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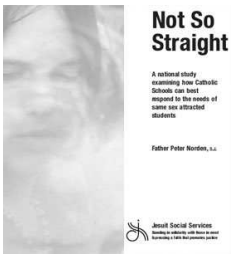
Mending lives burned and different

Michael Mullins

Published *19-Feb-2007*



Tomorrow is Ash Wednesday. For Christians, it's the beginning of Lent. But for Australians, it's also a time to recall the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1983. As Kylie Crabbe writes in this issue of *Eureka Street,* many people associate the day with bushfires only. Its mention, she says, evokes a hushed tone, for religious and non-religious people alike. The ashes of both have a disarming effect on us.

Today, the day before the beginning of Lenten observance, is the occasion for last-minute feasting. In many Christian countries, celebrations take the form of large-scale public partying known as Mardi Gras (literally 'Fat Tuesday'). They are set within a religious framework. However in Australia, the name Mardi Gras has been taken up by members of the gay and lesbian community, for their own month-long public party in Sydney.

Many still live in circumstances in which they feel themselves lesser human beings. This sense of inadequacy can often be traced back to school days, when they were treated as *different.* This difference is the subject of a recent Jesuit Social Services (JSS) study conducted by Fr Peter Norden, who quotes a Church document that insists all people must be identified by their status as a creature of God, and not by their sexual orientation.

Titled *Not So Straight* ,the study is intended as a training document for school administrations wishing to be proactive in creating a non-discriminatory climate for what it terms *same-sex attracted* students. Such young people, Norden says, are over-represented in the group of young Australians that resort to self-harm or suicide. He found that the schools' Catholic ethos tends to be applied more successfully in the case of students with a physical or intellectual ability, or those from a diverse range of cultural and racial backgrounds. The former students who took part all said that more could be done to apply the Church's teachings and pastoral practice to the situation of same-sex attracted students.

Such students in Catholic and other schools live their lives on the edge, in much the same way as those whose lives were upturned by the Ash Wednesday bushfires, and Christians who voluntarily enter into a serious observance of Lent. In the end, they are often richer for the experience. The same could be said for refugees and others who must put their lives together after their experience of rejection. A good example, and indeed inspiration, is Sadiqi, the Afghan refugee circus performer profiled in this issue of *Eureka Street.* He was punished and put down in Afghanistan for his religion, and then in Port Hedland for being a boat person. But he's now fulfilled, a high achiever in his chosen fields.

Capitalism's ingenious immunity to the guilty conscience

Scott Stephens

Published *19-Feb-2007*

In his review of Don DeLillo's highly acclaimed *Underworld* '" which sheer size and overall chutzpah established it as the last great novel of the twentieth century '" James Wood observed that "The book is so large, so ambitious, that it produces its own antibodies and makes criticism a small germ."

I've often thought that the same description could apply just as easily to capitalism. Every attempt to curb its voracious appetite, to 'humanize' its world-wide dominion, to place the world economy back in the service of the greater good, and thus temper its lust for unregulated growth, has not only failed, but has been assimilated. Almost inevitably, it has been folded back into the existing economic order and turned into yet another expression of capitalism itself.

Take, for example, the wide-spread use of 'anti-globalization' rhetoric by designer labels and marketing firms, or the current wave of chic enviro-funda-mentalism. In both cases, there has been a convocation of dialectical opposites. Trends that are logically opposed '" popular consumerism and radical conservationism, for example '" are accomodated in the same space. The exemplar product of global capitalism are T-shirts made in Chinese sweatshops bearing the 'World Without Strangers' motto.

Yes '" capitalism, too, produces its own antibodies. And it seems that nothing is safe from its grasp.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of global capitalism is to have made choice an 'inalienable' human right. The notion of democracy is now married to a right-to-excess; freedom is measured in economic or consumptive terms, by a 'Big Mac Index' amongst other things. DeLillo grasped this in *Underworld*:

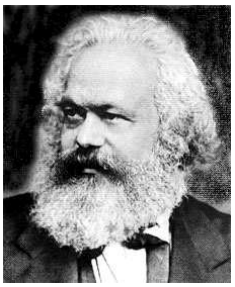
"Capital burns off the nuance in a culture. Foreign investment, global markets, corporate acquisitions, the flow of information through transnational media, the attenuating influence of money that's electronic and sex that's cyberspaced, the convergence of consumer desire '" not that people want the same things, necessarily, but that they want the same range of choices."

Choice itself has become the true object of human longing, a longing that goes right down to our genes. Karl Marx was right: the vision of capitalism just described '" embracing the entire globe, generating more money, *ex nihilo,*through the mysteries of financial derivatives and futures speculation, bringing together polar opposites in apparent economic harmony '" is, in the end, theological. Or, to put it another way, capitalism is Mammon.

So, here's my question: how can we take Jesus' statement '" "You cannot serve God and Mammon" '" seriously, when God and Mammon are now in cahoots?

Let me explain. While everyone loves to poke fun at Hillsong's slick corporate image and the ridiculous platitudes of 'prosperity theology', the conspiring of God with Mammon is much, much older. Max Weber, in his *Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,

famously proposed that the capitalist disposition to earn and accumulate arose directly from the Puritan sense of calling which embraces all of life.



But now that the capitalist drive has shifted from thrift to choice, from prudence to indulgence, from accumulation to experience, the way religion operates within capitalism has also changed. Instead of a secularized motivation for work, the function of religion today more closely resembles those mediaeval rituals that provided sinners with the means to atone for their sins.

We all have our own forms of penance ‘” like tithing, charitable donations, watching SBS ‘” each of which makes us feel better about participating in decadent consumerism. And not only that, these forms of penance allow us to participate by relieving any sense of guilt.

And so it is that capitalism and charity can co-habitate. The one lets you indulge, and the other lets you get away with it. The problem is that Christianity traditionally has geared itself to dealing with the guilty conscience of the West. No wonder it has so readily been accommodated by capitalism as its ideal religious accessory.

If one person can be blamed for consolidating this state of affairs, it is the bull of Wittenberg, Martin Luther. It was Luther who provided capitalism with a formula through which it could co-habit with religion ‘” *simul iustus et peccator* ‘” or, “By faith, the Christian is at once righteous and a sinner.”

Luther thereby secured the place of a corpulent religiosity, in which ethics is invisible, but guilt has been assuaged by some deeply held conviction or meagre act of charity.

When Marx claimed that a critique of capitalism must begin with a critique of religion ‘” “the criticism of heaven is thus transformed into the criticism of earth” ‘” wasn’t he simply repeating Jesus’ warning, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them”? Such expressions of disingenuous charity ‘” performed for one’s own peace of mind, and in the service of Mammon ‘” are the oil in the capitalist machine.

Perhaps the best way of breaking today’s alliance between God and Mammon, then, is to refuse ourselves the false comfort of token acts of charity and fashionable faith, so that we can see our behaviour for what it really is, and dare to live differently.

