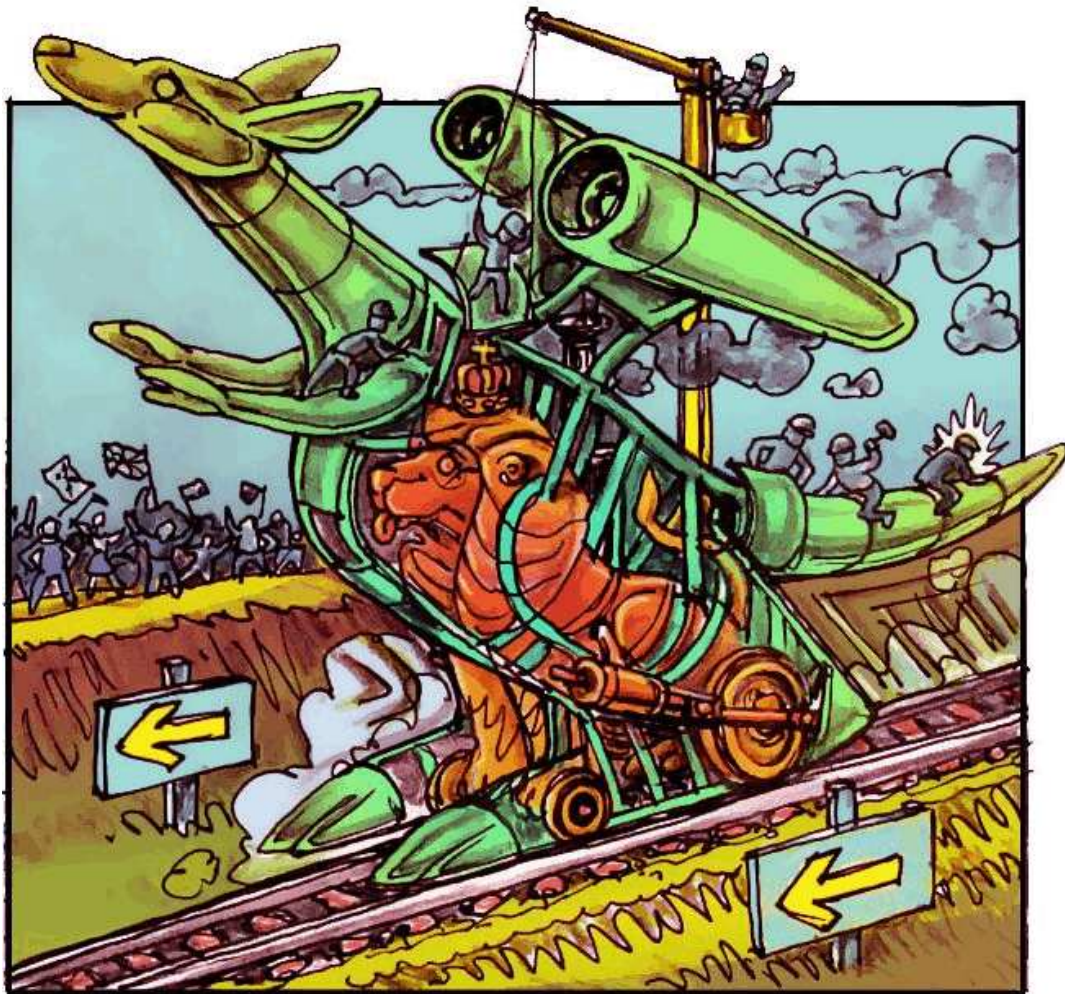


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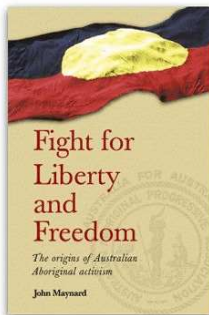
The roots of Aboriginal activism

BOOK REVIEW

Brian McCoy

Maynard, John. *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007. ISBN: 9780855755508

Altman, Jon and Hinkson, Melinda (eds). *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia*. Arena Publications Association, North Carlton, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-9804158-0-3



There are times in a nation's history when events combine to place particular moments in its collective memory. The Prime Minister's apology to the Stolen Generations on 13 February this year is likely to be one. Its timing, planning and execution moved the hearts of many Australians. For similar reasons, the Federal Government's intervention into Northern Territory Aboriginal communities in 2007 is likely to be another.

Such events, and the people who shape them, can open up transforming moments in a community's sense of self. They become occasions to be held and remembered, re-told from one generation to the next. At the same time, they also serve to caution us.

Some significant events and the people who have shaped them can too easily be forgotten. The story of Fred Maynard is one.

Maynard was born in 1879, as the second century of Australia's colonisation was just beginning. That he was instrumental in establishing the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) is not something deeply etched into our history or memory of Aboriginal protest.

In *Fight for Liberty and Freedom*, his grandson, John Maynard, describes what it was like to be Aboriginal one hundred years ago. He offers us the story of someone who fought to proclaim the voice and protect the rights of his fellow Aboriginal people.

The AAPA sought to make and strengthen links with American Black activists, such as Marcus Garvey and the boxer Jack Johnson, who came to Australia to fight on more than one occasion.

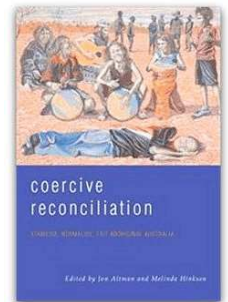
One of his most memorable fights was against Canadian world heavyweight champion, Tommy Burns, in 1908 — an event Maynard describes as 'the biggest sporting event with an international focus staged in Australia during the twentieth century', next to the 1956 Olympic Games. Some 20,000 people gathered inside the stadium, and 40,000 were locked outside.

They watched Johnson clearly and emphatically win. But this was no Cathy Freeman uniting a country — the colour of race was far too evident and politically divisive in the nation at that time.

Maynard was strongly supported by a non-Aboriginal woman, Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, a remarkable woman, missionary and social worker. Her son died soon after returning wounded from France during the First World War. Her sensitivity for those who had lost sons at war gradually shifted to a concern for Aboriginal children and their often forced removal from their families.

Her alliance with Maynard and the AAPA offers a timely reminder that many of the struggles they faced regarding the protection of Indigenous rights and the care of children in the early 20th century continue into the early 21st.

Coercive Reconciliation, and its 34 contributors, roughly half of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, contribute to our awareness of these ongoing struggles. The authors take us back to the 2007 Federal Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Human rights, particularly those of the young and most vulnerable within Indigenous communities, remain to be fully addressed.



As the chapters in this book express a wide range of commentary, we come to realise that the Government interventions have been multi-layered and complex. They can be deeply deceptive and divisive. Whatever the need for the rapid interventions, these authors reply with their own, often passionate, responses and critiques.

What Fred Maynard and Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton attempted nearly 100 years ago we see repeated by the authors of *Coercive Reconciliation*. Indigenous and non-indigenous people come together to articulate how the recognition of people's human rights can best address those human needs that racism, dispossession and poverty have exposed over decades.

It is worth noting that at the 2020 Summit in Canberra delegates to the Indigenous Australia Forum shifted between these two poles of concern: rights and needs. Despite efforts made by some in the media to suggest one direction was more compelling or more deserving than the other, both are needed.

What *Coercive Reconciliation* reminds us is that collaborative and cooperative work between Indigenous and non-indigenous people continues to be important. Such a partnership seeks to build a better future for the young but one that also addresses human needs and rights.

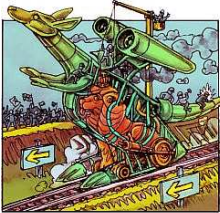
June 2007, 13 February 2008 and the April 2020 Summit are likely to remain within our collective Australian memory for a long time. It is even possible that the Federal Government will reverse the previous Government's refusal to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That would be something to please Fred Maynard and Elizabeth

McKenzie Hatton.

G-G's blind faith in Australia's constitution

POLITICS

John Warhurst



The Queen's Birthday public holiday perpetuates the confusion the British monarchy brings to Australia's national identity. It is one of two days on which Australian Honours are announced. In an evolutionary step, these honours replaced the award of imperial honours to Australians. Yet not only are they still officially awarded by the Queen, Australians awarded such honours cannot escape their identification with the British monarchy.

The Australian Republican Movement aims to replace the constitutional monarchy by a republic with an Australian Head of State. Things have gone well for the Movement in many ways during 2008. The republican Labor Party platform sets out the steps that should be taken. It is committed to an initial plebiscite as the best step towards another republic referendum.

The merits of the move have been proclaimed by our new republican prime minister on several occasions. And those merits have been strongly endorsed by the 1000 Australians gathered at the 2020 Summit. Young Australians participating in the national Schools Constitutional Convention did likewise.

