted Perth's 'four-on-the floor' entrepreneurs. He set up the John Curtin Foundation, which had ten of WA's business high-fliers as vice-patrons, including Alan Bond and Laurie Connell. Like John Cain, Burke made business the business of government. He set up the Western Australian Development Corporation to 'pick winners'.

Life rolled along in WA as long as the economy stayed buoyant. Living was generally pleasant, unless you happened to be an Aborigine. Burke's Liberal opponents were mostly dills, and people should just give newfangled ideas like the development corporation a fair chance.

This sunny air of complacency was helped along by WA's lack of freedom of information laws ...

Under Burke, and then Peter Dowding, many things were deemed 'commercially confidential' even though it was the taxpayer who was paying. One state secret was the rumoured mega-salary paid to John Horgan, a Perth businessman, as head of the development corporation. Taxpayers could find out how much was paid to a Supreme Court judge, but not what was paid to Horgan ...



During the good times, the wild men of Perth business attracted attention from interstate because of their background and lifestyle. Bond was a former signwriter and Connell the son of a bus driver. Bond struck a commemorative gold medal for guests at his daughter's wedding, while Connell hired a train for 150 of his closest friends and took them to a country race meeting.

Largesse was shared around. It has since emerged that Connell's Paragon Resources NL had donated \$250,000 of its shareholders' funds to the Australian Labor Party in July 1987. Paragon, a gold miner, was then 60 per cent-owned by Connell's private company, Oakhill.

The truth about donations by business to all sides of politics will probably never be known, because WA's laws on disclosing donations to political parties are hopelessly inadequate, like those in the rest of Australia.

Then the music stopped and Rothwells crashed. It was propped up for a year by the 'rescue', after a frantic passing-the-hat round Australia and overseas one weekend in 1987. The government provided a \$150 million guarantee, and later shovelled hundreds of millions into related ventures. But Rothwells sank anyway.

A report to Parliament by the old corporate watchdog, the National Companies and Securities Commission, found that a huge number of loans made by Rothwells were to interests associated with Connell. Indeed, a condition of the 'rescue' was that Connell himself should contribute \$70 million.

The commission later concluded that 'Connell's \$70 million personal commitment to the Rothwells rescue, on which the other parties to the rescue relied, was more than covered by fresh loans to Connell's companies from Rothwells'.

Probably the last chance to save Rothwells was a desperate deal allowing Connell to buy \$350 million worth of Rothwells' non-performing loans, most of which were to Connell himself.

Connell and Dempster were then partners in a petrochemical project at Kwinana, south of Perth. The government gave them a mandate, but the project was still largely in the planning stages when it was bought jointly by the government and Bond Corporation for \$400 million.

Although Connell and Dempster had been 50/50 partners in the project, Connell was paid \$350 million (which he used to buy the \$350 million in loans from Rothwells) while Dempster received \$50 million.

Alas, the project is still just a great idea. The liquidator of the project's business vehicle told *The Sydney Morning Herald* that he would throw a party if he could get \$40 million for the remains. He said: 'It is hard to comprehend that they [the government and Bond] paid \$400 million for a project that was still on the drawing boards. It is very difficult to come to grips with how they spent all that money when no one had even put a shovel in the ground.'

The collapse of the petrochemical project precipitated a massive falling out between Bond and the WA government. They are now fighting through the courts for compensation from one another.

A new twist on WA Inc. surfaced during the trial last year of Robert Smith, a private investigator found guilty of phone-tapping in Perth while Burke was WA premier. Wilson Tuckey, the voluble Liberal MP, has claimed in Federal Parliament that Burke is the 'BB' mentioned in Smith's work diaries, and has called for Burke to be sacked from his diplomatic post.

During his trial, Smith denied that Burke was the 'BB' mentioned in the diaries, but they do refer to visits to the Premier's office, to meeting Burke's brother Terry (also a Labor MP at the time) and to the Premier's former driver.

What has sparked most conjecture is a file and other material marked 'GOVT', which was seized by federal police when they raided Smith's office more than two years ago. The federal police pressed on with the matter within their jurisdiction, namely the phone tapping, and then handed the file over to the WA police.

One matter leaked from the file concerns a Liberal politician allegedly telling Terry Burke how a local councillor was bribed to vote for a controversial seaside hotel, Observation City, which was built by Bond Corp. The WA Opposition asked the state ombudsman, Eric Freeman, to investigate what the local police had been doing for two years. Freeman did so, and recommended that a royal commission be held into WA Inc.

Dr Lawrence took a short while to consider the recommendation, then called a wide-ranging royal commission to consider government-business dealings going back a decade. Previously she had resisted calls for a commission, but the recommendation from the ombudsman's report opened the floodgates of public opinion.

The inquiry into WA Inc. was to begin in March. Brian Burke has said he will give evidence, and the commission has appealed for help from the public.

Nobody knows where the trail will lead, but where did it start? Probably in greed for money and power, and in some problems that bedeviled all of Australia in the 1980s: limited public access to government decisions, dissembling politicians, grasping businessmen, sappy journalists, a concentrated media and a public too complacent until the very end.

Indeed the public was right in there during the decade of greed, albeit on a smaller scale than the big players. Investors in Rothwells and in the Farrow building societies were there because they received one or two percentage points' interest above that offered by the major banks. These people have since cried out for government protection in their hour of need.

Were they going to share the extra interest on their money? To paraphrase John Kenneth Galbraith, people only want money to be good when it is bad. When it is good, they go for it.

The nun and the burqa

HUMAN RIGHTS

Bronwyn Lay



When Germaine Greer savaged Michelle Obama's dress in *The Guardian* I sighed. Again with the clothes! I got to thinking about feminism and fashion.

I live in France and one of the main cultural barriers is my Australian sense of dress — slobby and untamed. I often catch glimpses of sympathy from villagers as I lob up the street in 'male' clothes, i.e. Blundstones and jeans.

Admittedly, I find French fashion oppressive. The Sunday markets in the posh village near us are riddled with women in tight white pant suits, fake tan, gold bling and violently spiked heels. The uniform is completed by a ciggie hanging off one hand and a small dog tucked under the other. Plastic surgery is rife — faces like melted masks, with no laugh or grief lines and lips bursting out like helium balloons.

The predatory 'beauty' market is a challenge to feminism, and I resent the capitalist industry that drains money and energy from women by promising to transform them into mannequins.