Ash Wednesday did not begin in 1983

Andrew Hamilton

Summa Theologiae

Published *19-Feb-2007*

When I was a little kid, I thought Ash Wednesday was synonymous with bushfires. There was a kind of hushed tone reserved for the name; a natural disaster that seemed to me to have scared the pants off fire-fighters, homeowners and volunteers alike in the town I grew up in. I was too young, but I knew that there were horrible stories behind the experiences of those like my dad, who went to help, and there was always an edge to the way mum described the early end to my sister's school camp.

So I remember it was a big surprise wh en I learned that Ash Wednesday was first of all a date in the Christian calendar and not, in fact, a day that began in 1983. A surprise, followed by a slightly sickening revelation about the irony of the name. About a thousand years before these bushfires Christians were already starting the season of Lent with ashes.

Then, as now, to begin this forty day season of preparation for Easter, ashes are made by burning the palm fronds left over from the Palm Sunday celebrations of the year before. On the last Sunday of Lent, on which Jesus' entry into Jerusalem before his crucifixion is remembered, foreheads are marked with a cross. Wearing ash became a symbol of repentance and of public sorrow.

The idea of Ash Wednesday meaning bushfires gave me a picture of ashes that were heavy and ubiquitous; the fallout of heartbreak. But while the liturgical stocks of ash may seem more contained, I now see we should be wary of keeping such things neat. Ash Wednesday, as the first day of Lent, ensures that the road to Easter starts with the hard, gritty edge of faith, and of life. It is the church's reminder that Easter renewal is sought from within the mess of everyday life. Whether we mark our foreheads, or just give our fears, disappointments and sufferings a good long stare, we start by acknowledging not just our own failings, but the brokenness of the world '" the symbols of celebration are reduced to ashes.

And I'm tipping we'll all remember the feeling of ashes this bushfire season. It is not hard to picture the sky as though airbrushed grey, clogged by a haze the sun fought against, while our eyes stung and our car ducos turned gritty. And that's just in metropolitan Melbourne. We who were there can recall the surreal images of flames and bursts of orange, and the people who appeared haggard and worried on our TV sets each night '" their lives redirected into the daily business of readying themselves and their properties, should wind and heat conspire to bring fire their way.

Perhaps though, after lifetimes of bushfire news, such situations, and the recovery required are overly familiar to us. We in Australia are well versed in the stories of our extraordinary flora, which thrive when struck by fire. We will be unsurprised to learn that it takes a mere few days for a eucalypt to send out its supple green shoots.


CATHOLIC ONLINE | Lent
www.catholic.org
Ash Wednesday

In less time than it takes the church to make its annual pilgrimage from Ash Wednesday

to Easter Sunday, the Australian landscape will have moved from fire and ash to extravagant blooms. But despite the bush's resilience, it is too tempting to make something reduced to ashes an easy symbol '" whether eucalypt or palm frond.

The Ash Wednesday liturgy acknowledges that people and lives are more complicated than bush, and our renewal mightn't follow a calendar so neatly. And yet, every year, the church takes the palms, and burns them. And the people file forward, and own up to what seems inadequate or painful, face to face on foreheads, because at the same time the ritual offers a reminder that this ash is not the final word. If what we have endured is neither neat, nor in line with the calendar, then perhaps the beauty of the church's proclamation becomes even clearer.

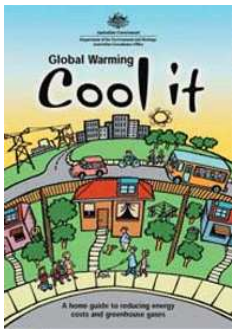
Lent happens every year, and it is always followed by the celebration of renewal at Easter. In any given year, when for whatever reasons people find themselves unable to believe it, they are still invited forward, to wear the ash, name the brokenness, and be carried by the millennia of the faith of others, until they find that the renewal has become their own.

Triumph of the tree huggers

Tim Thwaites

Archimedes

Published *19-Feb-2007*



One can't help being astonished at how the climate's changed on global warming in the past six months. It's gone from an idea which may have some future relevance to something which is already happening around us; from a topic for tree huggers to one of significant electoral importance; from something warranting a small, somewhat irrelevant, government office to an issue capable of consuming billions of dollars and occupying whole ministries.

That change is not only happening in Australia. All over the world, governments are having epiphanies over climate change. In Australia, it's the long drought in the south-east highlighted by bushfires of terrifying intensity. In India, there have been problems with the monsoon; in China dust storms and air pollution. In North America, freakish warm weather in winter and a hurricane of devastating force. In Europe, the hottest ever summers, floods and a winter storm powerful enough to shut down the German rail network.

Even though events of similar intensity have occurred in the past, the panoply of such happenings, one after another, gives people the impression that somehow things have changed. And the most obvious explanation is that a rise in the planet's average temperature is affecting the frequency of extreme events.

Perhaps the scariest thing is that these happenings are exposing just how little we know of the intricate physical, chemical and biological relationships which govern our world. Take the melting of the polar ice caps. It's happening at more than double the predicted rate, US researchers have found. The glaciers of Antarctica and Greenland are marching into the sea faster than forecast because nobody had taken account of the fact that melting ice could create a film of water underneath the river of ice to lubricate its progress.

Clearly, global warming is capable of throwing up unexpected results. The problem is that we have enormous resources invested in cites, agriculture, communications, transport corridors, recreational facilities and the like, all of it predicated on our climate staying the same as it has for centuries.

So what do we do? There appear to be two basic strategies. One is to try to stem the tide by dealing with the cause of the problem and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is the Kyoto approach based around greater efficiency of energy use, employing renewable and carbon-free technologies and fitting in with nature. The other strategy is to do what has proved so successful in the past'"use technology to reshape the world to our own ends and alleviate the difficulties caused by climate. One problem with this latter course is that we don't yet know enough about the way the world works to be sure of success.

The conservative governments of the US and Australia have tended towards the technological fix, because they view it as the least disruptive to life as they know it. After all, both countries have grown their economies on cheap energy and rampant consumerism.

And so the Howard government has initiated exploration of nuclear power and the capture and storage of carbon emissions as significant policy items, and the US is beginning to talk of giant mirrors in space to limit incoming sunlight. But these responses may well be outflanked.

Working with nature is likely to be the quicker and more flexible response. As the chief scientist, Jim Peacock, pointed out, one the weaknesses of the Switkowski report on uranium mining, processing and nuclear energy is its optimistic 10 to 15-year estimate of how long it would take to build the first nuclear power plants in Australia. Realistically, Peacock argues, we don ' t have the trained workforce and institutions to do things that quickly. And as this summer 's water crisis has shown, time is not on our side.