In contrast to the growing public support for an Australian republic, the British monarchy has suffered another PR crisis. A young Canadian Catholic woman has had to convert to Anglicanism in order to marry a member of the British Royal Family, as the British Act of Succession prevents any Catholic from doing so. This is further evidence of the outrageous discrimination built into the monarchy.

Despite all this the republic may still take some time to come to fruition, probably a minimum of five more years, as several steps are involved. That says a lot about the innate conservatism of Australian society and politics and the forces at work.

An explicit and implicit defence of the place of the British monarchy in the Australian Constitution is being mounted by the Queen's representative in Australia, the Governor-General, Major-General Michael Jeffery.

On several occasions recently Jeffery has proclaimed a very conservative view of Australian constitutional arrangements. In his view the Australian constitution of 1901 has made Australia a stable country. Not only is there no evidence of this relationship between constitution and society (it is a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument), but his view stresses a static

version of Australian history that makes the task of all reformers, not just republicans, doubly difficult.

In fact, Australia's constitutional story is one of continual, well-accepted evolution. It has had many elements. They include changes to both the style and titles of the Queen and to the role of the Governor-General, the removal of appeals to the Privy Council, the appointment of Australians to the position of Governor-General, and the passing of the Australia Act in 1986 to break many, but not all, remaining colonial ties with Britain.

The move to a republic is the next step in a story of popular constitutional development, not a break with the past in the way Jeffery portrays it. He reproduces a version of the 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' argument used so effectively against republicans at the 1999 republican referendum.

The history of that referendum is also now being tampered with to make the task of republicans more difficult. That referendum in time will be seen as a step along the path towards a republic. But in a brazen and quite deceitful rewriting of history monarchists are now claiming that that one referendum decided the matter.

In fact, the nature of the 'No' campaign was to urge republicans to wait for a better model. Authoritative research has shown that many republicans did exactly that. Indeed a majority of 'No' voters claimed to be republicans. The lesson was not that Australians were not republicans but that republicans were outwitted.

The move to a republic will take place in small and large steps. Realistically, the earliest that a plebiscite can be held is alongside the 2010 federal election. But it is possible that by the end of this year the Rudd Government will announce the public consultation process that is its necessary forerunner.

Moveable monument to the transience of childhood

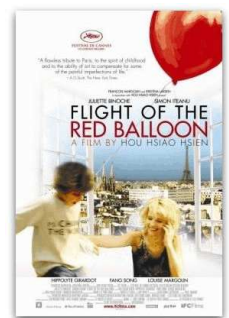
FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

***Flight of the Red Balloon*: 113 minutes. Rated: PG. Director: Hsiao-hsien Hou. Starring: Juliette Binoche, Simon Iteanu, Fang Song**

In Albert Lamorisse's 1956 film *La Ballon Rouge*, a young boy is befriended by a red balloon which, seemingly on its own volition, follows him around the streets of Paris.

The balloon in Taiwanese filmmaker Hsiao-hsien Hou's 2008 *Le Voyage du Ballon Rouge* (*Flight of the Red Balloon*) — part remake of, and part homage to Lamorisse's classic — plays a bittersweet symbolic role, drifting in and out of the spotlight — a moveable monument to both the magical freedom and the transience of childhood.



Parisian Suzanna (Binoche) is a charming and deeply creative single mother, flustered by the many demands on her time and emotion — providing voice performances for puppet theatre, teaching classes, and playing landlord to a recalcitrant tenant.

It leaves her little time to spend with her adored and adorable son, Simon (Iteanu). And so she enlists the services of Song, a Taiwanese film student with a soft spot for Lamorisse's *La Ballon Rouge*. Song discovers in the effortlessly charismatic Simon both captivating subject and passive muse for her own filmmaking.

This is a highly meditative film. Long passages contain little dialogue, and it possesses only enough plot to propel it forward at a leisurely pace. It will leave some viewers cold, especially given that it doesn't ultimately amount to much more than a meditation.

But the magic of this film is in its restrained and delicate approach to exposition. There is very little telling, rather details are revealed gradually, like an undeveloped photograph blooming in a darkroom.

This is epitomised by cinematographer Pin Bing Lee's camerawork. During some scenes within Suzanna and Simon's home, minutes will pass while the camera remains completely stationary, providing a keyhole view of one part of the house.

Once it has soaked up the detail, the camera might suddenly come alive, tracking a character as they trek to a different part of the cluttered apartment. Suddenly new details emerge of the world the characters inhabit, and we understand who they are a little better.

This is reflected in Hsiao-hsien's revelation of his characters. He lets his audience spend time getting to know these people, and metes out the facts of their lives and cares as we witness them in different locations, and see the ways they interact with different people.

Amid assorted sympathetic and understated performances Iteanu is a wonder. One imagines he must have spend a good deal of time in front of the filmmakers' lens to the point where he forgot its existence.

His performance is utterly naturalistic and unselfconscious, so that his carefree childishness shines in contrast to the convolutions of time and emotion that restrain the lives of the adults around him.

It's to that disparity, between the simplicity of childhood and the relative complexity of adulthood, that *The Flight of the Red Balloon* stands in most vivid tribute.

Why public servants leak

POLITICS

Tony Kevin



All is not well between the Prime Minister and the men and women of the Commonwealth Public Service. There are considerable settling-in difficulties. This was evident in the recent Fuelwatch episode, where somebody in the public service — not a ministerial office — leaked the Cabinet documents on this issue.

Is the Prime Minister driving the public service too hard? Or does he in fact need to spill some senior public service heads left over from the Howard years, to send a clear disciplinary signal to public servants in response to this serious leak of Cabinet information?

The first question is easier to answer than the second. The Labor Government is certainly making public servants work harder. Many public service policy areas became comatose under Howard. There wasn't much interesting policy work going on, and it mostly got done in ministers' offices or in trusted highly politicised outposts.

Howard staffed key policy areas such as national security and counter-terrorism with his most trusted people, rotating them in and out of ministerial offices. The sidelining of Treasury on water policy was a typical example of the style.

Rudd says he wants the public service to get back to the traditions of efficiency and relevance that it had under Fraser, Hawke and Keating. He says he wants it to learn again how to work harder and smarter.

My impression, however, is that he and some of his ministers do not yet trust public servants to deliver — perhaps with good reason, in some cases. A lot of public service work is being done in a great hurry, then shelved without follow-up. The ministerial office minder system remains dominant.

This style risks becoming a self-fulfilling expectation. It can only demoralise public servants keen to make a new start under Labor, if they come to feel that their departments are suspected of not giving first-rate advice.

Are departments being given tight-deadline work to keep them busy and perhaps 'road-test' their performance, while the most important policy thinking is still being done, as under Howard, in ministerial offices? I think so.

Rudd, a former public servant himself, still seems undecided how much trust to put in the

public service. That is what makes the recent Fuelwatch issue instructive, out of all proportion to its inherent minor policy significance. Cabinet was entitled to take the course of action it took. But perhaps it was a final goad to someone in a public service that feels overworked and under-appreciated, thus leading to the leak.

What to do about such leaks? Perhaps a bit of ceremonial head-lobbing at the top, *pour encourager les autres*?

In Crikey this week Stephen Bartos suggested five possible reasons for public service leaks: accident, individual ideological meltdown, to expose corruption or malfeasance at the top, to expose a government's policy misdirection or misinformation, or to give ammunition to the Opposition. Of these five, only the third is seen as acceptable by public service professionals.

I don't think any of the departmental heads left in place after Howard's departure would be so unprofessional as to leak material to the media or Opposition. For officers who have reached this top level, the ethic of serving the government of the day loyally and efficiently has become instinctive. On this view, the proper course for a public servant with serious policy objections to what his government is doing against his advice is to quietly resign or seek transfer — never to leak information or blow the whistle.

Leaking, or conspicuous public policy dissent, is most likely to happen in middle policy management — around assistant secretary and senior adviser level — where a good deal of politically sensitive material is accessible to people who might combine personal grievances with a still lively sense of the public interest.

Would a 'Night of the Long Knives' have done anything to prevent the leak? Should Rudd have removed some notoriously Howard-compliant departmental heads upon taking office? Perhaps — not because any of these persons is likely to leak, but because their continued presence might send a demotivating signal to middle policy management that nothing much has changed in policy terms.

Thus, if a government that came in on a strong platform of social justice and human values continues to do things such as hound David Hicks, delay natural justice to Mohammed Haneef, clear up a backlog of refugee cases without much evidence of compassion, prosecute indefinitely a cruel civil war in Afghanistan, and do little to educate the public on the realities of global warming and peak oil, it might expect some public servants to leak.

If accompanied by a real change in policy approach on such matters, reshuffling a few departmental heads might do some good in signalling to younger public servants that reform was underway. If not, it would simply be reshuffling the deckchairs in a public service that still feels a bit marginalised.

Talking to the enemy

POLITICS

Shahram Akbarzadeh

When the former US President Jimmy Carter visited the Middle East in April 2008 he was warned against making contact with terrorist groups.

