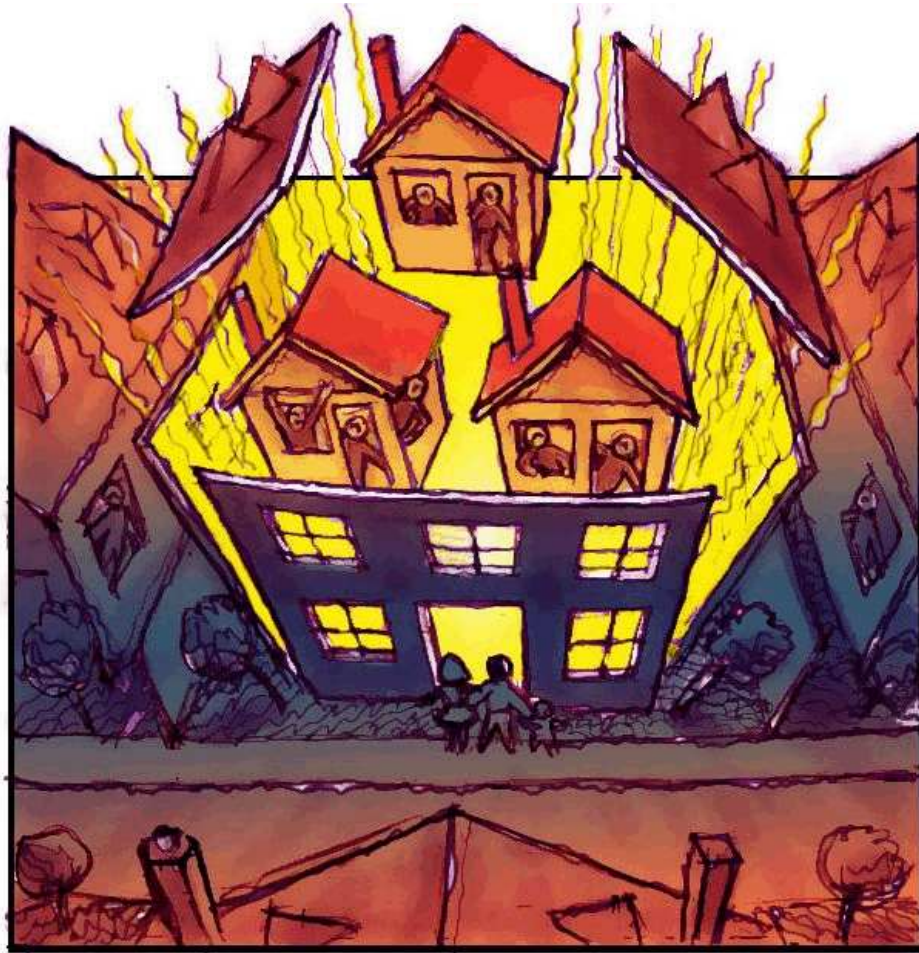


Restocking the global pantry <i>James Ingram</i>	1
'Still angry' over Palm Island custody death <i>Pat Mullins</i>	3
Egyptian musicians' night in limbo <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	5
Catholic teaching affirms freedom that may annoy pilgrims <i>Frank Brennan</i>	7
Her words' worth <i>Morag Fraser</i>	9
Paid leave fans the maternal flame <i>Jen Vuk</i>	11
Saddam's neck <i>Various</i>	14
Guilt edged leaders <i>Gillian Bouras</i>	22
Zimbabwe needs the ballot, not the bullet <i>Oskar Wermter</i>	24
The place of plastic <i>Michael Mullins</i>	26
Democrats' bastard demise <i>Tony Smith</i>	28
Aboriginal voices resist colonial history <i>Kevin Brophy</i>	31
The truth about coal climate 'solutions' <i>Tony Kevin</i>	33
Life becomes her <i>Tony Kevin</i>	35
Incivility trumps the empty dance of manners <i>Brian Doyle</i>	37
In bed with the secular spirit <i>James McEvoy</i>	39
Them blackfellas <i>Chenoah Ellis</i>	41
The terror that ended World War II <i>Frank Brennan</i>	44
Taking housing back from the banks <i>Chris Warren</i>	47
The skinny on 'fat' Australia <i>Tim Kroenert and Andrew Hamilton</i>	49



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Restocking the global pantry

HUMAN RIGHTS

James Ingram



The outcome of the recent World Food Summit attracted little reporting in the Australian media. Unfortunately the focus as usual was on personalities, notably the attendance of Presidents Mugabe and Ahmadi-nejad. Otherwise it was not seen as especially newsworthy.