In summer two extremes of fashion ideology — burqas and mannequins — line up at the market to buy bread. Many Saudi Arabian families come to this region for holidays. burqas, some diamond encrusted with Chanel markings, can be seen flying around as women pick out peaches from the stalls. The fabric drapes over the cobblestones as if claiming possession, and wings of fabric are nothing but graceful.

Burqas can be confronting as images of the Taliban come to mind, but I am distrustful of my own fear. These links, made in the subconscious and fed by the media, demand rigorous interrogation.

As my daggy clothes brush against burqas while we wander through the markets together, I'm well aware that my refusal to partake in French fashion doesn't affect me much. In the middle of 2008 France denied citizenship to a woman because her values were incompatible with *laïcité*, the principle of the secular State.

The Conseil d'Etat rejected Silmi Faiza's application because of her presumed subservience to her husband and her reclusive lifestyle. The evidence to illustrate her inability to assimilate French values, particularly equality of the sexes, was her refusal to give up wearing the burqa. As her husband and three children were already French, Faiza is the only member of her family denied citizenship. Equality of the sexes?

When the decision to reject Faiza's application for citizenship hit the media, strict Islamic dress codes were equated with radical Islamic values. One blogger claimed the burqa was a contemporary swastika. The case raised a plethora of issues: the compatibility of the secular state with religious practise, the use of the law to impose civic values and how equality of the sexes is defined.

If you took a substantive rather than formal view of equality of the sexes, it would be easy to equate plastic surgery consumers as proponents of commodifying capitalism. You could construct an argument that these 'mannequins' are incapable of assimilating in a state that upholds real equality of the sexes.

This argument would be howled down but is it all that far fetched? Faiza consented to the burqa, claiming no one forced it on her. Many consumers of plastic surgery decry the claim that they do it for the male gaze. 'It's for me,' is the common call.

Where plastic surgery consumers brandish their choice to be objectified, the burqa can be used to hide from it. Both are possible reactions to the male gaze, and they equally stir the disquiet of many feminists.

Whether or not the burqa is oppressive is contestable. But that aside, the State is opening a Pandora's Box if it presumes it can get under the fabric/skin of those it believes have consented to their own oppression.

Anyone who has worked with victims of domestic violence knows that it's problematic to question an adult's capacity to determine their own life. Free choice, a cornerstone of liberty, can be an insurmountable barrier when you're desperate to save a woman's life by convincing her to flee a lethal relationship, but she refuses to budge.

The State doesn't force women living with domestic violence to leave home, because its ingrained respect for individual consent is paramount in civil law and is embedded into Western cultural norms.

Issues of consensual oppression are difficult to adjudicate. Any democratic State that assumes a capacity to see through layers of culture, social conditioning and freedom of choice faces contradictions and accusations of totalitarian tendencies. Is a reclusive life inherently oppressive? How does one measure subservience? By your clothes?

Following the logic of the Conseil d'Etat inane analogies are all too easy. I wonder how a fully garbed nun, living a reclusive life of prayer and consenting to the authority of a male Pope/Bishop, would fare. I doubt the nun would be refused citizenship.

So I wonder if this decision epitomises French fear of Islamic religious practises, rather than an issue of equality of the sexes. As with the nun's garb, beneath the burqa, plastic surgery and my own 'men's clothes' are flesh and blood women who, regardless of their feminist position, religious practises and cultural choices, are entitled to equal access to the law and its resultant

protection.

It's all too easy to create a victim and then pick on her clothes. And Germaine, leave Michelle alone.

Big rat poems

POETRY

Christopher Kelen

a present of calligraphy

after the Tang poet, Meng Jiao

a present of calligraphy

your true wild monk won't fall for wine
well wrought characters do it for him
a wild ink brush finds its way through the sky
cloud makes fine parchment
here let me compose
black bolt of lightning flies from my hand

as water from a pure spring

the apt word flows
when I write see how dark the clouds gather
and washing the inkstone, a mountain in torrents
fresh green in the sun that follows
the ox and the village, track's happy slant
then here comes this angry serpent — invective
and just as meaning, wild wind at our throats
I'd better put down my brush right now
before these big waves sink any more boats

climbing through far away clouds

'in the clouds of a dynasty long lost
I climbed

picking through fragrant grasses
through clouds of five colours
all spirited
and I myself
by eye
cast above
peer down among straight pines
to yearn'
there — and I hope that will serve for my turn
that you'll raise a glass with me this day
then let us call each other scholars
drink till we forget who's farewelled
and who will stay

bound for Hunan in the summer rains

rivers and lakes
are all connected
these two kinds of water
wash from the sky
bound south this one sail
chokes in the shallows
no wind in the weeds
we swelter becalmed
ah, when the snow sings
— will the unwashed hear?
let me rise like a crane
show the river its wings

big rat poems

for a Daoist visiting mountains unknown

after the Tang poet, Meng Jiao

three big rat poems

1

give stone to the stone
height to the mountain
green to the pine
give courage to men
virtue and loyalty
just this poor house where
as in the *book of songs*
a famous rat eats the seedlings
as they rise
I could leave
but to me
this old hut means friendship
and who knows
what this rat was before
or may yet be

2

the rat got through
the heavy mud wall
gnaws the silk on the loom
it leaves some clay
but not a stitch of cloth
withered mulberries greet first light
the empty loom shows chill dusk

the common folk
are great advocates
of fat horses,
gorgeous clothes
how hungry and feeble
the aspiring are
heaven trains its eye
on this rat
3
the day before yesterday you left
my hair turned
white as the sleepless grass
now here the insects
are loud with stillness
the rat rustles round out of doors
half a month since the wind
ran through
always the one
immortal rat

Neoliberal termites unbalance Fair Work Bill

POLITICS

Tim Battin

In the Rudd Government's attempt to 'sell' the Fair Work Bill currently before the parliament, ministers have relied on an appeal to a middle ground. Employers haven't got everything they wanted, we are told, and neither have the unions. So the Bill must be about right ... right?



Were we to judge a piece of legislation as if it were a pendulum, which is what several Rudd ministers seem to want us to do, we would first point out that the Howard legislation was extremely unbalanced; prohibiting employers and employees from including specified matters in enterprise agreements, fining individuals or unions for asking for prohibited content, making industrial action by employees almost impossible to carry out (while allowing employers to engage in industrial action with relative ease), ceasing the conditions of an enterprise agreement once it had nominally expired.