In contrast, energy efficiency can make an important difference, in some cases almost instantly, and certainly within a couple of years. Small-scale decentralised renewable technologies can be adding to our power supply pretty quickly too. It is already the case that more electricity is produced worldwide from renewable sources than from nuclear power. The concern is that the large amounts of capital that would be gobbled up in establishing a nuclear power industry may preclude development of cleaner and cheaper alternatives.

Coping with climate change is likely to demand a judicious mix of working with nature and technological fixes. As Brad Page, the CEO of the Energy Supply Association of Australia, remarked recently, no single technology can deliver all the answers needed. It's about time the Australian government started being a bit more even-handed in its consideration of, and investment in, the solutions.

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'Hate the sin, love the sinner' more sentimental than moral

Andrew Hamilton

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Posters outside churches are generally uncontroversial. Certainly, those of us whose taste tends to the aristocratic may deplore them on aesthetic grounds. Posters are always a little vulgar. We believe that they should meditate on the experience of the British Royal Family: when they started to go tabloid, trouble followed. It would be far better were churches to return their traditional broadsheet ways, and to nail their wisest and most pertinent reflections (this article, for example) to the cathedral door.

Occasionally, however, posters arouse anger for what is written on them. Most recently, churches have drawn fire for posters proclaiming, 'God loves Osama'. Critics argue that the poster aligns God with the terrorists' cause, makes light of the havoc they have caused, and remakes God, after the image of the misguided and ineffectual clergy, into a simpering wimp.

The response of church leaders is that it is perfectly consistent for God to hate terrorism while loving the people who are terrorists. Although this thesis lies at the heart of Christian faith, it has always seemed unlikely, never more than now. Even Christians debate its truth.

Some years ago, for example, back-yard theologians on my bicycle-route engaged in theological debate on a garage wall. The first proposed the thesis, GOD LOVES ABORTION, and spray painted it on the wall. A few days later, a revisionist theologian used paint remover and spray can to alter the message to GOD HATES ABORTION. The response was quick. Love was again substituted for hatred, and God's love was made personal. The thesis now ran, GOD LOVES ABORTIONISTS. The revisionist theologian, a person with few, but decisive, moves, then scratched out 'hates' and wrote 'loves', leaving the thesis to read: GOD HATES ABORTIONISTS. The first theologian opened up another front and wrote beneath the much altered message, WHO DOES GOD LOVE? The question, unanswered, still sits weathering on the wall.

And that is the central Christian question. In the Gospels, it lies at the heart of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees. Does God love only those who act well and faithfully, or does God love both the just and the sinners? For many of his hearers, it was scandalous that one who claimed in his behaviour to represent God's values ate with prostitutes and traitors. Jesus' answer was that God loves us when we are still sinners. Or to put it in more modern terms, God loves each human being who comes into the world for who they are and not for what they do.

That sounds nice. We can give it sentimental acceptance until we begin to name names, to put pictures on posters. That God should love ordinary, domestic sinners like John Smith and Mary Doe is consoling. But Adolf Hitler, Jozef Stalin, Pol Pot, Osama Bin Laden? In tabloid theology, these are monsters. They are evil and undeserving of love or sympathy. They are forever identified with what they have done. To suggest that God loves them is to sentimentalise God, and to remove any firm basis for morality. Public morality demands that

we identify people's value with what they do, and that we classify people as victims, monsters, saints and heroes. A God who hates terrorism must also hate terrorists.

This is the argument that re-emerges whenever Christian leaders pray at public ceremonies for enemy soldiers, question the morality of their nations' war and conduct in them, or organise vigils before a hanging. These activities are seen as subversive, seen to insinuate a God subversive of the public order.

But this is the Christian God. It would be a mistake to describe belief in this God as sentimental, or the Christian God as cheerily tolerant. A God who sees each human being as precious, and knows each by name, cannot but hate the ways in which human beings deny this value. Denunciation of terrorist acts, of unjust wars, of oppressive institutions and of trivialising cultural conventions is the other side of caring for human beings as persons.

So maybe it is not a bad thing for the churches to go tabloid, and to be berated for it. To speak of the Christian God in polarised times will cause us all to reflect.

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Psychology of the PM's Obama critique

Gill Straker-Bryce

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John Howard has captured everyone's attention with his startling comments linking a victory for Barack Obama with a victory for Al Qaeda and terrorism.

The reason proffered for his wading into the early stages of the American election campaign are subject to some debate. They range from a type of blindness, borne out of his personal friendship with President George Bush, through to a focus on his brilliance as a strategist who has focused attention away from weakness in his domestic policies. Whatever motivated him, the question that must be asked is why does he think attacking Obama is to his own political advantage?

For an answer to this, one may turn to psychological literature on group thinking, which shows that the surest way to unite a group is to find a common enemy. Furthermore, fear is the most powerful motivating factor.

The literature available on prejudice and discrimination shows that fear is fundamental, more than anger, hatred or even envy. The price of uniting a group through fear is an increase in stereotyping and prejudice towards a group seen to be the 'other'. In the Coalition's last term of office, we have seen an upturn in racial and ethnic tensions in Australia. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the upsurge in fear that has been fostered by near-apocalyptic thinking with regard to the 'terrorist threats' that we are facing.

Furthermore, this fear is directed at something amorphous; a supposedly ubiquitous threat, some time in our future. The 'threat' we face is not grounded in the present, and cannot be dealt with in the moment. We are agitated towards a state of constant alertness, our physiological systems primed to deal with danger; we are made ready to fight, or for flight.

It is little wonder that gang and group based attacks are more common. The mob mentality is returning. People are needing to discharge some of their excess of emotion. No wonder, too, that we are more disinclined to offer hospitality to strangers than ever before, as evidenced by our lack of generosity with Sudanese refugees in Tamworth, who represent the 'other(s)' of De Beauvoir, Rimbaud, Nietzche and Lacan, all rolled into one.

Furthermore, the spread of this hermeneutic of suspicion works through subtle psychological mechanisms including association. As one contemplates the issue of 'otherness', and the current American presidential candidates, Barack Obama is perhaps the candidate that lends himself most to being cast in the role of the 'other' by those of us in the West.

Obama is the most 'other' to us Caucasians, at least in regard to appearances, and while it cannot be said of him that he is of 'Middle Eastern Appearance', his appearance could lend itself to a certain associational guilt, especially as his step-father is an Indonesian Muslim

and his own middle name is Hussein (a fact already being highlighted by some Republicans, who also erroneously claimed he went to a fundamentalist *Madrassa* school while living in Indonesia, as a boy.)

Association is the mechanism used by the advertising industry to sell its products, and we are all susceptible to its influence. It is not just a focus on the words and wiles of politicians that is needed, but also a focus on ourselves. In responding to a particular politician's opinions and views, and most especially as we cast our votes, it is vital that we understand the psychological processes that may inform us as we come to judge not only parties and policies, but individual politicians too.

Before we cast our vote, we should try to ascertain what it is that we have come to associate these politicians with, both knowingly and unknowingly, and how this has come to be. In the final analysis, it is the subtle, unspoken associations that often carry the most weight. Exposing these associations to the light of day is one way of helping us to make more informed and freer choices, and we certainly need such choices at the current time.