To expect the Rome summit to reach concrete plans of action is to misunderstand the function of this kind of global conference. Its importance lay in the fact that its purpose was to bring home to national leaders two things. First that feeding the world population in the coming decades is as big a challenge as sufficiently constraining global greenhouse gas emissions. Second, that the two issues are connected.

Over the last 30 years investment in agriculture in developing countries has fallen away. Official development assistance to the agricultural sector fell from about 18 per cent of total aid to around 3.5 per cent in 2004. Other sectors such as 'security', governance and democratisation became more fashionable.

Donors and recipients have forgotten that the foundation of economic development in poor countries remains a sustained rise in agricultural productivity. For most of the last 30 years food has been cheap and stocks high. Surpluses in developed countries meant food aid was abundant. The consequence for some food deficit poor countries was a preferential shift in demand for imported wheat and rice in place of traditional staples.

With food stocks falling food aid is a diminishing resource. The United Nations World Food Program reports food aid deliveries in 2007 fell by 15 per cent to 5.9 million tons, their lowest level since records began in 1961. As a consequence it has become difficult even to supply sufficient food to the victims of natural disasters and those displaced by armed conflict.

Quite correctly the Rome meeting did not emphasise food aid as such, though it did refer to the need for the relevant UN agencies to be assured of the 'resources', that is, cash or food aid, to 'enhance safety net programs through local or regional purchase of food'.

Some of the same adverse effects of climate change on agricultural output that we worry about in Australia are beginning to be evident also in much of Africa and Asia. Appropriately the Summit saw it as 'essential to address the fundamental question of how to increase the resilience of present food production systems to challenges posed by climate change'.

To that end it called for a 'decisive step up in science and technology for food and agriculture' and for a reduction in 'trade barriers and market distorting policies'.

On the whole the international community has a poor record in taking action to implement agreed general principles, but their articulation is an essential first step. Meeting the climate change challenge is daunting enough. At the same time food production must be increased enormously in the next decades not just to keep people alive but also to enable the billion or more expected to move out of poverty to enjoy more varied diets.

Making real progress on the food and climate fronts will require strong, disinterested leadership. Ideally this should come from the UN Secretary General. Ban ki-moon's attendance and involvement at the Rome Summit may signal that he seeks to do so beyond issues of peace and security which have preoccupied his predecessors. He has since stated that he will focus on the issue of food security at the meeting this month of the G8.

In his keynote message to the Rome Summit Pope Benedict XVI called for 'new strategies' to promote food production. The Vatican intends to play its part. The Pontifical Academy of Science is establishing an expert panel to consider contentious issues surrounding genetically modified foods.

The Summit failed to deal with this issue although many scientists are convinced that without them it will not be possible to meet future global food needs.

Republished courtesy the [East Asia Forum](#) blog.

'Still angry' over Palm Island custody death

BOOK REVIEW

Pat Mullins

Waters, Jeff, *Gone for a Song: A Death in Custody on Palm Island*, ABC Books, 2008, RRP \$24.95, ISBN 9780733322167

ABC journalist Jeff Waters gives a highly readable account of the death in police custody of Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island in November 2004, the subsequent reaction of the community, and the process leading to the eventual acquittal of the police officer involved.

After reading and re-reading his work Waters describes his reaction as 'still angry'. He hopes his readers 'become so too.'