Using WorkChoices as any point of comparison defies commonsense understanding of the pendulum metaphor. The jig of 'striking a balance' was up three years ago when Barnaby Joyce said he could support the passage of WorkChoices because he had been assured that public holidays would be retained!

A much less vacuous way to argue is to debate proposals on their intrinsic, intellectual merit, rather than whether they strike a balance between, say, Margaret Thatcher and Genghis Khan.

What was particularly concerning during 2007 was that the parliamentary Labor Party, secure on a wave of vociferous community opposition to the Howard Government's industrial relations laws, consciously pulled down the public's expectations by focusing disproportionately on AWAs and the most visibly extreme of the laws.

It is a measure of the extremism of where we have been — and, sadly, where we largely remain — that Greg Combet last Wednesday [boasted](#) that the new legislation would ensure that each employee could choose to be a member of a union.

It is precisely because the Labor Party, aided and abetted by the mainstream media, zeroed in on the absurd and outrageous features of Howard's legislation that the more submerged and dangerous aspects of the laws went largely unremarked. As we debate the new Bill, the challenge is to flush out its neoliberal presuppositions.

One of these precepts is that, in exercising their right to take industrial action, workers should be obliged to undergo a secret ballot. It seems difficult to be opposed in principle to a secret ballot, given the historical association with democratic movements. The worrying facet

is that a secret ballot suggests employee-employee coercion is a potential problem while employer-employee coercion in the lead-up to strike action is not.

Even more concerning is the practical effect of secret ballots. A secret ballot delays and entangles. One conservative calculation of the period needed to take industrial action, so that such action would legally comply with WorkChoices, was more than two months.

Other neoliberal tenets abound within the new Bill. No strike pay is allowed. The Bill persists with the pretense of honouring the principle of workers having the right to take industrial action, while subjecting it to a test that will take account of the economic interests of third parties (which means the principle is not honoured at all).

It is difficult to conceive of any strike action that would not affect third parties or sections of the economy. No wonder Heather Ridout is [happy](#) with the Bill.

Perhaps most insidious of all is the practice of paying homage to collective bargaining while keeping Howard's ban on pattern bargaining. The position is doubly contradictory because it also flies in the face of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value (elsewhere enunciated in the Bill).

The attempt to justify the neoliberal antipathy to collective bargaining across an industry is based on a false choice: efficiency versus equity. In more specific terms, (less rabid) neoliberals would have us believe that we have to balance — there's that word again — fair outcomes against productivity. And productivity growth, we are told, is threatened by pattern or industry bargaining. Well, no it isn't, but that's an argument for another day.

We ought to be wary of any ideology that makes us compromise with falsity. The architects of the Fair Work Bill 2008 would have served the community immeasurably better by jettisoning neoliberal ideas, identifying first principles of justice, and allowing everything else to flow from there. There is no trade-off between prosperity and justice. We can have both, and should demand nothing less.

Fashion fix won't mend failed states

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



In a [survey](#) of fashion magazines' tips for hard financial times, *Guardian* columnist Hadley Freeman found one writer suggesting a pair of \$350 designer gloves as 'a smart way to get your fashion fix'. Another proposed that 'blowing the budget ... on something outrageously extravagant will let you know you're still alive'.

Freeman concludes that few can afford to buy the items featured in such magazines, and that is the point. Their real purpose is fantasy.

It's well known that the fantasy sector of the economy — which includes the film industry — usually thrives during periods of recession. The recession itself was indeed caused by assumptions about credit and the economy that amounted to fantasy.

Fantasy is known to fulfill an important psychological need during challenging times. But it does not replace the practical and moral requirement to act decisively to deal with the economic situation that is closing in on us.

We cannot deny or escape the human cost of the recession. This applies particularly to those who live in the developing world. In the understated [words](#) of United Nations Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto, 'things cannot go on as before'.

D'Escoto was speaking ahead of the United Nations [Financing for Development Conference](#), which began in Doha on Saturday and continues until tomorrow. The event focuses on the need to strengthen financing for development in poor countries during a time of global economic turmoil. It is assessing how developed countries have honoured commitments made in the Monterrey Consensus, at a similar conference in 2002.

D'Escoto is critical of developed countries, who now feel the need to scale back their commitment to the developing world. He also points out that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are absent from the Doha meeting because they are controlled by the USA, which is 'anti-United Nations' and avoids international cooperation initiatives it does not control.

There are strong moral reasons for acting to ease the pain of developed nations, for the global economic slowdown hits them hardest. There is less demand for their exports, and prices of raw materials are falling.

D'Escoto maintains that the developed countries' inability to keep even their existing commitments is part of the 'insane selfishness' of modern times. He consequently appeals to

the 'enlightened self-interest for developed nations to deal with the time bomb of massive poverty'.

This is related to the growing number of weak or failed states, and the ungoverned areas which they allow to develop, that could become launching pads for acts of terror and transnational crime, with direct impact on developed countries.

However we analyse the acts of terror that occurred in Mumbai last week, there's a good chance that the poverty existing in developing nations had at least something to do with them. There is no room for complacency.

Poor man's pioneer

SPIRITUALITY

Andrew Hamilton

At times a single issue defines a group's stance within the wider culture. Today abortion has become such an issue for many Catholics in the United States and Australia. It divides them in the attitudes that they take to the state and to their church.



For many young Catholics in the 1960s the defining issue was poverty. An idealistic social activism was part the contemporary culture, and the Vatican Council had stressed the commitment of the Catholic Church to the poor. But these emphases were sometimes met with scepticism by older Catholics whose approach was more analytical.

Brian Stoney, who was buried last week from St Canice's Church in Kings Cross, was a significant figure in shaping ways of accompanying the poor. For over 40 years he embodied and fought for a commitment to the poor that was based on sharing their lives.

In the 1960s he was a Jesuit, and worked in suburban communities in Melbourne and Adelaide. He later directed Corpus Christi Greenvale and shaped the spirit of its work. In more recent years he lived in communities with marginalised people in Redfern and Surry Hills. During this time he left the Jesuits.

In his life and work he represented many of the tensions that faced Catholics generally, and particularly Jesuits, in the 1960s. By then, in a Catholic community that had become more affluent, Jesuit engagement with the poor was less direct than it had been.

It was easy for the poor to become the object of analysis, of assistance, of pastoral strategies, of theological reflection. This was consistent with a use of mind that privileged analysis over intuition, detachment over involvement, reflection over experience, the lasting over the transient, and general principles over the demands of particular situations.