Conventional wisdom asserts that talking to terrorists would give them legitimacy. This stance, however, is now challenged from within the US political establishment. The Democrats presidential nominee Barak Obama has openly called for talks with Iran, which Washington designates as a sponsor of international terrorism.

The Arab media hailed Carter for meeting the exiled Hamas leader, Khaled Masha'al, in Damascus. Carter's mission was seen as a positive step by most Arab commentators, but it contradicted US policy of not negotiating with terrorists.

Hamas is listed as a terrorist organisation by the United States, Israel and Australia. But there is more to Hamas than shelling Israeli civilians in the border town of Sderot, and conducting suicide bombings. Hamas won a democratically held election in January 2006 and formed a coalition government in the Palestinian Authority. This win came as a surprise to all, including Hamas. These election results were evidence of growing impatience among Palestinian voters with the lack of progress towards a sovereign Palestinian state.

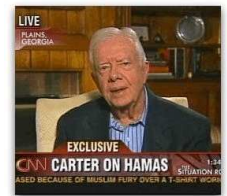
Hamas capitalised on the growing popular resentment to gain a foothold in the political process. In a clear attempt to differentiate itself from the ruling Fatah of late Yasser Arafat, which was tainted for making repeated compromises with Israel to no avail, Hamas declared its commitment to the destruction of Israel.

This rhetoric was played down while Hamas was forced to form a coalition government with Fatah, but since the June 2007 break between the two Palestinian parties and the isolation of Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, Hamas has returned to its hard line anti-Israel stance.

There is no justification for this position. It is repugnant. But surely no-one really believes Hamas poses an existential threat to the State of Israel.

So what is the way forward? Israel has tried eliminating Hamas leaders by targeted assassinations, hoping that it could cripple the organisation. The Gaza Strip is kept sealed off by Israeli forces and electricity supplies are restricted. There are daily incursions into Gazan cities by Israeli forces to take out Hamas fighters.

But no-one seriously expects these measures to defeat Hamas. That is because Hamas has



gained hero status among Palestinians, and the rest of the Arab world, for standing up to the might of Israel. If anything, continued Israeli assaults against Hamas only boost its popular image.

This brings up once again the uncomfortable question: what is to be done? Jimmy Carter has pointed to an alternative solution. If we accept that Hamas is not going to be eliminated from the political scene anytime soon, maybe we should be talking to its leaders and encouraging them to engage in the political process. At the end of the day, peace is not going to reign in Palestine or Israel if Hamas is excluded from negotiations.

That is an unpalatable feature of international politics: there is no room for moral judgements and ideological positions.

The United States, which has been the champion of moral outrage against Hamas terrorism and has refused to talk to its leaders, was also the state that put ideology aside in favour of Realpolitik when dealing with China. Henry Kissinger's visit to Communist China in 1971 was a watershed in Sino-US relations. This visit came less than two decades after a proxy war (with Communist China) in the Korean peninsula, and was concurrent with American military campaign in Indochina. By talking to the enemy, Washington found a way to reduce tensions in Sino-US relations and extricate the United States from Vietnam.

Ideological grandstanding has an emotive value. Both the US administration and Hamas have used it to bolster their position in relation to their constituency. But this is a dead-end policy. Unpalatable as talking to terrorists may be, Israel and the United States cannot ignore the fact that Hamas carries a popular mandate and has a tangible political objective that is enshrined in international law: national sovereignty of the Palestinian people.

Growing up Greek

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Dimitrios Bouras



Last week an intelligent nine-year-old boy, ever so full of beans, asked me: 'Dimitri, what nationality are you?'

Joel is a student at the run-down inner-city primary school where I work as a volunteer teacher-aid.

'Nothing complicated,' I answered, grinning. 'My dad's Greek and my mum's Australian.'

'What kind of Aussie is your mum?' asked Joel.

'She's Scottish/Irish/Cornish, with some English thrown in.' I was impressed — if Generation Y has such inquisitive minds our world's future is looking awfully bright.

'My dad's half Greek, half English and my mum's half Argentinian, half German,' he announced proudly.

'Wow,' I replied, 'what a mixture! Makes mine look awfully simple.' We high-fived and returned to class.

Joel's a typical example of the pupils at the school, who come, on average, from three or four different nationalities. My own mixed heritage appears ever so simple compared to theirs yet I've been letting it confuse, depress, and stress me for decades.

Every time I enter the grade 3/4 classroom I am, in my mind, returned to the late '70s, when I was a pupil at a suburban Anglican primary school for two-and-a-half years.

In a predominantly Anglo-Saxon/Celtic school I was a mixed bag of Celtic and Greek.

Sure there were Polish, German, Indonesian, Chinese and Indian kids at school, but they were not products of a mixed marriage. I was a rarity.

Still, we all seemed to get on famously. Racism was not an issue, segregation was an unknown concept, and now I see similarities between that school and the primary school at which I do volunteer work today. In both cases 'acceptance' seems to be the key word.

Acceptance — now there's a word that took years to strike a chord with me, to become integrated into my vocabulary and psyche.

Whenever my Greek father picked me up from school, I'd be struck by sheer panic. *What do*

I do now? I thought. Should I hide from him, or should I run over and tell him to meet me in the car? I'm ashamed of his appearance and accent. Doesn't he know that? I've told him so.

Yes, my father was a thorn in the flesh back then. Part of me was terrified that my mates would fall about laughing the moment he opened his mouth. Now I think someone once giggled at my father's strong foreign accent. But only once! That occasion, though, was enough for me to construct a sophisticated denial of my father's existence, so that I could maintain my position within my group of school friends.

Once the '70s had drawn to a close the tables were turned on me. Dramatically.

Gone was my little suburban heaven, my father having decided to relocate the family to Greece. By September 1980 I was forced to face certain harsh realities. In my new class, I was the odd one out. I was the one with a foreign accent. I was different from the other kids, and I knew it.

In Australia I had never been taunted or bullied because of my migrant father, but in the village, I was ridiculed and bullied, sometimes physically, because I was half-foreign, and because my mother was entirely so. Within months I considered my mother the new thorn in the flesh, and I began to do my best to deny her existence.

Back in Australia in March, 2008, I look up at the class clock: it's 3.30, and the kids of grade 3/4 are dashing gleefully to the door. They've just broken up for school holidays. Before I get the chance to become melancholy (again!) over my tormented school years in Greece, I take a look at the kids and remember Miss Sarah, their teacher, telling me: 'Dimitri, more than three quarters of these kids are from single parent families.'

I can't afford to become melancholy, and I won't. At least both my parents were around and saw me through my school years, for better or for worse. Sorry Mum, sorry Dad, for turning my back on you both.

Sonnet for a city

POETRY

Various

Sonnet for a city

(After Trent Parke's Photographs of Sydney)

The apparition of these faces in a crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound, *In a Station of the Metro*.

Water colour petals grow into a crowd, now they've found legs to weigh upon, waiting, standing in thought, and gathering to bus themselves away from their lonely poise. They populate like confetti the dustproof draft of an afternoon under the offices of a singular Promethean glare, the loose

change of cloud, and a sky adamant in light blue — Heaven's own gallery, where a saint shall guide anyone towards a meditation on the whole picture, if one can see it — that is, the cityscape you look upon, looking back at you, and asking 'Your name is again?' You'll say it's a tag to tell you're a complex figure of an individual graffitied onto the Central Business District. Yet, you, in your graphic image, have no walls to be aware of, merely the cuts of quotidian eclipses filing their fill from working buildings. And the economy adheres each apparition along the damp, black boughs of common sense, while feeding every person a sharp, laconic wash of light — enough for a photograph or a few, to redeem them in their frailty, to hold their impermanence from their souls, framing all within an illusion, the great art, that human sort of eternity.

Ben Hession

Pentecost

Tunnels of rent world and the cool white light
of autumn overcast the restless day
plaiting strands of air through gum
then with an impatient hand
letting go, so that almost undone they leave only
the loose knit of leaf sigh and bird song
beneath the crown.

Sound flaps about
like the tail of a kite, as wind picks up and shakes
the fragile resolve of things
that hold their own,
like a knot of frightened men
with flame lightening their brows,
and the word braiding women in their midst.

Anne Elvey

Sonnet

What of the understanding politicians are trite?
And others who seek to blind the public's eye?
As our journeys mature, black we are told is white
We accept this reasoning and we don't know why.
What of the frustrations with the gatekeepers of truth?
Ether they become, whilst the keepers walk the talk.
Is injustice a feeling spoken only in youth?
That sincerity, when required should easily baulk?
In the answer to the question what makes up the figure zero

Public figures come forth with their self-endorsed advice,
The scholar is rejected in favour of the spin-doctor's widow
An answer is given: this answer will suffice.
If cynicism is reality for the deflowered ideal
Let scepticism mine for what home truths may reveal.