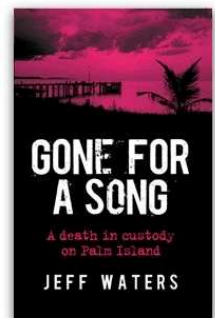
The book succeeded with me. I became angry at two levels. The first was for the tragic waste of a life and consequent pain and misery to all concerned in such trivial circumstances — a drunken altercation in the early morning. The other is sheer frustration at how often events like this and other expressions of futility and pain occur in Aboriginal communities.

Waters situates the event in the context of the history of Palm Island and race relations in Queensland. Palm Island was a penal colony for Indigenous people from all over North Queensland and the Torres Strait. Over the years, attempts at assertiveness have been quickly crushed. Waters describes Queensland as a 'racist state' where anti-Indigenous sentiment lays just beneath the surface — hence the strong reactions in terms of popular and political support for the police in this case.

Such events are not restricted to Queensland nor are they confined to penal communities or communities under government or church management, as the *Inquiry into Black Deaths in Custody* shows. The Mulrunji incident is an example of the failure of the security and justice systems to serve the interests of Indigenous people almost everywhere.

Community leader Brad Foster echoed the sentiments of Indigenous people across the land when he said 'the people of Palm Island want to see a fair hearing — at the moment they're not going to get a fair hearing under the process ... [Mulrunji's family has] been saying all along that the system's flawed — they feel that it's already been stitched up from the start.'

It is not only the security and justice systems which are impenetrable to large numbers of Indigenous people. With higher than average unemployment, high drop-out rates from the education system and life expectancy 20 years less for Indigenous people the conclusion follows that they also have inadequate access to the economic, educational and health systems.



Mulrunji's death is a tragedy in any terms. But it is tragic in the wider context of a nationwide malaise whereby access to the most cherished institutions of western democracy is unavailable to many Indigenous people. And that makes me, as an Australian, not just frustrated but also ashamed.

Egyptian musicians' night in limbo

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

***The Band's Visit*: 86 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Eran Kolirin. Starring: Sasson Gabai, Ronit Elkabetz, Saleh Bakri, Khalifa Natour, Shlomi Avraham**



During the opening seconds of *The Band's Visit*, the camera lingers on a white bus parked at an airport in Israel. After a few moments the bus trundles aside, like the rickety curtain in an amateur theatre, to reveal a line of eight men in sky blue uniform.

They are the Alexandria Police Orchestra, invited to perform at the opening of a new cultural centre. Standing at ease with pressed uniforms and starched-cotton dignity, they wait, just long enough for their patience to seem absurd. Someone has forgotten them.

From this first instance, *The Band's Visit* strikes a tone that is at once funny and sad. It's a delicate balance that is sustained throughout the short, understated film, which prods cross-cultural disparity for gentle humour and stirs the humanity of its simple story.

The band members find themselves stranded in a nearby, isolated township, and at the mercy of the hospitality of the staff of a shabby diner. The film subsequently focuses on the particular experiences of three of the musicians.

Conductor Tawfiq Zacharya (Gabai), softly spoken, eminently respectable and tinged with secret grief, is taken under the wing of the diner's gregarious owner, Dina (Elkabetz). It seems she views him as a potential sexual conquest, but there's affection as well. The evening they share is more intimate than a physical encounter. It provides the opportunity for Tawfiq to surrender his sadness, even if ultimately the opportunity is missed.

Young lothario Haled (Bakri) — accustomed to wooing girls with a few short bars of 'My Funny Valentine' — finds himself playing the reluctant cupid when he goes out on the town with the hapless Papi (Shlomi Avraham) and his luckless date.

Previously Haled has been both a son-figure and a rival to the band leader Tawfiq. The film's juxtaposition of their contrasting experiences reveals the complexity of their — ostensibly, merely antagonistic — feelings towards each other.

Meanwhile, veteran clarinet player and aspiring conductor Simon (Natour) intermittently ponders the concerto he had begun to write before he got married. In his host's troubled family home, he may find an unexpected ending to his interrupted masterpiece.