Water is our teacher in the school of life

Clare Coburn

Published *19-Feb-2007*

The premiers and the prime minister are at present scoring political points whilst pondering the problem of the Murray-Darling basin. The problem is so severe that more is now needed than the unlikely prospect of a metre of annual rain to bring the basin back to good health. It is questionable whether the money that will apparently be spent will achieve that affect.

It is curious that we are grappling as a nation with water, as the qualities of water are at odds with all this battling and debating. The aqueous substance which covers 70% of the earth, and which makes up the same approximate percentage of our human bodies, is a giver of life. By quantity, it is a substance which dominates the globe upon which we live and the bodies we inhabit, yet it functions in quite a different way. Rather than dominance, water acts to absorb, reflect and purify. As it falls and flows, it collects impurities and pollution; as it filters through the earth, water rids itself of unhealthy elements, before evaporating in order to cycle harmoniously to earth again.

Water acts with 'sensitive chaos' as Swiss researcher, Theodor Schwenk, describes it. When left to its own devices, it prefers meandering to linear behaviour, tracing loose coils across a continent. It resents angles, corners and positions and flows to the lowest point rather than occupying a position of status. St Francis of Assisi characterised its sisterly qualities in the Canticle of the Sun, translated for children as "so humble, precious, pure and good, it works for us so well".

Bernd KrÃ¶plin and a team of researchers at the University of Stuttgart have investigated water and explored the absorptive qualities of the substance. Analysis of droplets of human saliva reflect human health, emotional status, even the effects of technological implements like the mobile phone on the human being, through the relative order or disorder of the resulting patterns evident in the saliva. Masaru Emoto crystallised water and showed the effects of music on the emergent patterns.

If such sensitivity and fluidity is becoming rarer on the globe, or transforming from useful sources of freshwater to increasing levels of salt water, what is it that water is asking of us?

It seems to be demanding our stewardship - although demand is too harsh a verb for such a gentle substance. Perhaps it requests our care. We need to develop a deeper awareness of our attitude to water. The drought and global warming have forced us to account for our usage of water more consciously. As we carry buckets of grey water to the garden, replace exotics with natives in our gardens, or create mini-deserts of succulents, we gain more and more understanding of the role water plays in our life. As we congratulate ourselves on nurturing a verdant place in our lives with the cast-offs from our washing, we commence a more significant relationship with it.

Similarly, as we watch the water in our creeks diminish and cover with algae, and grieve for the faster flows and purer streams of yesteryear, we see the earth cracking as it yearns

for liquidity. When pondering the great river red gums of the Murray, with their Heysenesque might, we can only shiver at the ghostly possibility of huge stumps in the future.

So what shall the governments of our great, dry continent decide? Perhaps $10 billion dollars will be enough to slake the thirst of the premiers. Morris Iemma, with his mind on the looming state election, thinks the money is the answer. Others hold out for more detail, greater independence, and other guarantees. Mike Rann, premier of our driest state, is the strongest opponent of the Commonwealth takeover.

In a culture in which most problems are accorded a dollar value, and understood through this mechanism, the mooted spending to fix our water probelms are extraordinarily high, as Peter Costello boasts. Market forces will still be expected to play their role, with greater prices for irrigation and household water. Allowing market mechanisms to play a part will not, however, address the change of attitude needed.

The more receptive, patient and ponderous qualities of water suggest an alternate path to a purely financial response. Throwing money at our water problems is not the only way. Reflecting on some of the qualities of water and seeking to emulate them may be a starting point for receptive and sensitive ways of being and existing in the world. Let us hope these qualities are not hidden in the footnotes of any agreement that is reached on our water future.

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'Polluter pays' a must for global common good

Sean McDonagh

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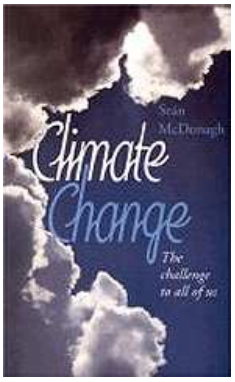

With the publication of the 4th Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it should now be clear to everyone that climate change is one of the most serious issues facing humanity. Even President George W. Bush, after almost a decade of denial, has mentioned the dreaded words 'climate change'.

The facts speak for themselves. China's glaciers are diminishing each year. If they disappear, from where will the 250 million people who depend on their melt-waters get water during the dry season? Australia is now in the grip of a severe drought which is, most probably, due to global warming. Will there be enough water to support the population of Perth or Sydney? A rise of one metre in the sea level would make it impossible for over 30 million Bangladeshis to live in the delta area. A significant rise in sea-levels will inundate many of the cities of the world and create a torrent of environmental refugees.

The 2500 scientists who compiled the IPCC document have done humanity a huge service. It is now clear that there is a direct relationship between burning fossil fuel and climate change. The report from the economist Sir Nicholas Stern came to similar conclusions about the pressing need for a change in how we manage our environment.

According to Strern, global warming is the greatest failure ever of market economics. He argues that from an economic perspective, it is crucial that we take remedial action immediately. His report shows that if we tackle it now it will only cost about 1% percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP). If we leave it for another 10 or 15 years it could cost in the region of 5% to 20% of global GDP.

I attended the UN Climate Change conference at Nairobi in November 2006. I noticed that almost all the negotiations around climate change quoted scientific, political and economic data but seldom mentioned the core ethical values involved in any human activity, particularly a destructive one like emitting greenhouse gases.

This is unfortunate because many profound ethical dimensions can be obscured by the scientific and economic arguments put forward for various climate change proposals. Unless ethical arguments are addressed, individual nations will continue to seek their short-term economic gain, no matter how this affects the global common good,

One of the first ethical principles is identifying those who are responsible for the damage caused by climate change. This principle states that a nation cannot use the excuse of minimizing the cost to its own economy as an ethically acceptable reason for failing to take actions on their greenhouse gas emissions which affect the entire planet. This is the reason that President George W Bush and Prime Minister John Howard gave for not signing up to the Kyoto Protocol.

If we reduce the ethical reflections to manageable proportions, the moral implications of climate change become more evident. For example, if I persisted in pouring a substance into another person's house which made it impossible for them to live there, I am sure that reasonable people would come to a number of conclusions very quickly.

Firstly, that what I was doing was morally wrong. Secondly, that my excuse that it was necessary for my economic growth would be morally unacceptable. Thirdly, that I should desist immediately. Fourthly, that I should pay compensation for the wrong that I had wrought. Richer industrialised countries, who are mainly responsible for releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere over the past 200 years, should be obliged to pay compensation for climate change damages that are unavoidable. In a spirit of global solidarity they are also morally bound to make resources and new technologies available to poor communities so that these countries can adapt and enjoy a decent standard of living without adopting the polluting, Western model of development.