Bede Moloney

Preserving the real benefits of fair pay

POLITICS

Brian Lawrence

To the surprise of many, the Rudd Government has followed the lead of the Howard Government in 2006 and 2007 and has not nominated a figure in its submissions to the Australian Fair Pay Commission's review of minimum wages.



More surprisingly, the Commonwealth's principal submissions do not engage in the ongoing debate about tax cuts and the maintenance of real wages. Some may say they contain a 'nod and a wink' for the Fair Pay Commission to discount real wage increases.

About one in ten Australian workers depend on the safety net minimum wages set by the Fair Pay Commission. They are low paid workers who are unable to bargain for higher wage rates. What the Fair Pay Commission decides has a major impact on them and their families. They are the battlers at the needy end of the 'working families' spectrum.

The Fair Pay Commission needs to determine whether the real wages of the most disadvantaged workers in Australia should be increased, reduced or maintained, and whether tax cuts for the low paid should reduce the increase in wage rates.

However before it starts to answer these questions it should remember that for a single-income family of four, including two school-aged children, the federal minimum wage of \$522.12 per week yields a disposable income, after tax and transfer payments, of \$755 per week. Parents cannot raise and educate children on \$755 per week. The maintenance of the real value of the federal minimum wage requires an increase of \$21.93 per week.

Despite the fundamental strength of the Australian economy, some organisations have urged the Fair Pay Commission to reduce the real value of safety net wages as a means of controlling inflationary pressures. They have pointed to the tax cuts that will come into effect in July 2008 and argue for an increase of only \$10 per week.

These tax cuts are of vital importance to low income workers and their families, but they are modest. Workers on the federal minimum wage will receive a tax cut of \$8.65 per week. For workers on \$35,000 to \$45,000 a year, the tax cut will be \$20.19 a week. So a worker on the federal minimum wage will receive proportionately less tax relief than higher paid workers who do not depend on the wages safety net.

Low paid workers did not get any special treatment from the 2008 Budget. They have been relatively disadvantaged by the tax cuts.

Let us be clear. The tax cuts were promised as a real benefit by both sides in the recent election campaign. Just think what would have happened if one side had even hinted they might be taken away from some working families by way of reduced wage increases.

In his Budget speech, Treasurer Wayne Swan declared: 'For too long, working families have watched the proceeds of the boom directed elsewhere, in the form of tax cuts skewed to those already doing very well. Tonight we tip the scales in favour of working families.'

Furthermore, the Government's post-Budget submissions refer to the tax cuts and various other budgetary changes which apply to a range of income groups and propose that the low paid 'should receive an appropriate increase in minimum wages'.

The discounting of wage increases by the Fair Pay Commission would tip the scales against the most disadvantaged working families. The Commonwealth Government must take a public and principled stand on the tax cuts issue and formally communicate it to the Fair Pay Commission.

More than that, it also needs to take a stand on the real wage issue. Consistent with its social inclusion policy, the Commonwealth should state that the real value of the wage safety net for low paid workers should be maintained.

Henson nudes not 'revolting', but demand reflection

MEDIA

Andrew Hamilton



The controversy about the Mr Bill Henson's photographs has touched deep feelings. The issues involved have inevitably been reduced to single words or phrases, like exploitation, censorship, pornography, parents' response and freedom of artistic expression.

The issues however are complex, because the social relationships involved in taking and showing photographs of pubescent children are also complex and interrelated. They need to be named and thought through patiently.

The central question is whether it is ever right to photograph children, particularly children partially or totally naked, as an art form. There are many different contexts in which it is possible to photograph even undressed children. They range from a doctor making records preparatory to medical treatment, to war photographers filming families fleeing in terror from bombing, to filmmakers producing pornographic images.

Most of us would judge the act of taking photographs differently in these contexts. Our judgment is based partially on the intention of the photographer, but also on the likely impact on the child. So is it legitimate for an art photographer to take photographs of children in order to illuminate the aspects of childhood that we normally don't attend to?

As part of the context, the working relationship between model and photographer is also significant. Our judgment may be affected by knowing whether the photographer was abusive and manipulative or respectful and professional.

One of Mr Henson's earlier child models has described her experience as deeply respectful and safe. If she is believed, it cannot be argued that this kind of photography invariably damages children. It can certainly be argued that it is highly likely to damage them. But then we would also need to ask under what conditions the process would be safe.

One of the knottiest issues raised is whether children are capable of giving informed consent to an activity that is likely to affect them deeply. Even if they are capable of such consent, should we regard their consent as irrevocable? Children, after all, can change their mind totally and often.

Even if we judge that children cannot give irrevocable consent, that need not totally exclude their involvement. Their consent would clearly need to be supported by wise parental support. It would also need to be revocable. If they did revoke their consent, the image presumably would be removed from display and excluded from publication. Such conditions would have added benefits in discouraging the commercial exploitation of children in

advertising.

The way we answer these contextual questions affect our judgment of Mr Henson's photographs. But we remain left with the deeper and troubling question whether children are appropriate photographic subjects for such searching study of the darkness of childhood. I do not find conclusive the evidence that they suffer hurt from the experience. But should even the possibility discountenance the making of such images?

Other questions arise about the display and reproduction of the images. Our answers may also vary with the context. It might make a difference whether the images were displayed in a gallery or on a tram. Galleries and specialist art journals usually attract people with a relatively trained artistic sensibility who look for the meaning of the image. Images in the public realm might draw a more superficial viewing.

That is not to say that everything claiming to be art should be entitled to be shown in a gallery. The making of the artefact or its content may involve such abuse of human dignity that to invite an aesthetic response to it would be morally unthinkable. Snuff movies of high quality, if such exist, might be an example. But I am not persuaded that Henson's photographic images are based in such disrespect for human dignity that they may not be shown.

Art is intimately related to currents in contemporary society and culture. This exhibition has revealed how strongly in our culture runs anxiety about child abuse. This anxiety has also expressed itself in concern about the sexualisation of children in media and advertising. It is natural that Bill Henson's images should be seen as part of this broader phenomenon. To support his enterprise will inevitably be seen as weakening opposition to this noxious trend.

Nevertheless what I have seen of Bill Henson's photographs suggest they work in quite a different space. His images seem less to sexualise childhood than to make sexuality just another of childhood's terrors. In his photographs nudity represents a disturbing vulnerability rather than a high sexuality. They are not pornographic. But it remains true that as a media event his art has been confused with the commercial exploitation of children.

Under the judgments we form about the legitimacy of making and showing art of this kind lies a view of the place that art plays in society. The higher our estimation of its importance, the greater the privileges we will give artists to make and display images that in other contexts we might exclude.

I would argue for a real but limited privilege. Art is central in any culture because it reflects the large human questions and the deep movements within the culture. This is a vital task. To do it properly artists must have space to make mistakes and to cross boundaries. Even repugnant images can illuminate a culture. But there is a moral framework in which art must work.

Finally, if we were convinced that Bill Henson's images should neither be made nor displayed, would it be right to invoke the law and involve the police? The answer will depend on whether these measures are likely to achieve the goals that the law is made to uphold, in this case to free children from exploitation and harm.

I suspect that most legal cases involving works of art do not achieve their goals. They bring the law into disrepute, arouse sympathy for the accused, and erode support for the good values the law is designed to protect. In the event, it is not only art that is liberated, but also pornography and exploitation.

Only higher prices will cure fuel addiction

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Both the Federal Government and Opposition have proposed easing the pain of ballooning petrol prices with flat tax reductions. The Prime Minister favours a cut in GST on petrol, while the Opposition leader wants a five cent reduction in excise.

However they would be doing us more of a favour if they treated oil dependency as an addiction, and actually imposed extra taxes that would further increase the price of petrol. This is the logic behind the Government's strategy to reduce the cost to community health and wellbeing of other addictions and social ills such as tobacco and binge drinking.

Oil usage at current levels is unsustainable. We all depend upon oil to maintain our lifestyle, but supplies are finite, and greenhouse emissions caused by motor vehicle use are a major contributor to climate change on a calamitous scale. We need to make radical changes at all levels, from personal to global.

The energy crisis of the '70s shocked us into action. Substantially increased petrol prices precipitated greater fuel economy in the manufacture of cars. But the oil giants eventually dropped prices and we resumed our bad habits.

Outspoken Melbourne university transport planner Paul Mees is a lone voice in his advocacy of increased petrol prices. He [told](#) ABC Radio that motorists complaining about high prices are forgetting that fuel would soon have had to cost more anyway, to address the problem of climate change. 'The whole point of an emissions trading scheme is to make things that produce a lot of greenhouse emissions more expensive and since 20 per cent of our emissions come from transport that inevitably was going to mean that petrol prices would go up.'

It's obvious that the Federal Government would need to direct revenue from any increased petrol excise into subsidies for those in business and geographical situations which require motor vehicle use at or near current levels.