Promotional material describes this as a film about a 'lost band in a lost town'. It is important that the story takes place within a social vacuum. It's a night spent in limbo where

the characters, unable to move forward, are forced into stillness in order that they may seek within and try to find themselves. In some cases, they succeed.

Catholic teaching affirms freedom that may annoy pilgrims

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

The NSW Government's controversial Amendment to the World Youth Day Act is a dreadful interference with civil liberties, and contrary to the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching on human rights.

As an Australian Catholic lawyer, I am saddened that the state has seen fit to curtail civil liberties further in this instance than they have for other significant international events hosted in Sydney.

The great Catholic document on human rights is [Pacem In Terris](#), the 1963 encyclical of Pope John XXIII. He said:

It is generally accepted today that the common good is best safeguarded when personal rights and duties are guaranteed. The chief concern of civil authorities must therefore be to ensure that these rights are recognised, respected, coordinated, defended and promoted, and that each individual is enabled to perform his duties more easily. For to safeguard the inviolable rights of the human person, and to facilitate the performance of his duties, is the principal duty of every public authority.

Thus any government which refused to recognise human rights or acted in violation of them, would not only fail in its duty; its decrees would be wholly lacking in binding force.

One of the principal duties of any government, moreover, is the suitable and adequate superintendence and coordination of men's respective rights in society.

This must be done in such a way that the exercise of their rights by certain citizens does not obstruct other citizens in the exercise of theirs; that the individual, standing upon his own rights, does not impede others in the performance of their duties; and that the rights of all be effectively safeguarded, and completely restored if they have been violated.

No fair application of these principles would permit an extension of police powers simply to preclude protesters from causing annoyance to pilgrims attending World Youth Day.

There is presently strong debate in Australia about the desirability of a bill of rights. The NSW Government is strongly opposed. The Victorian Labor Government is strongly in favour, having enacted its own [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#).

There is no way the Victorian parliament would have passed a law authorising police to stop protesters simply from causing annoyance to pilgrims.



Any Victorian regulation like that made by the NSW Government would be struck down by the Victorian Supreme Court as being contrary to section 15 of the Victorian Charter, which states that every person has the right to hold an opinion without interference and the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

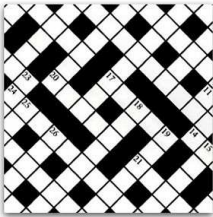
Limitation on such rights in Victoria and the ACT is now permitted only if the limitation can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

The rights of law abiding, peaceful protesters at WYD need to be 'recognised, respected, coordinated, defended and promoted', just as surely as the rights of the pilgrims. The rights of free speech and assembly should not be curtailed only because visiting pilgrims might be annoyed or inconvenienced in public places.

Her words' worth

EUOLOGY

Morag Fraser



Sister Joan Nowotny IBVM (18 August 1925 – 29 June 2008) devised Eureka Street's cryptic crosswords from 1992 until the final print edition in 2006. Former editor Morag Fraser pays tribute, and for old time's sake we offer one of Sister Joan's crosswords [here](#) to keep the addicts busy. [Solution](#)

All good magazines have pages designed to appease the terminally addicted and give succour to the ritually obsessed. So when we began *Eureka Street* in 1991, it was a lay-down misère that we would publish a cryptic crossword. A hard one. Not perhaps as hard as the *Times* crossword that the likes of Inspector Morse would finish in a contemptuous 12 minutes while simultaneously downing a pint in The White Horse and solving a murder in Jericho. But hard enough to tease and satisfy. Who would devise it?

I wish I remember how we arrived at Joan Nowotny. It might have been via a trumpeted competition or a stern instruction from a Jesuit Lord-who-must-be-obeyed, but I like to believe it was divinely ordained that it should be Joan, only and always Joan, who would keep us gridded, intellectually tempered and clued up (her clues were so very *mondaine*).

There are few certainties in the publishing business, but from the *Eureka Street* crossword's inception in 1992 to the magazine's final print edition in 2006, there was Joan, always on time, the crossword faxed on two pages of hard copy inscribed in a round and stylish hand that reminded me of the cryptic manuscript annotations of another formidable woman, Sister Mary Dominic, who had made a pianist out of my no less formidable mother. I fancy that the three women might now meet in a higher place, and I would not dare guess their conversation.