When it comes to allocating global emissions among nations'"the 'polluter pays' principle'"is consistent with the demands of distributive justice. This means that there is an ethical imperative incumbent on every nation to try to promote sustainable development policies. Faced with the disruption which climate change will bring, everyone must assume their responsibility by cutting their carbon emissions.

President Bush and Prime Minister Howard have used the excuse of scientific uncertainty with regard to climate change to avoid cutting greenhouse gas emissions. This excuse transgresses basic ethical norms. When there is a possibility that activity, in this case burning fossil fuel, will cause great harm then the precautionary principle dictates that nations take precautions not to harm other nations. In the wake of the recent IPCC report there is now very little scientific uncertainty about global warming and climate change.

On the theological level as Christians we are called to care for God's creation. Climate change is upsetting the natural cycles upon which God's creation '" animal, plants and humans - depend. Sometimes we forget that humans depend on the natural world for almost everything.

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Community trust the vital ingredient in refugee resettlement

Ben Fraser

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In the prelude to the annual country and western music festival, the Tamworth local council struck fateful tones of discord. After a decision in December to reject becoming a resettlement area under the Federal Government's Humanitarian Refugee Resettlement Program (HRRP), and provocative comments by the local Mayor regarding criminal activities of the existing Sudanese population in Tamworth, the township quickly became the centre of a racist firestorm. A closer reading of events revealed that much of this criticism was unfounded and misplaced.

The broader concerns of the council, in tune with community sentiment, were that the existing government HRRP was ill-equipped to deliver full services to newly arrived refugee families, threatening the longer -term success of the pilot scheme. In eventually accepting the resettlement plan last month, the Tamworth council demanded a more comprehensive community role in supporting the resettlement program to avoid a shortfall in services.

Although outgoing Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Amanda Vanstone applauded Tamworth's about face and the 'big heart' of rural Australia, it was clear that refugee resettlement is not singularly grounded in the root of compassion. Indeed, this debate touched on a number of prevailing concerns, particularly how best asylum seekers can adapt, engage and contribute in a new society facing deficient services and divided opinions.

The Tamworth incident was played out at a time of glaring media profile for the Sudanese community in Australia. The recent cases of convicted rapist Hakeem Hakeem, and of Taban Gany, sentenced for drink driving causing serious injury, have subjected the wider Sudanese population to columns of outrage in the press and to simmering distrust from within sections of the public.

Moreover, these cases have demonstrated how within a refugee framework, issues of law and order are easily muddied by suspicion of cultural difference. Several prominent members of the Sudanese community in Australia have publicly condemned these crimes and aired their concerns at criminal and anti-social behaviour particularly among the younger Sudanese community. But they have also noted that emotional trauma and the transition from a world of conflict affect their current lives. This should be the starting point for addressing problems in the community. It is unfortunate that sections of the media have used this anguished burden to frame all Sudanese within a portrait of lawlessness.

Recent overtures by the Department of Immigration towards reducing the intake of Sudanese refugees and effectively looking elsewhere would be a regrettable failure of the humanitarian resettlement program. The Australian government provides sanctuary to refugees based on an international protection framework. This is based on needs, not on fit. In affording protection for Sudanese refugees, Australia must contend with exceptional cases, periods of adjustment and inevitably, incidents of failure.

Immigration under any circumstances is as newly appointed immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has stated, a 'process, not an event'. Although a careful assessment of asylum seeker cases in countries of first flight is warranted, as much as health screening and document checks are an integral part of the resettlement process, it is naive to suggest, as a number of media commentators have, that all weaknesses in our refugee program lie in the selection process. Gaps and deficiencies in the on-shore component of the resettlement program are equally pertinent,

Recent findings by the Inter-Departmental Committee on Humanitarian Settlement prepared for the NSW and Federal Governments, have questioned the capacity of the Immigration Department's, Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) to meet fully the needs of new arrivals. It underlines the lack of appropriately targeted services to African humanitarian entrants, and the increased demand on State services when the Commonwealth fails to meet their settlement needs.

The Sudanese community in Australia is keenly aware of the difficulties associated with the resettlement process and has recognised and condemned more public failings under the eyes of the law. However, much of the recent media coverage of these complex issues has been grossly inflammatory, condemning the entire resident Sudanese population as having failed an arbitrary 'assimilation' test. Improved services for newly arrived and longer-term asylum seekers would greatly strengthen Australia's Humanitarian Settlement Strategy for vulnerable people who arrive here. Building tolerance and trust in the Australian community is equally important. It is a challenge for a 'multicultural' Australia.

Afghan action hero's emotional complexity

Tim Kroenert

Published *19-Feb-2007*

A Hazara and minority Shi'ite Muslim, Sadiqi fled Afghanistan and the Taliban's violent regime in 1999, eventually travelling by boat to Australia with 147 other asylum seekers. After landing on our shores, they were dispatched to the Port Hedland detention centre, where Sadiqi was incarcerated for six months.

During our interview, in a bustling inner city cafÃ© that seems a world away from that oppressive place, Sadiqi's dark eyes shimmer as he recalls the experience.

"We were punished in Afghanistan because of our religion, and escaped to Australia to find freedom," he says. "But when I came to Port Hedland and saw that camp with the fence around it and the chains and lock on the door, I thought, 'This is not the freedom I was looking for.'"

It's a painful and all-too-familiar story, but Sadiqi is not willing to play at being a victim. The quietly spoken migrant eventually won his freedom and, during the ensuing years, set about building a new life. Today, he is fresh from a year of study at the National Institute of Circus Arts, where he's been honing his martial arts skills while broadening his performance horizons, culminating in an acclaimed performance alongside fellow students in NICA's end-of-2006 show, the Federico Fellini-inspired *DiVino*. "I learned a lot about performing," says Sadiqi, whose role in *DiVino* comprised the enigmatically titled 'Flying Fork' feat (which fuses martial arts with acrobatics and juggling), as well as an *a cappella* vocal solo. "I'd love to be in a movie eventually, especially an action movie, and *DiVino* gave me good insight into how people perform, and how they use their ability to express themselves."

For most people, an aspiration toward action movie stardom would sound like a pipe dream, but given Sadiqi's martial arts expertise (he also came within kicking distance of competing in both the 1997 kung fu world championships and the 2000 Sydney Olympics), for him it has the ring of a genuine career goal.

In truth, and sturdy physique notwithstanding, Sadiqi, with his mop of black hair, rugged features and grin-full of white teeth, looks as much 'exotic leading man' as 'action hero'. His emotional complexity is also evident, and during our interview his eyes intermittently gleam with the intensity of hope, joy and, more than once, sorrow. "In Afghanistan, when people go out, they are not sure they will come back safely," he reflects. "But when they are home with their family, they have peace in their hearts. In Australia, when I go out, I'm sure I'm coming back safely. But when I come home, there is nobody. I don't have peace in my heart."