The second Vatican Council provided a more concrete image of human needs. It coincided with the Romanticism of the 1960s, which emphasised the claims of experience, of the immediate, the affective and the experimental. Together these movements in church and society shaped a powerful spiritual rhetoric whose stories were dramatic, claims unbounded, and promises high. It also provoked a sceptical and often anxious response.

The Council invited Catholic religious congregations to re-examine their way of living and their pastoral priorities. Often their deliberations focused on poverty and on how they should address the poor in their works.

Brian Stoney was naturally at home in the rhetoric of the 1960s. Among his heroes were Robert Kennedy and Sally Trench, the young English woman who lived close to the streets. In his conversion to the poor through contact with the Matthew Talbot Hostel he recognised that reflection on the plight of the poor must begin in accompaniment, and that the poor are teachers, not topics.

He also discovered that accompanying the poor could reveal, and perhaps heal, personal anguish.

As he explored ways of engaging personally with the poor he attracted many young people who instinctively resonated with his vision. They found him a compelling spiritual teacher.

But when he represented his vision among Jesuits and other religious groups, he often felt marginalised. He relied on experience and intuition and was constrained by the disciplines of discursive argument. He was passionate but not articulate. He resorted to the rhetoric of gesture and of silence.

These often shut down conversation, but his presence and the quality of his life ensured that others could not evade the claim that the poor made on them.

Both the strength and the dangers of Brian's vision lay in the blurring of boundaries. He challenged and crossed boundaries between subjective and objective, between the reputable and disreputable, between the religious and the secular, between sinfulness and goodness, between the self and the other.

Those wishing to share the lives of people who are marginalised in society, as Brian did, have no choice but to test these boundaries. It also placed him in a position from which he could invite people to go beyond the boundaries that protected their comfort but threatened their happiness.

But an older wisdom also held that people need boundaries if they are to nurture the springs of the self and to protect the health and balance necessary for living. Brian had discovered that if we enter the lives of the poor and marginalised on their own terms we shall discover our own weakness and come to accept it.

That demands a strong sense of self. Traditional wisdom would insist that if we blur the boundaries between the self and the other, we shall cease to engage with others as persons. We project our own weaknesses on to them. We find, not healing but enervation and depression, and we neglect the ordinary disciplines that protect others from the consequences of our weakness.

Brian necessarily lived in the no-man's land between the received wisdom and what he had discovered. It is understandable that he showed little care for his health, and felt estranged from many people who cared for him. His leaving the Jesuits was one part of this story. But even in his leaving, the boundaries remained blurred, so that strong bonds remained on both

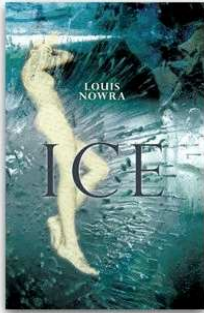
sides.

His funeral revealed the depth of connection he had enabled deeply vulnerable and isolated people to make. It spoke of his affectionate and quirky personality. It also pointed to unfinished business: the shaping of a Jesuit and Catholic presence with the poor that corresponds to the harshnesses of our society.

Chipping away at Australia's frozen heart

BOOK FORUM

Cassandra Golds



Nowra, Louis: *Ice*. Allen & Unwin, 2008. ISBN: RRP: \$32.95

How much of classic Australian literature seems to concern itself with frustration in the deepest sense — the stillbirth of hopes and dreams, the futility of aspirations, a yawning emptiness at the heart of things.

Louis Nowra's new novel, *Ice*, joins this tradition, with a mesmeric proliferation of intense images to drive home the point, and a plot that pushes over into the Gothic.

Malcolm McEacharn is destined to become a great man of 19th century Sydney and Melbourne. His first heroic achievement is to tow an iceberg from Antarctica into Sydney Harbour — and, as the iceberg is chipped away by the many overheated Sydney-siders who want a piece of it, its heart is revealed to be death — specifically, the body of a young sailor, perfectly preserved and lost at sea 40 years.

McEacharn, a Scotsman whose ship's-captain father perished in Bass Strait when he was a child, and who was abandoned by his mother, has also lost his Welsh wife of one year. Her death, or at least, his grief over it, is the driving force behind all the many restless activities of his life.

The spectacular importation of the iceberg is a daring, but foiled attempt to make his fortune. Later he pioneers the transportation, by ship, of frozen meat from Australia to Britain. More ice, more unnatural preservation, more death.

He marries a second wife, for her money, and begins to prosper both financially and politically in colonial Melbourne. Meanwhile, he becomes an avid collector of animal embryos, and under his huge architectural folly of a house, Gothland, he begins to build a secret monument to his own tortured psychology.

But the story of Malcolm is a story within a story. Its narrator is the husband of Malcolm's current-day biographer, who lies in a coma after having been attacked by an addict in contemporary Sydney. The attacker's addiction is the party drug, ice.

Ice is about death, the fanatical resistance to change, the futility of attempts at preservation and, perhaps, the emptiness at the heart of Australian life.

It is also about love: the life-long love of Malcolm for his dead bride, the suspended grief of the narrator's love for his comatose biographer wife. In one of the novel's core images, Malcolm describes each person as being like an onion — an entity made up of layer after layer

which, in the end, reveals nothing at its heart — unless the person has loved, in which case that love will give the onion a soul.

But the love depicted in *Ice* — obsessive, rigidly resistant to change or growth, and always in a state of grief — is itself no more than a living death.

Truth the first casualty of war film

DVD REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

Redacted: 90 minutes. Rated: MA. Director: Brian De Palma. Starring: Izzy Diaz, Patrick Carroll, Rob Devaney, Daniel Stewart Sherman, Zahra Zubaidi

'Truth is the first casualty of war.' So reads the tagline, and thematic banner, for American writer/director Brian De Palma's filmic thesis on misconduct and amorality among US Army soldiers in Iraq.

Ironically, the film itself, a based-on-fact account of the rape and murder of a 15-year-old Iraqi girl, and the murder of her family, by a wayward group of US troops, plays pretty fast and loose with the truth.

The central perspective is that of Angel 'Sally' Salazar (Diaz), who hopes that the unflinching, fly-on-the-wall footage of his time helping to man a US military checkpoint outside of Baghdad will get him into film school.