I never managed to do — let alone complete — one of Joan's cryptics (Greek to me) but Kate Manton, who was both a fine assistant editor and logically inclined, used to entertain herself by finishing the crossword as soon as it came in.

Kate swore it was an efficient way of proofreading. And who was I, cryptically challenged, to gainsay her?

I think part of Kate's fun was to try to catch Joan in a mistake. Telephone calls would go back and forth. From my editorial fastness I would hear to their exchanges the way one hears to a conversation in Swahili, or the mobile exchanges of teenage girls — with bemused incomprehension.

But I did understand how to recompense Joan for her freely given labours. In Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia there are now about seven licensed grocers or purveyors of fine wines who understand precisely what is meant by a nun's mixed dozen. Joan had a

discriminating palate and a demanding social calendar, so we would coordinate the arrival of the mixed dozen to fit: more cabernet sauvignon in winter, and two dozen, not one, with some sparkling, for the hectic round of engagements leading up to Christmas.

The licensed grocer (Turkish?) in Flemington took longest to adjust to the idea that he was boxing up Clare Valley Shiraz or Mornington Peninsula pinot for a Sister Joan ('Is she some kind of feminist?'), but even he grew eventually to enjoy the idea.

There were many facets to Joan Nowotny. We saw the sparkling witty woman who never once let us down. If she would sometimes detour out of clues and into theology or delicious gossip, then that was a blessed bonus.

Go well Joan. Thank you, and God bless.

Sister Joan Nowotny's early years were spent in Brisbane where she was educated at Loreto Convent, Coorparoo. After joining the Loreto Sisters she studied Arts at Melbourne and subsequently graduated as a Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy in philosophy at University of Toronto. She taught for many years in Loreto schools, serving as principal at Normanhurst and Kirribilli.

Later she moved into tertiary education. She was Principal of the Loreto University Colleges in Hobart and Melbourne, and taught philosophy at Yarra Theological Union from 1980 to 2003. There she was Academic Dean and Vice President.

Paid leave fans the maternal flame

POLITICS

Jen Vuk

Few issues continue to generate as much talkback radio, op-ed columns and water-cooler moments as paid maternity leave (and on a lesser scale, paternity leave). While most Australians seem to accept a working woman's right to paid leave, the main sticking point is an economic one: who should foot the bill?



Despite the dust raised by such debate, in the decade of the former Coalition Government, paid maternity leave continued to be the proverbial elephant in the room.

Last month, the Labor Government nudged the elephant ever so slightly towards the door.

Adding to the changes to the family tax benefit system, as of January next year the baby bonus will be paid in fortnightly instalments, paving the way for easy conversion to a paid leave scheme. But the greatest indicator of a political change of heart was the joint announcement of a government-sponsored enquiry into paid maternity leave by research and advisory body The Productivity Commission.

Let's not hold our breath just yet. The commission is not expected to report back before February next year. Yes, despite Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard's sunny assertion that the government is after 'a short-term, focused inquiry', there's an overriding sense of a government stalling for time.

There's good reason past governments have washed their hands of a 'workable' paid maternity leave scheme. As far as policy goes it's undeniably complex and incendiary. 'Uniting all groups is strong support for government funding. But beyond that, the disputes begin,' wrote *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Adele Horin last month.

'How much paid leave should women get — 14 weeks or six months? And should they get the minimum wage, full wage replacement, or something in between? Just as important is whether employers should contribute, or whether taxpayers should shoulder the entire cost. And fathers? Do they have to wait?'

The cynic in me would argue that the Rudd Government's push for an inquiry simply responded to the zeitgeist. The Retail Traders Association, a group that has long resisted the concept of paid maternity leave, now supports it. RTA shares its vision for 14 weeks at minimum pay funded by the government with none other than the ACTU.

Who would have thought we'd see the day that traders would sidle up to the union? But

such is the capricious nature of the debate.