Sadiqi's father, brother and extended family members, he reveals, currently live as refugees in Iran. He also has two sisters who remain in Afghanistan, one of whom has been out of contact with her family for a disquietingly long time. "If one day I could bring my family together again, that would be peace for me," says Sadiqi.

It's clear that for Sadiqi, family is high on his list of priorities, so it comes as little surprise to learn that when forced to choose between their wellbeing and his studies at NICA, the former won out. Sadiqi is financially responsible for his father and brother's family and, finding it increasingly difficult to balance study and work, this year he has had to discontinue his circus arts studies. "Sometimes I envy Australian guys, as they are able to concentrate only on their own life," says Sadiqi. "But I'm happy to do good stuff for my family. When I was a kid my father worked hard to look after me; now he's getting old, and it's my responsibility to look after him. It's an honour for me to do that."

Like all the blows life has dealt him, Sadiqi has absorbed this one with a characteristic quiet dignity. For someone used to training in a converted animal shed in Afghanistan, with a concrete floor and a ceiling that would drip mud when it rained, the facilities at NICA were nothing short of a luxury. He's sad to leave the school, but grateful for every opportunity that comes his way.

Sadiqi has applied for Australian citizenship, and added a physiotherapy degree to his list of goals. If his life has been a fight, he's certainly not ready to throw in the towel. As his hero, Bruce Lee, declared: "A fight is not won by one punch or kick. Either learn to endure or hire a bodyguard." For Sadiqi, those are words to live by.

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The other Islamic revolution

Shahram Akbarzadeh

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Islam is going through a quiet revolution in the West. This is not a revolution of blood and gunfire, but one of deep thought and radical ideas. Like all other revolutions in history, the final outcome is not predetermined. But there are very hopeful signs about its success.

This quiet revolution is carried out by ordinary men and women who happen to be Muslim, but are otherwise undistinguishable from the rest of the community. They live their daily lives according to a set of revolutionary, though not necessarily novel, ideals of being genuine citizens and true Muslims. Most do not consider this to be anything extraordinary. Herein lies the enormous force of this revolution. It does not depend on a cadres of dedicated revolutionaries, but on the everyday practices of ordinary people.

The guiding principles of combining Muslim faith and citizenship in a secular democracy are pretty basic. Muslims living in Australia, for example, do not have to turn their backs to religion in order to be good citizens. Quite the contrary: they turn to the essentials of their faith to fulfil their citizenship. The essentials of Islam, as those of other Abrahamic religions, are justice, fairness and equity. Although many cultural practices have been traditionally ascribed to Islam in different parts of the Muslim world, in essence, the core values are constant and consistent with the values that govern liberal democracies.

The reality of migration to Western secular societies for the first generation, and the experiences of the following generations of Muslims in Australia and elsewhere, have freed Islam from its cultural shackles. As Muslim intellectuals in Europe and North America have noted, the migration of Muslims from traditionally Muslim societies to secular liberal societies has allowed them to return to the essential kernel of their faith. This is made possible because the governing principles of the West, that draws on Judo-Christian ethical foundations, and of Islam substantially overlap.

Some observers have repeatedly called for an Islamic reformation- by which they mean accepting the separation of church and state. In reality, this reformation is already underway in the daily practices of Muslims who quietly observe social and legal codes of behaviour. They see no contradiction between performing their public duties and believing in Allah.

This revolutionary process, however, is challenged by Islamic radical groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. They reject out of hand the very idea that Islam could be compatible with the West. For Hizb ut-Tahrir and its ilk, concepts of democracy, multiculturalism and inter-faith dialogue are ploys to separate Muslims from their faith and subjugate them to un-Islamic rule. These conspiracy theories, although unsubstantiated, do carry force for those who feel alienated and marginalised in society. These include youth who have not found their calling and are searching for a cause to rebel.

In Australia, unlike the United Kingdom, Muslims have so far not given much attention to Hizb ut-Tahrir. Australian society has absorbed Muslims relatively well, and has offered them the opportunity to mingle and to move up the socio-economic ladder. This has not been a seamless process, but the overall picture is one of success, not of failure.

The threat of terrorism and the tendency of the media to sensationalise, however, have contributed to a pervading sense of distrust of Muslims. More Muslims now respond with a sense of hurt and indignation that they should be assumed guilty simply because of their faith. It is this sense of hurt and alienation that Hizb ut-Tahrir is now trying to exploit in order to push its divisive message.

In standing up to Islamic radicalism, Australian Muslims need the support of the broader Australian community.

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Master mixer of politics and religion

Frank Brennan

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The New York Times

Rev. Robert Drinan, Ex-Congressman, Dies at 86

When Fr Bob Drinan SJ, aged 86, collapsed with respiratory failure at Georgetown University in January, he promptly told the nurse that he was due for class at 11am. There were to be no more classes. Having been a long-time Democrat and one time congressman for Massachusetts, he then joked, 'Some Republican must have done this '.

His funeral was, by all accounts, a grand affair with the eulogies becoming more political as the order of speakers proceeded, the last two being Senator Teddy Kennedy and the new leader of the house, Nancy Pelosi. Nancy had attended the last major public mass said by Drinan '" at her old college in honour of various charities.

I had first met Bob in South Africa in 1995. He was on some US government sponsored mission on human rights. He was larger than life, on his way to Australia, where he met my father, then Chief Justice, thence proceeding to trumpet to the media that he had met father and son on opposite sides of the Indian Ocean '" not quite the Australian way of doing things.

Later that year in Washington DC, I lived in the room opposite him for one semester, and attended his international human rights course. He was indefatigable. He taught a full class load even at an advanced age, and every weekend he was off to some other city in the US to talk to the local Bar or to some church group about human rights. In his last conversation with his local religious superior, he said, "I do not rest in the daytime."

I happened to be back at Georgetown the week after the funeral It was a delight to hear the reminiscences about this Jesuit lawyer who had served in Congress after being a successful dean of Boston College law school. When Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ, the Superior General of the Jesuits, insisted that he retire from Congress, he then took up a teaching appointment at Georgetown law school.

One of his political claims to fame was that he had moved the first motion of impeachment against Richard Nixon. He chose the issue of Nixon's unauthorised bombing of Cambodia. Though morally outrageous, this offence did not have the political clout to carry forward an impeachment. Some of the mourners at the funeral had said that Bob almost blew the impeachment which later was carried on Watergate.

Mixing politics and religion is always difficult, especially on Capitol Hill when it comes to the abortion question. Even after leaving Congress, Drinan continued to buy into the question, incurring the wrath of pro-life groups for his 1996 opinion piece in the New York Times urging Congress not to override President Clinton's veto of the ban on partial birth abortion '" a particularly gruesome procedure used with some late term pregnancies. Much of the article made good sense, but it went a step too far in trying to shelter the Democrats from the political fallout on the abortion question.