When his comrades, the violent and disturbed Reno Flake (Carroll), obnoxious and aggressive Rush (Sherman), and conscientious but impressionable McCoy (Devaney), set out to rape young local girl Farah (Zubaidi), he accompanies them in the naïve belief that his hidden camera will capture just the kind of confronting slice of reality that he's after.

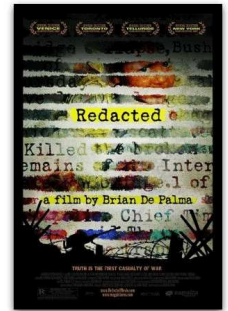
During the course of the crime, the horror of the event awakens an awareness of a photojournalistic ethical quandary: that to film horrors requires refraining from intervening to prevent them.

Needless to say, it's a pivotal moment for Sally. But this is not his story, it is De Palma's. As George Romero did in [Diary of the Dead](#), De Palma utilises a variety of visual styles to replicate assorted 'live' video sources — Sally's video diary, an artsy documentary, CCTV footage, webcam confessionals and other forms of guerilla footage.

He pieces these together in order to support his critique of the misconduct of troops in Iraq (links are drawn between Al-Mahmudiyah and Abu Ghraib), and the tendency of the mass media and military to whitewash rather than confront these issues.

The title is a clue. To redact is to revise or edit into a literary form. So although *Redacted* takes its grim inspiration from a real-life atrocity, the 2006 Al-Mahmudiyah killings, that fact has been placed in a frame of fiction. Disclaimers at the start of the film make that clear. The truth has been revised and edited to carry the filmmaker's vision.

De Palma has been called a left-wing propagandist, and even treasonous, by some who take



umbrage at his seemingly free and easy use of facts for didactic political purposes.

Accusations of treason may be extreme, but there is something rather disingenuous, even manipulative, about *Redacted*. Films that are 'inspired by true events' are of course entitled to take liberties. The interests of art or accessibility often make it a necessity.

Yet the real-life perpetrators were charged and sentenced for the crime, and the exclusion of such critical truths simply because they don't fit the thesis does seem a deliberate and dubious misdirection.

The atrocities of war rightly make for unpleasant cinema. But with *Redacted* the questionable motives and means employed by the filmmaker leave behind the bitterest taste.

Redacted is available on DVD from [Madman](#).

Imagination spent on global financial solutions

ECONOMICS

Colin Long



The global economic crisis is not just a financial crisis. It is a crisis of western capitalism in its post-industrial, post-modern form. The debt-fueled hyper-consumption that has driven growth in the West for the last two decades has come to its inevitable terminus.

This process had to end at some stage, either through the contradictions built into the financial system (endless growth based on easy credit can't go on forever) or through the contradictions between the economic system and the limits posed by the natural environment.

Despite the wishful thinking of the world's politicians and business leaders, climate change and the broader environmental crisis always would have halted this mode of production at some stage. The question was whether the system's own contradictions and instabilities would preempt the greater calamity of environmental crisis. Only the scale and rapidity of the systemic collapse of the post-modern capitalist model is truly surprising.

Most of the politicians of the world, Australia's included, have predictably and unfortunately shown themselves once again to be men and women of limited vision. Their solutions reveal them to be devoid of imagination. They are bound by what they have known rather than animated by what could be.

The outcomes of the G20 meeting in Brazil demonstrate this clearly. The differences between the Europeans and the Americans, emphasised in many media reports, amounted to little more than the precise placement of the deckchairs on the Titanic. They neither fundamentally questioned the endless growth model, nor acknowledged the scale of the environmental crisis and its ramifications for global economic recovery.

We should not portray governments as white knights coming to the rescue of a failing system. Nor should we target bankers as greedy and irresponsible, as if they were somehow different from the rest of us.

We all had a stake in this system. The bankers were merely at the pinnacle. They oiled the machinery of easy credit that fueled rampant house price increases. We could all then feel so much wealthier, encouraged to go out and buy big TVs and new lounge suites to fill our ever-expanding houses — all on credit, of course.

Governments such as Australia's provided subsidies for home buyers that simply drove house price inflation: they subsidised the housing industry, not home owners. Tax cuts of all sorts further encouraged unsustainable asset price increases and the diversion of resources

into unproductive speculation in property.

They also encouraged unnecessary and environmentally-destructive consumption. All this at a time when the resources of the nation needed to be harnessed to deal with the great challenge of climate change.

Through our superannuation contributions we have all participated in the great expansion of the global financial sector. Our retirement savings only added to a massive pool of footloose capital whose controllers were schooled in the shibboleths of neoliberalism.

They directed these savings, not to where it has been most needed — dealing with the environmental crisis, building education, eradicating poverty, improving infrastructure — but into the stock and property markets. There it created a massive bubble that only served to destabilise the economic system as a whole.

And when this crazy system collapses, what is the response of governments like that of Kevin Rudd? Our PM, trying desperately to seem statesmanlike, cautious and responsible, announced that he would spend half the government surplus. It would not go to change a system that is rotten to the core, but to prop it up with more of the same. The tragedy is that he persuaded most commentators that he was responsible.

He will pump billions of dollars into the economy to keep people investing in real estate and buying more and more consumer goods. He will also pump more money into the banks so that they can continue to offer credit and continue the whole process of living on the never-never.

Thus the economic system that has brought us to the brink of a second Great Depression will not be restructured. If Rudd and his counterparts in Europe and North America can get people to spend their way out of this current crisis they will only have sown the seeds for an even greater calamity in the future.

This model, based on never-ending consumption and growth, will finally run up against the limits of resource depletion and environmental degradation— if its own untreated contradictions don't intervene first.

The election of Barack Obama aroused a universal hope that maybe, just maybe, politics could be different, that we might recognise that we don't live in the best possible world, that change is necessary.

There are encouraging signs from the President-elect. Seizing the chance that Kevin Rudd seems determined to miss, he has promised to spend billions to develop a renewable technology industry, improve health care and restructure US industry. These are positive first steps, although there is still no fundamental acknowledgement of the limits to growth.

Just imagine what we could have achieved in Australia with half of the budget surplus if

we used it to redirect the Australian economy on to a low carbon, low resource-use path instead of more of the same work-borrow-consume madness. Imagine all the new jobs in renewable energy, public transport, electric cars, sustainable housing construction.