A [policy update](#) issued last week by The Climate Institute suggests higher prices do in fact lead to greater fuel efficiency. It points out that fuel taxes are about eight times higher in the



UK than in the USA, and that this results in substantially lower average per capita fuel expenditure.

The Institute argues that Australian moves to reduce petrol excise would 'lock in choices based on expectations of lower prices', and actually make communities 'more — not less — vulnerable to future increases in world fuel prices, as well as encouraging increased greenhouse emissions'.

Meanwhile Federal Cabinet leaks during the past week have exposed the Fuelwatch scheme as a con. It seems the majority expert opinion points to it providing no petrol price relief. It may even increase the price at the bowser. If that's true, those committed to fighting Australia's fuel addiction with higher prices could view Fuelwatch as a move in the right direction.

Nothing smart about Rudd cluster bomb intransigence

POLITICS

Gillian Bouras



Women are odd creatures, a mass of contradictions. We love peace, harmony and order, yet let anyone threaten our children, and we are immediately transformed into raving and violent maniacs of the most primitive kind.

We are not merely concerned about our own offspring, either, for most of us cannot bear to think of children suffering in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, China and Burma.

What do you do when your own child grows up and wants to become a soldier? You try to talk him out of the idea, that's what, and when you fail, you try not to think about the whole nasty business.

Nik, my middle son, is a commando in the Greek Special Forces, and in 1997 he was part of a UN contingent stationed in Bosnia. On his return he showed me his snapshots. What do the red flags mean? I asked. They show you where you shouldn't walk, he said. Land mines. The day before he left Bosnia, a sapper had been blown up.

Land mines have killed or maimed at least a million people since 1975, and some of the monsters are still a danger in the Golan Heights, 40 years after they were first planted there.

Land mines then; cluster bombs now. These are bombs that have mini-bombs inside them. They thus carry much the same threat as land mines, in that they lie around undetonated for long periods. When they explode, innocent civilians, children among them, are all too often the victims.

Expatriates view their homelands through rose-coloured spectacles, but mine cracked when I learned the Howard Government had spent \$14 million on these iniquitous weapons, the first time an Australian government had ever done so.

Those same glasses shattered entirely when I learned the Rudd Labor Government had not done the right thing either, standing in the way of initiatives at this week's Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions.

More than a hundred countries sent representatives to Dublin, in the hope of drafting a treaty banning the use and stockpiling of cluster bombs. The Pope, Desmond Tutu, the International Red Cross, UNICEF and World Vision were a few of the spiritual leaders and aid organisations calling for the ban.

America, China, Russia, Israel, Egypt, India and Pakistan had no representation at the conference. America, notoriously, has used cluster bombs in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo.

Nonetheless, it was announced yesterday that the conference had agreed upon a draft treaty to ban the bombs. This was a success for humanitarian activists everywhere, but for the exclusion of one small detail.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* [reported](#) this week that Australia was frustrating attempts by the Dublin conference to ban cluster bombs, by trying to ensure its SMArt Bomb 155 would be excluded from the treaty.

This weapon is an artillery round designed to sense and attack armoured vehicles. It has, according to Australian defence authorities, 'reliable' self-destruction mechanisms. But it has never been used on a battlefield.

What if, God forbid, it is one day, and is found to be just as viciously effective in sowing bomblets as any other cluster device? Too late then.

Despite the risks, Australia's arguments must have been persuasive. The smart bomb was excluded from the Dublin treaty.

In 1999, Australia was among the first of 158 countries to ratify the Ottawa Treaty banning land mines. Back then we were the goodies. Now we are the baddies. Why? For fear of wasting \$14 million? Because the Wide Brown Land's defences have to be kept up to date? Or because some politicians simply lack the empathy to imagine the effect of such weapons?

Nik is good at his job, and rising through the ranks. I still don't like the thought of having a son in the military, but at least he is a commando — if he were ever in combat, the risk he personally would pose to civilians would be small. He is not, obviously, a bomber pilot. Nor is he a politician.

Women and madness

BOOK REVIEW

Alexandra Coghlan

Appignanesi, Lisa. *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women And The Mind Doctors From 1800 To The Present*. London, Virago, 2008. RRP \$65

The façade of Bedlam — England's most notorious mental institution — was distinguished throughout the 18th century by the sculpted figures of two chained males, all-too vivid personifications of madness as a disease both bestial and primitive in its unrestrained passions.

In 1815 the statues were replaced by those of young and beautiful women. Madness, it seemed, had a new public face, and it was unequivocally female.

Lisa Appignanesi's book *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors From 1800 to the Present* explores the shifting historical relationship that has persisted between women and mental illness over the past two centuries, and the theorists, theories and social movements that have helped to shape it.

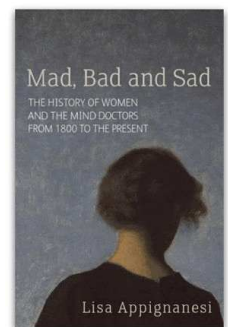
Women feature on Appignanesi's pages as patients, doctors, mothers, social archetypes, and as the subjects of projected male fantasies, providing both a focal point and a lens through which to view the vast web of social history and medical developments that make up this most revealing of issues.

Central to Appignanesi's theory, and to the fascination of her book, is the role of madness as a barometer of the values, concerns and morals of its day.

Philosopher Ian Hacking has lightly observed that, 'In every generation there are quite firm rules about how to behave when you are crazy.' It is no great conceptual stretch to perceive therefore that each generation has its equally firm rules governing what constitutes madness itself, and how those afflicted are to be treated.

What interests Appignanesi however is the subjective process by which these rules and conventions are established, and the often hidden assumptions that dictate such judgements.

She undertakes a systematic dismantling of the developments in 'medical' approaches and theories of insanity, and thereby reveals that processes and categories traditionally conceived as the empirical product of scientific fact, are — even today — more frequently the subjective and arbitrary divisions of social and cultural fashion.



Appignanesi reveals that neither diagnoses nor symptoms are ultimately immune to fads and phases, with each progressively shaping the other in a sort of medical chicken-and-egg scenario requiring the collusion — conscious or unconscious — of both doctor and patient.

Appignanesi produces a variety of compelling statistics and case studies spanning two centuries that indicate the particular susceptibility of women both to the diseases of the mind and to the efforts of the mind doctors and their 'talking cures'.

She extrapolates from these suggestive facts a fascinating case that — without soapbox or sermon — places women very much at the centre of the historical issues surrounding mental illness.

Her women however are not the passive victims of male oppression that theorists such as Elaine Showalter have painted, but rather, willing and socially conditioned accomplices to prevailing trends of behaviour, even going so far (as in the case of Henry James' sister Alice) as to employ invalidism as an escape from the limiting categories of healthy female life.

Philosopher Julia Kristeva, in her theory of 'abjection', posits that any substance, notion, or individual cast out by society, rather than disappearing or ceasing to be of value, instead serves reflexively to define the 'self' of the subject and to interrogate its boundaries.

Appignanesi's book represents a compelling working-out of this same notion, and her 'mad, bad and sad' women have significant implications for the 'shallow sanity' of mainstream society and its norms.

It seems both curious and inevitable that a book about madness should become so fundamentally a discussion of sane society, and of the ways in which its thinkers, doctors and politicians have all laboured to preserve its ordered workings precisely through the treatment and categorisation of the insane.

Appignanesi's scholarly work is a timely reminder of the 'other' side of those necessarily contingent categories of sanity and insanity, healthy and diseased, and is an eloquent invitation to its readers to interrogate many of the most fundamental social and ethical categories.

Spanish chiller evokes ghosts of grief

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

***El Orfanato (The Orphanage):* 105 minutes. Rated: MA. Director: Juan Antonio Bayona. Starring: Belén Rueda, Fernando Cayo, Roger Prades**



Be prepared to lose sleep. *The Orphanage* (*El Orfanato* in its home country, Spain) is a skillfully made spooky movie set in a cavernous seaside mansion. It concerns the glass-eyed ghosts of six children, guaranteed to give you the heebie-jeebies.

As if that wasn't creepy enough, it is the film's more tangible, human elements that might leave both mind and gut churning late into the night.

Laura (Rueda) returns to the orphanage of her childhood, accompanied by her husband, Carlos (Cayo) and their nine-year-old son, Simón (Prades). They intend to reopen the orphanage, but matters both personal and supernatural cause bumps from the outset.

For one, the vivacious Simón is increasingly preoccupied with his imaginary friends, to the chagrin of his doting parents. Simón doesn't know that he is adopted, nor that he has an illness carrying a potentially early expiry date, and this secret puts additional strain on Laura and Carlos.

Then there's the orphanage's bleak, untold history to contend with, not to mention the ghosts that have stuck around to stir things up. When Simón disappears without a trace, Laura is convinced these otherworldly occupants are her key to finding him. As months roll by, this conviction becomes an obsession.

The Orphanage is a contemporary ghost story with its ghastly fingers trailing through a long and diverse history of scary tales, from Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* to films such as *The Others*, *The Amityville Horror* and even *Friday the 13th*.