According to former senior public servant Julia Perry, who drafted the inaugural proposal, relying solely on government funding is wishful thinking. Perry argues that a fair system means divvying the cost between employees, employers and the taxpayer.

The two camps do quietly agree on one issue. The baby bonus would be phased out and the funds reallocated among working women. So it's true what they say. We can't have our cake and a baby bonus, too.

It does beggar belief, though, doesn't it? Surely someone in parliament understands that two wrongs don't make a right. As author of *Motherhood: How Should We Care for Our Children?* Anne Manne points out, mothers who look after children at home are nothing if not working, too.

When seeking to implement a new equitable scheme for mothers, one group of women must not be made a scapegoat for another.

That's not to say that the baby bonus, while much appreciated, ticked all the right boxes.

As columnist Gerard Henderson recently pointed out in the *Sydney Morning Herald*: 'Under the Howard government scheme, a woman on an income of \$200,000 a year would receive \$5000 — as would a woman on \$30,000 a year. There is no doubt as to whom the baby bonus was more significant.'

Parenting deserves more than being thrown a bonus. It deserves to be exulted and supported in its many and varied forms — now and into the future. That's why it's imperative to get the paid maternity leave scheme just right. With so many women in the workforce it's the linchpin upon which other 'family-friendly' policies depend.

Setting up a payment template and launching a productivity report are steps in the right direction. But this is not a time for navel gazing. To ensure that Australia has the best possible scheme, we need to look closely at overseas models that work. And those that don't.

The noise is positive, but I see no muscle behind the move yet. Neither do I see real commitment to change. A decision hinges upon an inquiry 10 months away. As 2002's much lauded study into Australia's parental leave by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission showed, the issue marked 'urgent' today can easily find its way to the bottom of the in-tray.

With a government still in its infancy, teething problems are to be expected, but some analysts are predicting something far worse: a leader who overshot the mark and is now retracing his steps. If there's even a kernel of truth to this then we're in trouble. A paid maternity leave scheme — a policy that has been almost 30 years in the making — can't afford a backward glance. It needs a great leap forward.

Saddam's neck

POETRY

Various

East End

miles davis thru
stereo speakers
brasy honeyed
jazz tho muted
morose leached
of potency only
a treacly syrupy
glibber of notes
those saxy lines
swelling upward
from a coup's
dark low-wound
window butting
the balcony like
raunchy baubles
bumping off into
the ozone on a
fuzz of glamour
girl champagne.

Thom Sullivan

Praying

Praying near some long grass

I saw
what I had looked at
and not seen —
a praying mantis.
Chlorophyll-green,
it glowed the same way
as a grass stalk
when the sun
shone through its body
Even its structure —
one blade
emerging
from another.
Having been seen
it stayed so still
it took my breath away
disappearing
back into the grass
it had already become.

Cathy Altmann

Middle age

Everyone his own Hamlet when young.
Struggling, but sure power dwells within;
a river of nobility to drown the unjust
who would poison our ears. Tourniquet
of rapt youth dissolves any stinging venom.

Hamlet never made it to be fat and forty,
crucified by relentless, quivering justice.
Falstaffs on Harleys, hoggishly free
we chuckle and clown, farting over hills,
helmeted by our thicker, stretching skins.
P. S. Cottier

Immortality

A small boy sits on a tea-towel.
The sky is the colour of wet cement and just as cold.
Perhaps, he thinks, I could scratch my name in it.
Michele Peterie

Magi

And when at last we braved the ways
Of that cold, insisting star,
And came to the stable,
We paused at the brink
Of that warm and breathing place,
Where embassies of birds
Were roosting in their pious eaves,
And the scent of snow
Was rumoured on the music of the wind;
And fell upon our kingly knees,
Discomposed of kingliness,
In this place of small entreties,

Before a child
Whose eyes so vastly knew
The light of royal possibilities
Within the dusk of every heart.