Imagine preparing ourselves for the coming environmental crisis whose impact on the economy will make the current turmoil look like a golden age. Imagine if we could mobilise the world's politicians, decision makers and resources to deal with climate change in the same way that they've been mobilised to deal with this self-inflicted economic crisis.

Imagine using our national and global resources to deal collectively with the challenges that we will eventually have to deal with as societies, not as isolated individuals hoping for another tax cut.

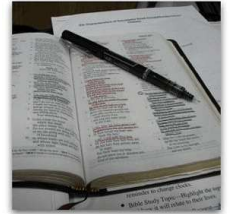
Imagine a different future. It is up to us to do so, because our politicians certainly can't.

Theological colleges on shaky ground

EDUCATION

Neil Ormerod

Theological education is becoming an increasingly fragile affair. A decade of 'reform' in higher education, primarily directed towards the university sector, has had spin-off effects that have led to an increase in administrative and financial loads on theological colleges.



Previously colleges obtained accreditation of awards at little cost. Now state agencies operate on a cost-recovery basis. In order to achieve Higher Education Provider status, colleges must submit to a quality audit costing tens of thousands of dollars in audit fees, not to mention the internal institutional costs of the process.

With large institutions these costs can be defrayed, but with smaller enrolments and low student fees, theological colleges have little option but to turn to their churches for increased underwriting. This comes at a time when mainstream churches are suffering a significant decline which also impacts financially on them.

As they say, something has to give, and in Brisbane something has now given.

For two years the Catholic college of the Brisbane College of Theology (BCT), St Paul's Theological College has been in negotiations with Australian Catholic University (ACU) aiming to merge the two theological faculties. As both were located on the same site, this seemed a sensible rationalisation. The major sticking point in these negotiations was the importance of maintaining the relationship with and viability of the BCT.

However in a merger the financial costs of St Paul's, currently borne by the Queensland Catholic dioceses, would be lessened by access to Commonwealth supported places for their seminarian program. The BCT was aware of these negotiations and had signed a memorandum of understanding with ACU in relationship to research programs.

These negotiations have supposed the desire of the three constituent Churches, Catholic, Uniting and Anglican, to maintain their commitment to the BCT. It now seems that this commitment has faltered.

Various Anglican dioceses have desired to establish a more unified approach to ministerial training. The Anglican member of the BCT, St Francis' Theological College, has been subjected to various reviews over the past few years to consider options available to it.

These discussions have largely revolved around the availability of Commonwealth supported places either through St Mark's Theological College, associated with Charles Sturt University (CSU), or with St Barnabas' Theological College, associated with Flinders

University in Adelaide.

Matters came to a head when the BCT faced the demands of its upcoming reaccreditation. Due to a particular set of circumstances — including the absence of the Anglican archbishop, Phillip Aspinall, at the Lambeth Conference — St Francis' was unable to commit itself to the reaccreditation by the required deadline.

Faced with this difficulty the BCT decided not to seek reaccreditation from the end of 2009. This effectively means the college will cease to operate from that time, after 26 years of operation.

With negotiations with ACU well advanced, St Paul's situation was secure. Meanwhile St Francis will enter into a relationship with CSU. Left in the lurch was Trinity College, which now is negotiating with ACU.

I have always considered BCT, despite its history, to be an increasingly marginal operation, simply not big enough to meet the high financial and administrative demands of the current environment. While it has had opportunities to increase its base to include other Church agencies, it has not chosen the path of growth that has characterised, say, the Sydney College of Theology.

A similar consortium of these three churches in Adelaide, the Adelaide College of Divinity (ACD), has sought to meet the same difficulties through affiliation with Flinders University. Nonetheless given that one of the auxiliary Anglican bishops in Adelaide, Bishop Stephen Pickard, is a former head of St Mark's Theological College, I would think that the ACD will look with some interest at the BCT situation.

Some 18 years ago I wrote a piece in the Christian affairs magazine, *National Outlook*, in which I noted the impact of the Dawkins reforms on higher education. There I predicted that the formation of ACU and the offer of theology programs within the university sector would shift theological education away from the private sector and towards the university sector.

Now a number of universities offer theological programs — ACU, CSU, Flinders University, Murdoch University, Notre Dame University and most recently Newcastle University — often in association with theological colleges. Through these associations churches can significantly defray the costs of ministerial training.

The closure of the BCT will have ramifications throughout the theological sector. The Committee of Deans of Theological Consortia and University Schools has recently put in a submission to the Bradley review of higher education which raises a number of questions about the impact of government policies on the sector. It also urges a review of funding approaches to private providers.

Depending on the outcome of that review the demise of the BCT might be a one-off anomaly or a sign of things to come.

Train story

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras



We know it's a suffering world. Even if we are not inhabitants of Iraq, Afghanistan, or one of X number of other trouble spots, many of us plod a somewhat weary way through this vale of tears, often forgetting to count our blessings. On a kind of pedestrian auto-pilot, we are, putting one foot in front of the other.

Yet, once in a while we are stopped dead in our tracks. By the human, which occasionally turns out to be the miraculous as well.

I was recently stopped in my railway tracks, as it were, shortly after embarking on a train journey to Melbourne from the Western District.

My place in the train was opposite a couple who were old, but did not know the meaning of the word 'ennui'. I'm old enough, Heaven knows, but John and Jane (not their real names) are much older.

I was immediately struck by a memory of the term 'irrational exuberance', which has been frequently used in these troubled times as a reference in economics. But John and Jane were incandescent with an exuberance which was irrational and, paradoxically, completely rational, at least to my way of thinking. For they had fallen unexpectedly, but completely and rapturously in love. At 81.

The journey of nearly three hours simply whizzed past. Usually, caught between idle interest and nostalgia, I gaze out the window at the familiar landscape. Not this time. And idle interest? Forget it. I was enthralled.

John and Jane had met at a senior citizens' club, they told me, and it had not really been love at first sight, but something that grew between them. Rapidly. 'Well, at our age you can't muck about, can you, so we're not; we're hoping for ten years.'

They were returning from a wonderful holiday, and to their separate abodes. Neither was relishing this thought, and they were trying to decide what to do next. Part of their exuberance was an irrepressible sense of humour. 'I'm quite happy to be caught,' announced John, 'but in the meantime I'm having fun running.' Jane grinned: 'So am I.'

The life stories were duly sketched. Both had been widowed for some time before they met. Significantly, both had had happy marriages, although very different ones. Jane's had been unusual for the time, as she and her husband had had separate interests, so that both travelled independently as well as together. John's long and more conventional marriage had been

marked by his wife's chronic illness.