He said he wrote "as a Jesuit priest who agrees with Vatican II, which said abortion is

virtually infanticide, and as a lawyer who wants the Clinton administration to do more to carry out its pledge to make abortions rare in this country."

He described the pro-life movement as being 'indignant', while claiming that Clinton was 'serious' about reducing the number of abortions. Like Clinton, he thought that any law limiting the availability of a particular abortion procedure should contain an exception for the health of the mother.

Pro-life groups were adamant that such an exception gave doctors carte blanche to use the procedure, their discretion about the mother's health being judicially unreviewable. In 2000, the Supreme Court struck down a Nebraska State law banning partial birth abortion precisely because it did not contain an exception for the woman's health. By then Drinan had been required by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Archdiocesan authorities to issue a clarifying statement. He wrote:

I '| see abortion — particularly partial-birth abortion — as a grave evil and can understand why Church leaders are urging lawmakers to ban it. I do not want anything to impede that effort. On the contrary, I join in that effort and stand ready to promote laws and public policies that aim to protect vulnerable human life from conception until natural death; I support the Catholic bishops in their efforts to exercise moral leadership in the fight against abortion.

Pro-life groups were still not satisfied, but there was no further clarification or retraction required once the pro-life groups had exhausted their correspondence to Cardinal Ratzinger and Fr Peter Hans Kolvenbach SJ. At the funeral, Fr Drinan's superior, Fr John Langan SJ dealt with the issue graciously and fairly. He said:

"For the most part, his advocacy of human rights harmonized with the social and moral teaching of the Catholic Church. But it must be acknowledged that on the immensely painful subject of abortion there was sharp conflict, a conflict which I wish neither to minimize nor to revisit but only to put into a larger context of common concern for the wellbeing of women and children in a society wracked by moral disagreement. It is not what Bob would call a MIGA, it does not 'make it go away'. In the matter of abortion, it is important to remember that a decisive point of disagreement for many Catholic politicians is about the appropriate limits of state action and about the attainability of a stable democratic consensus on a matter on which the major religious and philosophical traditions reach conflicting conclusions, not about the moral issue in itself or about Catholic teaching."

At the time of his death, Drinan was one of only two Jesuits remaining on the law faculty at Georgetown University Law School.

The Georgetown web site is filled with email tributes from faculty, ex-students and friends testifying the natural generosity of this priest who always dressed in clericals and could mix with anyone '" though amongst powerbrokers he maintained until his dying breath a distinct preference for the Democrats on Capitol Hill. He was well pleased that he lived long enough to feel the political wind change around the Washington beltway. Heaven for Fr Drinan will include a change in the White House in 2008.

Novels' modern characters draw empathy

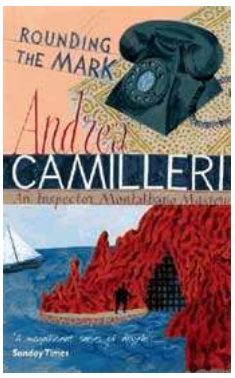
Tony Smith

Fiction

Published
19-Feb-2007

***Rounding the Mark,* by Andrea Camilleri. Picador, London, 2006, ISBN 0-3304-4725-4 $32.95 264pp Paperback website**
***The Undertow*, by Peter Corris. Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2006, ISBN 1-7411-4748-4, $19.95, 209pp Paperback website**

***The Naming of the Dead,* by Ian Rankin. Orion, London, 2006 ISBN 0-7528-6859-4, $32.95, 420pp, Paperback website**

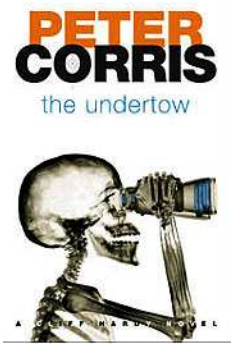


While crime writers are seldom considered for major literary awards, there is no doubt that the best in the genre demonstrate exceptional control of their material. Three novels published in late 2006 are admirable for the structure of their respective plots, characterisation and style. World literature is much richer for the input of Italian Andrea Camilleri (translated by Stephen Sarterelli), Australian Peter Corris and Scot Ian Rankin. Indeed, their contributions are so diverse that confining them to a genre seems arbitrary.

Although some writers have tried to add interest to their stories by exploring historical or exotic settings, Camilleri, Corris and Rankin have mastered the art of presenting modern characters in contemporary situations. These three writers have perfected the art to such an extent that the reader feels immediate empathy with their protagonists.

Camilleri's Inspector Salvo Montalbano of the Sicilian police is a slightly more humorous study than Rankin's DI John Rebus of Edinburgh CID or Corris' Sydney PI, Cliff Hardy. Unwilling to take direction from above, Montalbano is a fierce defender of his staff, who reciprocate with unqualified loyalty. Slightly less understandable is the tolerance shown Montalbano by his long-time, long-distance fiancÃ©e, Livia. Montalbano's reluctance to commit himself to Livia symbolises his love for Sicily, disparaged by northerners as a lawless place.

While all three characters have inspired television pieces, only Montalbano has become a small screen icon. anA loosely-based rendering of *Rounding the Mark* appeared recently on SBS as *Turning Point*. Montalbano must exorcise two personal demons, and Camilleri uses contemporary events and issues to create both. The novel opens as Montalbano threatens to resign because he feels betrayed by police conduct in Genoa. Faced with demonstrations against the G8 meeting, police exceeded their authority, fabricated evidence against protestors and denied any wrongdoing. Montalbano is respected locally, even by the Mafia, because he has never used violence, fabricated evidence or broken his word, even to criminals.



While wrestling with this problem of professional ethics, Montalbano encounters a young boy who has arrived on the well-worn asylum seeker trail from North Africa. When the boy tries to escape from the woman and two other children who seem to be his family, Montalbano takes the boy back. Later he learns that the boy has again tried to escape and has been run down and killed.

Montalbano's guilt increases when he realises that the boy was going to be used as a slave, sold to a paedophile or killed for his organs. The plot of Rounding the Mark concerns Montalbano's campaign to bring the people behind these outrages to justice. His success leaves him feeling that he can still work within the system, even if it seems at times to be corrupt beyond reform.

The G8 meeting at Gleneagles near Auchterarder brings problems to John Rebus. The Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for International Development falls to his death from the castle parapets. He had accepted hospitality from an industrialist and was helping to entertain a Kenyan diplomat. Rebus' colleague Siobhan Clarke becomes personally involved in the conflict around G8. Her parents are among the many demonstrators on an anti-globalisation / end poverty campaign and her mother is assaulted by a policeman.

Siobhan discovers that a young woman who is supposedly taking footage of events for the campaign organisers is in fact a police officer working undercover. Rebus discovers that the woman is the sister of the dead politician. British security services have control over all matters relating to G8 and Rebus is not encouraged to pursue his belief that the politician was murdered. Few writers could propel his protagonists along the fine line managed by Rankin.