It wears its influences proudly, more homage than plagiarism. Its use of the supernatural to provide an allegorical exploration of Laura's grief and guilt reflects the traditional function of ghosts in literature, and gives the story a distinctive, human element.

Frankly, *The Orphanage* is scary as hell. Prior to the Spanish film festival closing night screening, the director, via a tongue-in-cheek written statement, said he hoped his film would make the audience suffer. The tortures invoked by *The Orphanage* range from standard 'jump' moments to icy tension and pure gut-wrenching horror.

Filmmakers have long recognised the creepy-factor of ghoulish kiddies — think *Village of the Damned* or *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. *El Orfanato* harnesses this creepiness, underscores it with sympathy for the horrific way in which the children died, and augments it by emphasising the childishness of these ghosts. Theirs is a decidedly playful haunting — one of their games provides the film's most chilling scene.

It's entirely possible the ghosts are a figment of Laura's imagination, lending undue portent to otherwise innocuous goings on. If that's true, it speaks volumes about her mental state. Bayona revels in the ambiguity, although it must be said that if the ghosts are to be taken literally, elements of their back story are insufficiently explained.

Either way the film's supernatural elements are a red herring, distracting both Laura and the audience from the awful — and awfully mundane — reality of Simón's fate.

Post script: this is a highly effective but imperfect film. It saves its greatest imperfection until last. Unwilling to leave his audience with the harrowing outcome of the film's climactic movement, Bayona instead tacks on an uplifting final note. The film's ending is discordant and suggests dubious means for finding peace amid grief.

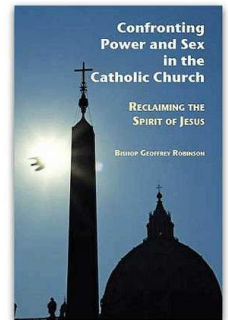
Bishop Robinson confrontation leaves unfinished business

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*, in which he explores what he sees as the roots of abuse in the Church, continues to raise controversy.

In May this year the Australian Bishops issued a statement in which they praised Bishop Robinson's commitment to the victims of abuse, but raised issues of doctrine that concerned them in his book. In reply, Bishop Robinson expressed disappointment that they left untreated the central challenge made by his book.



Acting on the request of Roman authorities, many United States Bishops have recently said he would not be welcome to speak in their churches.

It may be helpful to put this controversy into context. When Geoffrey Robinson was assistant Bishop in Sydney, he helped coordinate the response of the Catholic Church to victims of abuse within Catholic institutions. In the course of his work he spoke with many victims of sexual abuse. These experiences inform the central arguments in *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*.

So what is Bishop Robinson's argument, and why did the Australian Bishops criticise his book?

In his book Bishop Robinson argues that the causes of sexual abuse are to be sought in the psychological state of the abusers, in their ideas about power and sex, and in the environment that shapes them. He claims that these factors are woven together in a church culture that needs to be changed if the roots of sexual abuse are to be excised. He explores broadly how this church culture developed and how it could be changed.

In the Catholic Church it is each Bishop's responsibility to teach the received faith. The Bishop of Rome, the Pope, has an overall responsibility to preserve the unity of faith and life in the local churches. He intervenes when local Bishops cannot deal effectively with issues that arise. In their decision to criticise Bishop Robinson's book, the Australian Bishops' Conference judged that matters of faith were at stake.

In their [statement](#), they praised Bishop Robinson's contribution to the life of the church. 'We are deeply indebted to him for his years of effort to bring help and healing to those who have suffered sexual abuse, and for what he has done to establish protocols of professional

standards for Church personnel in this area.’

They then claim that the book questions the authority of the Church to teach definitively. It also questions the knowledge and authority of Christ that ground the authority of the Church to teach. In detail, they claim that the book questions Catholic teaching on tradition, scriptural inspiration, the infallibility of Councils and Pope, the nature of priesthood, and elements of the Church’s moral teaching. They conclude by conceding that the authority entrusted by Christ to the Church can be badly exercised.

The criticisms are sweeping. But their scope is not altogether clear. The Bishops find fault with Bishop Robinson’s questioning. There are two forms of questioning: one explores, the other denies. We can question faith by exploring its grounding and its boundaries. Other questioning can be tantamount to denial. We may assume that received positions are untrue unless we are given reasons that immediately convince us, or we may simply propose an alternative position inconsistent with a received position that we do not even take into account.

In the case of this book, Bishop Robinson certainly questions the authority of the church and other matters in the first sense. He must do so if he is to explore the groundings of a church culture. But if the book is read in a way that assumes the author’s good intentions, it is not evident that his questioning amounts to denial.

But the Bishops may have been concerned that the book would be widely read in this way. Indeed this risk is inherent in the shape of its argument. To discuss the pathologies of a culture is like reflecting on the factors within an organism that are conducive to cancer. The sources of cancer are also the sources of the life of the organism. If we focus only on eradicating cancer without asking what makes for a healthy organism, we may kill the organism in eradicating the cancer.

In *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* Bishop Robinson focuses on pathological ideas. His arguing partners are those who make excessive claims for the scope of Church teaching, demand too much deference to Church officials, have too narrowly negative a view of human sexuality, and who put compulsory clerical celibacy beyond discussion.

In covering so many areas so broadly, Bishop Robinson cannot give a rounded and solidly grounded view of Catholic faith and life. He cannot do full justice to the Church as a living organism. In Catholic faith, this life is identified with the presence of the Holy Spirit within the development of the Church. If the book is not read in the light of an organic view of the Catholic Church, could be read as a negatively analytical and piecemeal account.

The Bishops then may have thought it necessary to warn against this possible reading of the book, particularly for readers who assume that it has added authority because it was written by a Bishop.

Bishop Robinson has accepted the Bishops' right to respond. But he was disappointed that they did not address the crucial issues which he raised. These are the extent to which the Catholic culture, including the institutions of clerical celibacy and of the exercise of authority, shapes attitudes to sex and power. And the extent to which these attitudes damage people, making abuse and its concealment more likely.

These questions remain. They have not been answered by the criticisms made of Bishop Robinson's book, however justified they may be. Precisely because the sources of pathology lie so close to the sources of life in the Catholic Church, as in other organisms, it will require a great deal of research and self-reflection to address these questions. But the pain of the victims of sexual abuse cries out that they should be addressed seriously.

Young writers uncaged

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Gabrielle Bridges



I'm sweating under the critical inspection of a gang of young writers. Even babies chewing rusks are eye-balling me. Perfume and aftershave vie with baby powder. The dress code varies from school uniforms, through op-shop-special to Goth and punk.

'Hi, I'm Kate. I'm filling in. Marie's mother is sick,' I explain. 'Please introduce yourselves and tell me what you write.'

One of the teenage mums writes poetry, the other fantasy. The Goths are into dragons and wizards. A girl in a wheelchair says, 'Melanie. A novel.' Next a song-writer. A tattooed youth draws, 'Sean. Dirty realism.' Two science-fiction writers.

A shy girl mumbles, 'Fiona. Poetry and short stories.' She reminds me of someone. Ah, yes – I too was a gawky teenage poet with no audience.

I point to the quote from 'The Prisoner' by Erica Jong on the white board:

The cage of myself clamps shut

My words turn the lock.

'Please respond to this in whichever style you prefer. Write from the heart, no editing. Ten minutes.'

Heads bend, pens scrawl. After trying to fix names and interests in my head, I write too, to keep my twitchy hands busy. There are groans when I signal time's up.

Reading work aloud is voluntary but most are keen. They watch my reactions closely. Many relate the poet's words to their own lives, others to parents and teachers they consider emotionally shackled. I'm impressed, and I tell them so. The shy girl remains silent but soaks up every word.

'Please revise this during the week and bring it back.' Fiona's hands disappear onto her lap. Hell, I don't want to scare her off on my first day. 'Remember, reading aloud is optional.'

After a break, fruit-cup cordial juxtaposed with smelly nappies, we play a 'character' game. Sean volunteers first. The others pepper him with questions about the drug-dealer in his story.

As we quiz the creators of a sorceress, spaceship pilot and detective, they scribble notes about creating characters. My shoulders slump in relief. It's working out.

I'm less nervous the following week. Fiona arrives early, clutching some paper. 'Um, could you read this?'

'Of course.'

*Only birds hear me cry, and they scatter, leaves before a gale,
they're not caged and their brief lives are led by simple instinct.*

I read on in respectful silence. Her voice trembles. 'It's pathetic, yeah?'

'No. It's good.' I grab a form from my folder. 'There's a competition. It would be great if you entered.'

A tentative smile appears. The next lesson, on creating atmosphere and locations, generates invigorating discussion. With encouragement, Fiona ventures the odd question, while the rest jostle to have their say.

By mid-term, Fiona reads an occasional contribution. I savour the word-pictures in poems she shows me privately.