Both had had a religious upbringing of the nonconformist sort, so that John, unsurprisingly, is a lifetime teetotaler, despite having been a grower of grapes. 'None of my fruit ever went into wine,' he told me. 'It was all for dried currants and so on.'

I became quite exuberant myself under this inspiring influence, but also found myself on the brink of tears when John told me more about his late wife's illness. She had had MS, and he did most of the nursing during 20 years. I could hardly utter a sound at this point, but the expression on my face must have spoken volumes, because John said, 'Simple, though, isn't it? That's what you do when you love someone.'

Love can happen at any age, and be simple, I agree, although I think people who put the idea into practice are extremely rare. John is clearly one of this select number, and so remained open to the notion of love recurring.

Perhaps there is nothing original to say about the matter, but Tolstoy believed that at our best we are particles of love; when we die we return to and rejoin the eternal source of Love. I knew, when I looked at those old but beautifully shining faces, that I was in the company of two vibrating, rejoicing particles, ones that were so alive.

I am tearful now, just remembering. Yes, sometimes we get stopped in our tracks.

Cheap retail at the cost of culture

COMMUNITY

Kirsty Ruddock

I've always loved studying history. I like to think an understanding of history will ensure 'history never repeats'. My faith in communities learning from their history has been tested of late.

This year I was contacted by some elders from the Aboriginal community in Moree to help with a legal problem. Their names were familiar from my history books, as citizens who stood up to segregation with the freedom riders in 1965.

Despite Moree priding itself these days on reconciliation, members of the Aboriginal community continue to fight for their rights. The fight is now to preserve their own culture and history from commercial interests. The fight is dividing their town yet again, but this time it is dividing both black and white.

Moree is a town like many in regional Australia whose population and community are in decline. The Moree Council has experienced the greatest population decline in NSW of late. The community is desperate to stem it.

They've picked an unlikely saviour. Many believe the solution is the construction of a discount department store.

Such is their passion that they are willing to sacrifice their main oval in town to the cause. Instead of seeing cricketers and rugby players strutting their stuff on Taylor Oval, you could shop till your heart's content in the new Big W marketplace. And Moree would rise again to stake its place as a regional retail centre with jobs for all.

But an unlikely coalition of old cricket and rugby players and some members of the indigenous community have been fighting the proposal.

The old players cannot believe their Council would develop their oval, which has been at the heart of reconciliation in their town; where black and white played cricket and rugby league for generations. Many greats of Australian sport — Don Bradman, Clive Churchill — played on Taylor Oval.

More importantly, traditional owners believe the oval is a burial site. Two Aboriginal bodies were found under the oval during excavations in 1903. But many Moree residents, including the Council and proponents of Big W, remain sceptical, and are intent on more testing before accepting that the site truly was a burial ground.

Nor is it enough that the site is also where a young Aboriginal man was killed in race



related tensions in the 1970s, or where other ceremonies have been performed to recognise Aboriginal leaders in Moree. In Moree it seems history and culture have no place in the pursuit of economic growth.

Although it would be easy to see the Council as the villain in this story, the truth is that our society as a whole accepts commercial interests can take precedence over conserving stories and culture. And companies continue to pursue economic gain above all else, particularly above a sense of community and history.

Taylor Oval is adjacent to the local Woolworths. It is easy and flat to build on, and will consolidate Woolworths' commercial interests in town. Big W is refusing to meet with the Aboriginal community, as the Council has approved the plans and believes the town has decided. Majority rules.

The NSW Government shares some of the blame. It is willing to sell public land to make a quick buck. Instead, the Government could have worked closely with the Aboriginal community to find a suitable site that would not prove so divisive.

The struggle over Taylor Oval shows us how far we, as a nation, still need to travel to heal the wounds of our past. The leaders in the Moree community have played on racism. They dared to hold a protest to support the development on the day of the National Apology, despite supposedly believing in reconciliation.

Many in the Aboriginal community are scared to voice their concerns for fear the rest of the community will blame them for Big W not coming to town. With 25 per cent unemployment in the Aboriginal community they are also desperate for any jobs Big W might bring and don't want to be further victimised by the majority.

The intractable division in the Moree community means this dispute will have to be arbitrated by the Courts. It shouldn't have to be this way. Our communities should be able to think of creative solutions to these issues of how we build better communities and opportunities for all.

More importantly, large corporations and our governments should show leadership and respect for Aboriginal culture. How long will it take for us to learn from history?

Godiva exposed

POETRY

Liam Guilar

From *Lady Godiva and Me*

Leofric donates a reliquary to his new church at Coventry:

For services rendered, steadfast and loyal,
supporting our King in a raid on his mother,
the arm of a dead man, Augustine of Hippo:
definer of sins, rejecter of women.

God's gift my lovely, rarest of women,
companion and lover, councilor, friend,
who wakes in the dawn, in our bed, warm beside me,
as now and forever, together as one.

The arm of a dead man in a jewel spangled box
to place on your altar, to pay for your prayers,
for the peace of our souls, to keep her beside me,
to keep me from hell, for the service I rendered.

Godgiftu:

He slipped the robe from off my shoulders.
Unpinned my hair, as he did every night,
trembling hands, whispering 'later'.

But in broad daylight, in the market square.
From expectant alleyways the breeze came fumbling

fondling, fingering. So I mounted up and rode
into a dream of silent shuttered houses.
Like running widdershins around the church
I waited for an outraged God to strike me down
for flaunting breasts and pubic hair.
Until, one open window. Only one. A man's face
smiling, to prove my courage.

What only Tom saw:

The sound of hoof fall in the silence:
ice cracking; locks bursting
cobble splitting; grass thrusting
shading the grey streets green.

The Sherbourne rising, spilling
fresh water sluicing through Cross Cheaping
roiling. Eels thrash and muscle

in her wake

ivy and mistletoe spring from house beams
flowering towards the light,
ash and oak and yew rooting the earth
sunlit spring sweeping the town.

Leofric, waiting:

You didn't ask me for the moon.
I would have wrapped the world
around your shoulders. Harrowed hell
or pillaged heaven but you assumed
I'd let you go, and trust you would return.

The hours between stretched
on the rack of your absence.
Amongst swift talking ladies' men
competing for your hand
fear shuffled in the silence.