Grant Fraser

Body Language

I hang my head
Between my knees
As a crutch to support me
So I won't see reality.
My arms, like a protective mother
Shield me from biting love
And getting attacked by savage lust ... |
Stops those coming to me
As a woman. Wanting me
Because I sit as a child.
Although my brain beats
With head breaking sadness,
I am encompassed by a dome of withdrawal.
Yet love is shining its eye
Through the crevices of my body
Making sure I don't drift too faraway

Kerry Ridgway

mining, the moon and whisky

along a lonely

stretch of river
smoke escapes from
a short chimney
overhanging rock shadows
the dusty quarry
hills stained with
rust and scars
chipped deep wounds
long dark tunnels
blokes under the
light of moons
bruised here tarnished
there warped with
dents cracked and
peeling in corners
long cold nights
same old company
whisky makes it
worth their while

Jodie Hawthorn

sun

in the just
past the mid
afternoon sun
which struck
your face

you were able
to close your
eyes & breathe it

a crocheted rug

pulled to your chin

Rory Harris

Kabul

concealed in her skin,
the girl does not belong
where marriages are revoked
the decency of the burqa
covers her — but
 all day
 men glimpse
 her silver nails
 and understand

Ann L. Healey

Saddam's Neck

I
n a loop around his neck the noose around his neck in a loop in
a
-
l
o

o
p
-
a
r
o
u
n
d
-
h
i
s
-
n
e
c
k
-
i
n
-
a
-
l
o
o

p
around
his neck
on CNN
the noose
around his
neck over and
over again in a loop
the noose around his neck

in a loop around his neck on CNN the noose around his neck in a loop
on CNN in a loop around the noose around his neck in a loop on CNN

James Morris

Guilt edged leaders

POLITICS

Gillian Bouras



Guilt comes in many different cans. Off the top of my head I can think of labels like Catholic, nonconformist, evangelical, puritan, Jewish, refugee, survivor, privilege, and leadership guilt.

Protean guilt is one characteristic that distinguishes us from the animals. In a marvellous poem called 'In Praise of Feeling Bad About Yourself', Wislawa Szymborska points out that:

The buzzard never says it is to blame

The panther wouldn't know what scruples mean.

My expatriate telescope is ever trained on the Wide Brown Land, and so has focused lately on what is being called Iguanagate. It would seem fair to say that Belinda Neal MHR, and her husband John Della Bosca, fall into the privilege category, even if not into the top leadership bracket.

I'm so old that I can recall concepts such as *noblesse oblige*. N.O. is hardly relevant in these troubled times, but surely the notion that privilege, leadership and responsibility go together still has some meaning. Not to mention ideas involving dignity, decorum and good manners.

I gather that Ms Neal threw a tantrum when asked to move to another table at the Iguana Waterfront Club. I also gather that tantrums seem to be pretty much her style, but that she crossed certain boundaries when her language became abusive, when she allegedly threatened the club with the loss of its liquor licence, employees with the loss of their jobs, and then asked, not at all *sotto voce*: 'Don't you know who I am?'

When hearing such questions people of my generation are inexorably reminded of historian Lord Acton, who famously opined that power tends to corrupt. The noble Lord had a point — still has, for it is also alleged that Della Bosca bullied the club staff into writing a letter of apology, which he himself may have dictated.

Lord Acton, a product of his time, considered that great men are nearly always bad men. Today he would have to dumb down: forget great, remember equality. Today some prominent people are not necessarily bad, but more often stupid and selfish. They also have a misplaced sense of entitlement.

Kevin Rudd acted quickly and efficiently in directing Ms Neal to anger management classes. Good move, for angry she certainly is. But I wonder whether she and her husband feel any guilt. Do they feel they have acted wrongly? Or do they feel they are being picked on?

References to a media beat-up seem to indicate the latter.

The can labelled leadership guilt is more like a can of worms. Neal and Della Bosca can hardly be compared with Bush, Blair and Howard, but are arguably on the same continuum. I, for one, cannot understand how Bush, Blair and Howard can sleep at night: guilt and regret of the most painful kind must surely get in the way of repose.

Iguanagate pales into insignificance in comparison. And yet. Will Neal and Della Bosca take responsibility for bullying behaviour? Do they regret having threatened people's livelihoods, self-esteem and confidence?