One day she bounds in, glowing. 'The competition! I got third prize!'

I hug her, exhilarated. 'When's the award ceremony?'

She tells me. 'Can you come?'

'Try to stop me!'

In the front row, we listen intently, stunned by Fiona's strong finish:

I wish I could be free, free from bonds of love and need and expectation

I act loving, obedient, reliable, on demand, but I long to be me, myself, just me.

The students stomp, whistle and cheer. My voice is louder than theirs. As Fiona steps down from the stage, her comrades swirl around her, hugging and kissing the blushing author, begging her autograph in the competition's anthology.

I can't say yes fast enough when Marie asks if I'll continue with the classes.

Aceh model suggests long-term hope for Burma

HUMAN RIGHTS

Margaret Rice

Some people remain reluctant to donate aid money to Burma following the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Nargis, fearing it will be pocketed by the generals. But Caritas Australia, the Catholic aid agency, is achieving impressive things on the ground, funnelling funds directly to its networks deep in the heart of the country.



Working this way, Caritas estimates it will have distributed food, household living items, shelter and medical care to 60,000 people in the hardest hit regions within the next few weeks. Three hundred local volunteers have been trained to provide practical help. Refuge has been offered in parish centres and food distributed from them.

Many more than two million are suffering. The assistance being provided is not enough, but it is something.

Like the heads of other major aid agencies, Caritas Australia's CEO, Jack de Groot, is relieved that the generals have finally relented and allowed the agencies to go in. But despite this, he is not optimistic.

While international humanitarian agencies have been operating in Burma for many years, in the lead-up to the farcical constitutional referendum this month, the generals were squeezing these agencies out. This was despite the fact they provided food relief to malnourished people and helped control HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

The regime certainly didn't want the international attention it has now attracted as a result of the cyclone.

There is a lot the agencies can do. But Mr de Groot fears permission to enter will be a token gesture and that after an inappropriately short period, the agencies will be kicked out again. This despite the reality that Burma now needs long-term help to recover from the disaster.

The World Food Program (WFP) reported, even before Cyclone Nargis, that malnutrition of children under five was at 32 per cent and that there were at least five million people in Burma who were short of food.

And before the cyclone, the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) was \$7 million short of funds to feed existing refugees — 254,000 people massing at the Thai Border, and in other places.

'We fear that due to the destruction by salt water of the delta lands — the rice bowl of Burma — thousands upon thousands of people will starve,' says Mr de Groot.

‘Already, we are hearing stories from farmers who are frightened that their families, having survived the cyclone, will now die of starvation. And as they starve, they will try to escape to countries such as India and Thailand, creating regional tension.

‘Another fear is that the generals will isolate the ethnic minorities of Burma ... Already, no-one is allowed to travel into those regions where the Karen and Mon people live. We fear they will be isolated further and their survival threatened because it is not a priority of the government to protect and feed these people.

‘Our sense is that as soon as the emergency phase is over, access will once again be denied to aid agencies and NGOs, with unspeakable consequences for the people of Burma.’

There is a model for a closed community to be given access to emergency relief following a natural disaster, leading to support for desperately needed long-term rehabilitation, despite pre-existing political tensions between a people and its central government.

During the 2005 tsunami, 200,000 lives were claimed in the Indonesian province of Aceh. Tensions between the Aceh people and the central Indonesian government were at an all time high. There had been fears that bloody clashes would escalate.

After the tsunami, the Indonesian government hesitantly allowed international aid agencies to help with emergency relief, in the first instance, and later with the gradual rehabilitation of the province.

Trust was eventually built between the international aid agencies and the Indonesian government, resulting in a peace agreement being signed between the Indonesian Government and the Free Aceh movement, GAM.

Sadly, at the moment it seems unlikely that such a course of action will be followed in Burma. The world holds its breath, now that aid has been allowed in. But the prospects are bleak.

If international aid agencies were allowed into Burma, not just to fix the immediate damage but to overcome the awesome long-term problems facing the country, this would give hope that the international scrutiny that occurred in Aceh and transformed the experience of its people could happen in Burma.

This would be the silver lining of the cloud that is Cyclone Nargis.

Abyss of abbreviated old age

POETRY

Ian C. Smith

Atmosphere

Breath fanned cigarettes, lit candles
shadow-dancing around walls
the glow beneath their ash flaring
like his illness now, then receding.
Memories discrete, hers unknown
his as vivid as blood on parchment
the only documents of their time
treachery tumult happiness hope.
Maddening fits of loneliness
trawl his brain through landmark dates
reliving tardy decisions, mistakes
the satirist in him self-abusive.
At this abyss of abbreviated old age
he wishes he could light those candles
head bowed to breathless lungs
with her again in that smoky room.

Black Cloud

Peering through binoculars
at a yacht rounding a wreck site
he sees a man step to the stern
then a woman emerges from below.
A silent theatre in the round.

He tries to imagine their conversation.
She could be a self-taught navigator
her horizon limitless because
she doesn't want to linger alone
regret mistakes, grow old, and worse.
Let's face it, all journeys must end.
She has brewed coffee in their cosy galley
and when they drop anchor tonight
she might rest her head on his shoulder.
He will smell her hair, light a cigarette
lay his hand on her warm hip.
Lowering the binoculars he sees
a black cloud scudding their way
shadowing the water which trembles.

(Don't) read all about it

In this small and backward nation
I rose from alarm-shattered dreams
rode ambitious past milk still in glass
rebel's cigarette sparking in the wind
insides of knees scraping in rhythm
against bulk classified pages
thick slabs of Saturday's Ages.
Although naïve about print's potential
I studied the form guide, as did a boy
who would stick close to home writing books
crafting sentences about his childhood.

I delivered his dad's rolled up reading
digestible news in the tabloid Sun
the popular choice on my run.
A man exposed himself, his breathing ragged
so I reported this hot news to my mum.
In court our local C. of E. minister
who bored us with R. I. at school
swore on the Bible the man was asthmatic
a problem I had not linked to sex crimes
when I hurriedly left his Weekly Times.
OK, the past's barking dogs shape us
so why this sense of missing out
when I return to that shrunken scene
barely able to mount a bicycle, sure
dim lights of milk bars a memory
like protecting the frail and not skiting
a fair go and mature handwriting.
What about the slow poison of unlived lives?
Sports heroes should only impress children
ditto advertising's narratives of joy
light through feathers dancing in air
bread and circuses for the hoi polloi.
Too much pulp mediocrity awaits
in the dawn of our days at our front gates.

What he has worn

Nappies, presumed, the beginning — end?
His big sister's stolen knickers.

A hated raincoat left at school

the mean belting for forgetting it.
Uniforms, a hard kid sadness
shoe polish on blonde sideburns
a crimson James Dean jacket.
Newspaper to combat the cold
a mouthguard, his girl's mascara
the hair shirts of love's regret.
Nonchalant expressions (he hoped)
deflecting embarrassment's arrows
— yet long pale socks for golf
with matched high shorts and scores.
Boxing gloves, crash helmet, skis
an eye patch, rings, a red nightshirt
a tablecloth, jocks over tights
party-bound through braking traffic.
Cap and gown and calumny
the consequences of his actions
desertion, wounding words, and worse.
Spiderwebs, gardening alone, early
sunscreen, suede safety boots
two front teeth on a plate
glasses, goggles, wedding suits
condoms, headphones, many a bruise
plaster casts, welding and other masks
and since he was sixteen, fading tattoos.

Converting Paisley the Irish demagogue

POLITICS

Frank O'Shea



Northern Ireland has celebrated a year of normal political life.

At least St Paul got hit by a bolt of lightning and, and if we are to believe Carvaggio, got knocked off his horse. He even had a shout from a passing satellite to help him make up his mind. Three pretty strong hints that he should mend his ways.

Two thousand years later, what did Ian Paisley get to persuade him to change from a brand-name for bigotry into a reasonable human being?

In a recent biography of the big man, *Paisley. From Demagogue to Democrat*, journalist Ed Moloney examines a number of possible reasons for his conversion so late in life.

In 2004 Paisley had a serious illness requiring a hospital stay of more than a week. According to his son Kyle he was at death's door. But the man himself would have none of it. On emerging, he raged against those who suggested he was human.

'I hope to take a few thousand pounds off some newspapers who lied about me. And I would say it is just because I happen to be a Protestant and journalists happen to be Romanists that they think they can take it out on me.' The spots had not changed.

It was of course necessary to insist he was in good health if he was to take his place at the head of a delegation at Leeds Castle later in the year to meet with Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern and White House representative Mitchell Reiss to discuss the future of Northern Ireland.

At this time, according to Moloney, Paisley had in mind that he wanted the post of First Minister and it is possible that his recent illness made him more amenable to compromise.

It was another two years before the Leeds discussions bore fruit, this time at St Andrews. In the interim, there was the robbery of Â£26.5 million from the Northern Bank and the killing of Robert McCartney, the first almost certainly with the approval of the top echelons of the IRA, the second a piece of thuggery that involved the organisation in covering up murder by some of its members.