Devotion didn't cut me from the crowd
and love's a cold and lonely place to stand.

Tom:

Blinded by her passing,
Tom blinks the shadows from his room.
'Come in, sit down.' *I have no chairs.*
'Hungry?' *We could share the one hacked wooden bowl*
'You take the only spoon.' *Watch out for splinters.*
Numinous on the pile of rags he calls a bed,
her golden hair upon the coat he uses for a pillow?
Reflected in her beauty he can see
how heavy, sordid, rough-hewn his desire;
his ugliness, his lack of grace, his poverty of mind.

He will eat her at the plank he uses as a table
and kiss the shut eyes of her severed head.

Leofric in old age:

If my children, or their children
will not stand where I did,
weighing desire against consequence,
holding the middle ground when extremes clash;
If the wars I fought become their fairytales
the faith I bled for just fireside mythology;
if I bequeath wealth, titles, reputation
a physical resemblance, a family name
but if everything I valued they deny
in words or deeds or simply by default;
that were a bitter purgatory
no prayer could ease.

Pol Pot and the repentant Swede

HUMAN RIGHTS

Binoy Kampmark



It was an error many might have made, and did, in fact, make. But Gunnar Bergstrom and his crew of Swedes from the Sweden-Kampuchea Friendship Association did not leave Cambodia in 1978 with any negative impressions of their hosts.

The tour had witnessed an immaculate display of choreographed state control by the Khmer Rouge. There was, of course, the mandatory state reception by one-time Francophile Pol Pot, ample food and good drink. Tours to the revolutionary countryside and the camps were tightly controlled. The impressions could not be anything but positive. The lot of those grinning peasants under the Pol Pot regime was, the group concluded, a good one.

Bergstrom left, not with the knowledge that the systematic murder of a population (some 1.7 million deaths in all) was taking place, but with a sense that the progressive forces of history had taken root in Indochina. The Khmer Rouge, with some destabilising help from American bombing, had not only emancipated the people of Cambodia; they were going zealously to reform their society.

The repentant Swede returned to Cambodia last week after 30 years, hoping to atone for his self-deceptions through meeting the victims of Pol Pot's Year Zero scheme. He will front up to public forums addressing survivors. He is readying himself for the grief that follows when those in denial face the confessional. Part of it is already in print, in the form of a book, *Living Hell*. In words to the Associated Press prior to his departure, Bergstrom claimed that, 'We had been fooled by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. We had supported criminals.'

Bergstrom's seduction by the communist revolution was merely one of thousands that took place in the 20th century among the European intelligentsia. The Hungarian polymath and intellectual Arthur Koestler described his conversion in the 1930s. One only had to see the rotting crops that a capitalist state refused to distribute amongst the populace, citing the need to be frugal and stringent in the face of economic hardship. The Great Depression saw to it that capitalism would receive a bad press for most of that century. Communism, in turn, had its defenders till the day the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

Silence was the logical response from someone like Bergstrom. After all, one would not want to disbelieve the utopian project. 'There were many



times when the doubts crept into my mind, but I wouldn't express them to the group of other people until later.' But it was a silence that found itself on all sides of the Cold War. The disappearances and murders in South America at the hands of authoritarian regimes were kept under wraps by directives from within the White House and State Department. The very absence of records and bodies suggested a lethal silence. No one would talk: the stakes were high in a global, at times Manichean struggle.

While the role of communist and Marxist intellectuals these days is a small one, the lessons of the communist tragedy still resonate. Some call the fall of the Soviet Union the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century. But victims were cast aside as the necessities of revolutionary progress. To paraphrase Lenin: let 90 per cent of the population perish as long as ten per cent live to see a better future. Pol Pot came as close as any to realising this maxim, though the 'better' future eluded him.

Others are bound to disagree that communism has had, with all its experiments and excesses, its day. Someone like the Slovenian intellectual provocateur Slavoj Žižek, currently one of the major intellectuals of the left, told *The Guardian* recently of a secret he wanted to share: communism will eventually win. Such figures see communism as the resurgent force that can cope with the capitalist excesses of the current global financial crisis.

If it does, it will certainly only be able to do so in a humanitarian way. But as Bergstrom fronts the victims of Pol Pot's megalomania and genocide, one should also empathise with him. At least he finally repented.

Cowboys and censors hijack child porn debate

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Communications Minister Stephen Conroy [told](#) Federal Parliament recently that a six week trial of Australia's mandatory internet filter will commence before Christmas.

'The pilot will specifically test filtering against the ACMA blacklist of prohibited content, which is mostly child pornography, as well as filtering of other unwanted content,' he said in answer to a question from Greens Senator Scott Ludlam.

Nobody's going to defend child pornography, but the unspecified 'other unwanted content' is another matter.

We are being asked to trust the government to draw a line between 'wanted' and 'unwanted' content. The Australian Federal Police is playing a major role in the implementation of the filter. Revelations about the role they played in misjudging Dr Haneef, and the associated political manipulation, give us little confidence that they will get the internet content filter right.

The terms of the internet filter trial refer frequently to the 'ACMA blacklist'. What is this? What are the websites it includes? We do not know, for the contents of the list are not disclosed. They cannot even be obtained under Freedom of Information, due to an amendment to the FOI legislation. Electronic Frontiers Australia [says](#) :

'The Government is yet to explain under what terms the list will be expanded, who will decide what goes on it, and what mechanism will be available to correct errors.'

In a [commentary](#) for *Crikey* last week, Clive Hamilton characterised Electronic Frontiers Australia as 'extremist' internet libertarians. He argued that such groups are 'cowboys' who play by their own rules, and either refuse to acknowledge, or trivialise, the extent of the problem of child pornography.

He said: 'One prominent opponent [of the internet filter] characterised the Government's proposed restrictions as an attempt to stop people looking at "naughty pictures".'

The protection of children is an emotive issue that cuts across rational debate. Hamilton and other supporters of the filter are presenting a legitimate moral argument, but they are yet to convince the community that it should be given preferential treatment over other moral arguments.

During the war against terror, we gave up some of our freedoms and trusted the

government to do what was best for all. Many Australians supported our involvement in the war in Iraq. But when the truth about the case of Dr Haneef came to light, we had a scenario that included incompetence and political interference that led to serious violation of the rights of an individual.

It is hard to believe there are not many unrevealed instances of miscarriages of justice that have occurred in the cause of countering terrorism, and that it could not happen again in the war against child pornography.