Corris' title, *Undertow*, links this novel tenuously with Camilleri's. Corris often creates a story around historical events. Aftershock was based on possibilities suggested by the Newcastle earthquakes, and Wet Graves had its origins in the building of the Harbour Bridge.

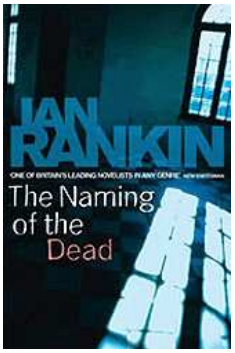
His fiction contains many pop culture references. Corris employs great skill in choosing the physical settings for Hardy's adventures, especially those around inner Sydney suburbs such as Glebe, where Hardy lives, and Newtown where he has an office. In this case he advises in a cautionary preface that all 'characters and circumstances are fictitious', but that is probably a wishful prescription rather than an accurate description.

Like Montalbano and Rebus, Hardy has problems with an insular police culture. Unlike them however, he is an outsider and can walk away from confrontations with conscience uncompromised. One ex-policeman Hardy has trusted through many adventures is Frank Parker. Parker asks Hardy to investigate the possibility that he has a son by a woman whose husband, convicted of conspiring to murder a partner in his medical practice, died in prison.

The son, William, has disappeared. Ashamed of his father's crime, he developed behavioural problems and shunned a promising career as a UN linguist. The mother believes that her husband was not guilty and hopes that if this can be proven, William might return to her and behave more acceptably. So Hardy has three tasks '" finding William, establishing his paternity and reviewing the conspiracy case.

Corris always says that he writes a pastiche of crime stories from the middle of the twentieth century and denies any literary pretensions. The success and longevity of the

Hardy series suggests however, that he is doing what he does pretty well. It is true that most of his plots are resolved not just in, but by violence. On the other hand, Corris, unlike Camilleri and Rankin writes in first person and Hardy's musings over issues are always thought provoking. A constant theme is the disproportionate unhappiness among the wealthy and the powerful. In this case, Hardy ponders the strength of the bonds between parents and children.



A great satisfaction when reading is finding that a writer's most recent work is his best, and Corris continues to satisfy. Reading Camilleri in translation is an interesting experience too. Rounding the Mark differs in tone from the earlier Montalbano novels, and it seems likely that Camilleri has modified the character so that he resembles more closely the television Montalbano played so superbly by Luca Zingaretti.

Sartarelli supplies endnotes to explain some local references for international readers. So, for example, we learn that rotating the forefinger of the left hand means 'Later'. The great omission in these notes is an explanation of how Catarella's mispronunciations translate from Italian to English. Catarella is on the front desk of the police station and often fails to hear callers correctly, and uses strange expressions. So he inquires whether Montalbano is over his 'illment' and thinks that Fonso Spalato is 'Pontius Pilate'.

Of the three established crime writers, Rankin's writing is the most sophisticated. His prose gives the sense of being very carefully crafted. The Celtic bard's voice comes through strongly, and Rankin's characters use some interesting slang such as 'high heid yins', but there is no need for a translator. In this latest case, the ending is realistic in its lack of tidiness, but is nonetheless satisfying.

Crime buffs and lovers of good writing generally will be pleased if Camilleri, Corris and Rankin continue to ply their craft as well as they do in these latest mysteries '" for a good while yet.

Rocky takes on the beasts within

Tim Kroenert

Action

Published *19-Feb-2007*

Rocky Balboa, 102 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Sylvester Stallone. Starring: Sylvester Stallone, Burt Young, Milo Ventimiglia, Antonio Tarver, website

Anyone who's seen *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot*could be forgiven for forgetting Sylvester Stallone was once a highly rated Oscar nominee. The much-lauded film in question, 1976's *Rocky*, is a bona fide classic.

Stallone's pathos and humour-filled screenplay about, and on-screen portrayal of, a downtrodden Philadelphian who beats the odds, social barriers and his own personal demons to defeat (symbolically, at least) the world heavyweight boxing champion not only earned him two coveted nominations (best actor and best original screenplay)'"it made the writer/star and his character into household names.

Of course, four lackluster sequels and countless parodies and rip-offs have subsequently marred the film's reputation. The sixth and final installment in the franchise, *Rocky Balboa* (arriving 17 years after the previous installment), is much more than a simple return to form. It's equal parts nostalgia trip, bittersweet reflection on ageing and loss, and a fitting final chapter for one of modern cinema's most iconic characters.

Rocky Balboa finds the ageing athlete working as a gregarious restaurateur, who regales patrons with stories from his heydays in the ring. It also finds him nursing sizeable grief for the death of his wife Adrian in years recent, and struggling to connect with his adult son (Ventimiglia), who's tired of living in his celebrity father's shadow.

Some of the film's platitudinous speeches about self-respect and facing life's 'punches' head-on are heavy-handed, yet entirely in keeping with the Rocky spirit. The franchise has always been at its best when the fist-pounding action inside the ring has worked as both metaphor and catharsis for the turmoil and drama taking place away from it.

Indeed, when Rocky is offered the opportunity to take part in an exhibition match (read: publicity stunt) against undefeated but unpopular world champ, Mason Dixon (Tarver), it's a chance not so much to reclaim former glories as to purge the demons within.

Even in the worst films of the franchise, Rocky has always been a well-rounded character: outgoing; marked by insecurities; bolstered by devout faith; struggling to balance family responsibilities with his drive to be at the top. It's worth noting that the character's endurance is due as much to Stallone's performance as his writing.

When it comes to acting Stallone (contrary to popular opinion) has always been a cut above muscled contemporaries such as Arnie and Van Damme; in*Rocky Balboa*, he turns in one of his finest performances to date, imbuing the punch-drunk pugilist with a soulful melancholy that manages to engage even during the film's most overwrought moments.

The crunching surge of Aramoana's surf

Peter Matheson

Published *19-Feb-2007*

Power Cut

To my right
Black stove, red glow
Creel basket piled with logs
This winter night when every light clicked out,
In my hand
Sorley Maclean,
Troubadour of Skye's sour soil,
Of the Cuillins' intransigent fling.
Out front
Waitati's ebb and flow;
Raasay's ghosts a world away,
Heart hammering in the dark.

Belonging

On this soft-shining radiant day
Grey-silver seas,
Beneath a massive sky;
Light elbowing out the gloom.
A flirting sun caresses distant hills
And teases awkward trees.
Precisely fashioned drops of rain
Are measured one by one
On tarmac road.
I walk - it's second-nature now -
The rim of land and sea;
Left to my hand

The zestful quietude of waves;

A curious seal ups periscope

Then dives again;

Click-clacking starlings sigh,

Acknowledging the crunching surge

Of Aramoana's surf.

Here I belong.

I swim the land

And walk the sea,
I breathe these hills

As they breathe me;

My weightless feet

Touch covenanted soil,

On this soft-shining, radiant winter's day.