These were real life updates on Gerry Adams' famous comment to his followers in an earlier ceasefire: 'We have not gone away, you know.'

They allowed Paisley — indeed demanded of him — a suspension of contact with Sinn Fein.

Moloney believes Paisley never relished confrontation. He could dish out vitriol from the pulpit or the hustings, but face-to-face he was a poor negotiator. Certainly he was no match for Tony Blair, whose main weapon was flattery and charm.

But Peter Robinson, Paisley's number two, was made of sterner stuff — 'invariably unsmiling and grimly oozing acrimony ... Paisley with balls'. He kept a close eye on the negotiations, ensuring that his boss did not give everything away 'just for a riband to stick in his coat'.

And there were ribands. At the time of St Andrews, Paisley was a Privy Councillor and his wife Eileen was in the House of Lords. She appears to have had a major influence in persuading him that he should make peace.

In his subsequent statements, he makes reference to children and grandchildren and his responsibility to future generations, sentiments that may have been inspired by her. They were certainly not used when he was doing his Grand Old Duke of York impersonations in his earlier career.

In the end, the overarching impression is of a very human man, unable or unwilling to see the inconsistency of the main thread of his life, brought in from the cold by the blandishments of power, privilege and respectability. Chief Minister, Privy Council, House of Lords: how much more respectable can a poor preacher get?

He and Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness were supposed to be equals, but he obviously saw himself as a Prime Minister and to the credit of the Sinn Fein man, he went along with it. To be flattered by Blair, Bush, Clinton and Ahern is one thing, but to be flattered by a man seen as the IRA in a suit! Now that's conversion.

That he has lost the moderatorship of the church he himself founded and has been persuaded to resign as First Minister, almost certainly against his will, adds an element of nemesis — sad or well deserved, take your pick — to his fading years.

All that being said, all the inconsistency, all the fascist-style gatherings of his youth, all the marching up to the top of the hill, all the ranting in Westminster and Strasbourg, we are left with one incontrovertible fact: for 12 months, Northern Ireland has functioned like a normal state.

And just as Ian Paisley can be blamed for some of the deaths and maimings of a war that lasted 40 years, he can also claim some credit for the one year of peace and prosperity.

There is one final thought. If Paisley was indeed at death's door in 2004, isn't it just possible that he had some inkling that there might be an ultimate reckoning for a lifetime of hatred and

incitement to violence? A Pauline conversion, perhaps.

Fence-sitter seeks balance on same-sex marriage

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

The 2020 Summit has put the bill of rights question back on the agenda. Cardinal George Pell has come out fighting, opposing a bill of rights in any form. I am more of a fence sitter — I see pros and cons.

So let me consider an instance of the major problem with bills of rights: some judges are tempted to extend their reach, running ahead of the public in forcing a social agenda.



This month, the Californian Supreme Court became the second State superior court in the US to uphold same sex marriage as a constitutional right protected under the State bill of rights. Four years ago, the Massachusetts court had set the first precedent.

Nine other state and federal courts have, with far less media attention, maintained that traditional marriage laws are still valid, there being a rational basis for distinguishing same sex relationships from traditional marriage relationships.

The Californian Court by a narrow majority struck down a State law which resulted from a citizen initiated referendum, stating: 'Only marriage between one man and one woman is valid and recognised in California.'

The Californian legislature had already passed the Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act in 2003, which gave gay and lesbian couples the same substantive rights and privileges as married couples.

Here in Australia, we are also debating same sex marriage, but without judges buying into the question. Last month, Robert McClelland, the Commonwealth Attorney-General, announced: 'The Rudd Government is delivering on its election commitment to remove discrimination against people in same-sex relationships from a wide range of Commonwealth laws and programs.'

He added that, 'In keeping with the election commitment, the changes do not alter marriage laws.'

Asked whether the government would permit a marriage ceremony for a same sex couple, he replied, 'No, these reforms won't change the Marriage Act ... the government regards marriage as being between a man and a woman, and we don't support any measures that seek to mimic that process.'

There have been tensions between the Rudd Government and the ACT Government on this issue. On 19 May, the ACT Civil Partnerships Act 2008 came into effect. It provides 'a way for two adults who are in a relationship as a couple, regardless of their sex, to have their relationship legally recognised by registration as a civil partnership'.

For the moment, the major political parties in our Commonwealth Parliament have assessed that the community is happy to endorse a raft of measures guaranteeing there is no financial or other discrimination against same sex couples. At the same time they have decided the institution of civil marriage should be maintained as a relationship between one man and one woman who are not closely related.

There are still many Australians who view marriage as a unique institution involving a man and a woman who are usually open to bearing each other's children. Younger Australians may well develop a different view of marriage, not just because of the greater public acknowledgement of gay and lesbian relationships, but also because of the advances in technology which widen the possibilities for shared parenthood.

The state has a legitimate interest in maintaining social contours that enhance the prospects that children will be born into a family unit where there is a father and a mother, where the genetic, gestational and nurturing parents are one and the same.

In debating bills of rights, we need to consider whether contested social reforms like same sex marriage are best resolved by elected legislators acting on advice from law reform commissions, community lobby groups and committees of experts, or by judges making determinations according to open textured provisions of a bill of rights.

For example, is the issue of same sex marriage which divides the Commonwealth and ACT governments best resolved by the political process playing itself out, or by the High Court making a decision whether the restriction of marriage to opposite sex partners is consistent with the ACT Human Rights Act? Some judges might like to force the social pace by deciding homosexual persons in the ACT have an equality right 'to marry' their partners.

On such social questions we tend to track with equivalent societies like the US, but without the social angst we see presently played out in California, where the recent court decision will flow over into the US presidential campaign and will likely result in yet another citizen initiated referendum negating the court decision.

We need to determine the best constitutional/legal/political process for agitating and resolving this and other hotly contested moral and political issues.

There are opponents of same sex marriage who have no desire to discriminate against same sex couples. Without animus or prejudice, they just do not think that a loving, monogamous same sex relationship is the same as their marriage. They see civil and common law marriage as a social institution for nurturing the next generation. They do not see same sex relationships

as being primarily about producing and raising children.

Whichever way the debate on same sex, civil marriage ultimately resolves itself, I cannot see that it would be assisted in Australia by judges becoming involved as the arbiters of what is rational and fair. Meanwhile, those of us who do not live in Victoria or the ACT will be able to watch developments with their new bills of rights and decide whether the benefits outweigh the costs on issues less contested than same sex marriage.

GM patents exploit the poor

GUEST EDITORIAL

Charles Rue



My work colleagues in Eastern Asia and Latin America have witnessed the negative effects of genetically modified crops on the farmers they work with.

Farmers in the developing world have been used as guinea pigs. Film stars, employed by biotech companies as PR agents, con farmers into buying GM seed with promises of increased crop yields.

This is a lie. Neither GM cotton yields in India nor GM soy bean yields in Latin America have increased.

Unsuitable cotton crops in India have failed. The net result is that the farmers who borrowed money to buy the failed GM seed cannot pay back their debts. Hundreds have committed suicide in despair.

GM also undermines farmers' practice of saving and swapping seeds for their next crop, by contaminating the traditional seed banks. The multiple varieties developed by these farmers over thousands of years to cope with varied soil and weather conditions were their insurance policy, but seed contamination destroys this insurance.

Destroying natural seed banks has worldwide implications for the bio-diversity of staple food crops, exposing nations to starvation as countries lose their food security.

Australia has aligned itself with countries such as the USA and Switzerland in implementing the Trade Related Intellectual Properties Agreement (TRIPs). GM companies use international patenting laws as their legal mechanism of control and extortion.

Often the seeds that are patented as GM varieties capture traits which were first bred into crops by farmers in the developing world. These poor farmers are robbed twice over.

GM companies claim that GM is needed to feed the hungry of the world. The Vatican was almost conned into supporting this PR line and was stopped three years ago by the lobbying of my fellow Columbans and Jesuits from southern Africa.

Rumour has it that the PR companies have again lobbied the Vatican for its support of GM on the pretext that it will feed the world. If so, this is blatant lying and must be opposed.

Brazil produces plenty of food, has large exports and, notably, grows plenty of GM crops. Yet 40 per cent of its people go to bed hungry. GM is about making money, not about feeding

the hungry.

The proposal by GM companies to insert a terminator gene into living organisms to make them infertile and so guarantee company profits from patents shows how much they really care about feeding the hungry.

Some Australian states, including Victoria and New South Wales, have lifted the moratorium on GM crops, although it was extended in South Australia. When Australia permits the growing of GM crops locally and supports the international agreement on patenting laws, it is cooperating in ripping off the poor of the world.

I challenge the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Tony Burke, to stop listening to the pro-GM economic analysis from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and listen to the experience of poor farmers in developing countries.