Egomania and narcissism are, alas, features of a successful politician's personality, so in such personalities it is hardly surprising to note a sense of infallibility as well, and a yawning black hole, a psychic space, where empathy ought to be.

'Only connect,' wrote E. M. Forster, and ordinary people experience guilt most often when we feel or become aware that we have unjustifiably severed that human connection in some way.

The way in which leaders of nations sever that connection is ever obvious. In the case of dictators it is expected: reducing the masses to the lowest point is what dictatorship, as distinct from almost-forgotten benevolent despotism, is all about. Guilt is not a consideration in the psyches of Mugabe and the Burmese generals.

Messrs Bush, Blair and Howard are different in the sense that they are elected leaders who may have done a good job of rationalising with regard to the invasion of Iraq. Five years down the track it is hard for any member of the public to know how these men feel about the deception and manipulation that have undoubtedly gone on.

Leadership and guilt may be mutually exclusive terms. Or guilt may have a sell-by date.

Some leaders and some of the privileged are like the buzzard: they never say they are to blame.

What do Neal and Della Bosca say?

Zimbabwe needs the ballot, not the bullet

POLITICS

Oskar Wermter

Gangs of party youth, drunk and high on marijuana, rampaged at night through blocks of flats in Mbare, an old and very much neglected working class area of Zimbabwe's capital Harare. Anyone suspected of having voted for the opposition, opting against the 'ruling party' of Robert Mugabe was assaulted.



The chairman of our parish council had all his furniture thrown out of his tiny flat. He was beaten and left out in the cold with his wife and small children. Anyone who gives him shelter must be prepared to suffer the same fate.

An elderly parishioner, mother of a candidate for the opposition party, is now in hospital with serious injuries. Night after night gangs of fanaticised party youth knock at people's doors and force them to attend all-night brainwashing sessions where they must sing 'revolutionary' songs and shout party slogans.

The 'ruling party' which came to power after a long, bitter and bloody 'war of liberation' is re-living those glorious days when they were fighting the racist Rhodesian regime under Ian Smith. The same tactics then and now. Power comes though the bullet, not the ballot, through force and violence, not through free debate and the democratic vote.

Mugabe is still fighting the 'whites', the British and the former colonial powers in general. 'Britain wants to recolonise Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's 'sovereignty' is at stake,' he screams at party rallies which people are forced to attend at gunpoint. 'Anyone voting for the opposition is voting for Rhodesia, colonialism and imperialism.'

Party youth, uneducated, unemployed, frustrated, ignorant and unable to see that their plight is precisely the result of Mugabe's failed policies of patronage and self-enrichment, are high on this ideology of hatred and resentment. When they are killing an opposition member, they think they are destroying an enemy who has committed treason, a traitor, and defending Zimbabwe's 'sovereignty'.

This 'sovereignty' thing justifies the horror of cutting off a woman's feet and a hand, before killing her, as they did recently. The official count is 86 people killed, but a group of independent doctors, worked off their feet treating about 2000 seriously injured victims of violence, think the true figure is more likely to be 500.

The Bishops of Zimbabwe, in their April 2007 pastoral letter 'God hears the cry of the oppressed', said they were aware that 'there are Christians on all sides of the conflict; and there are many Christians sitting on the fence'.

A young father of a family came to me asking for help. A candidate for the opposition party, his house had been burnt down. He was concerned that his party colleagues were tempted to take revenge and burn down the houses of their enemies in the 'ruling party'.

Among those who put fire to his house was a fellow Catholic and parish leader. In the meantime some priests had to go into hiding, some were assaulted, one priest's house was burnt down.

How is all this possible? According to the Bishops of Zimbabwe: 'After Independence [1980], the power and wealth of the tiny white Rhodesian elite was appropriated by an equally exclusive black elite, some of whom have governed the country for the past 27 years through political patronage. Black Zimbabweans today fight for the same basic rights they fought for during the liberation struggle.'

The Bishops wrote in their pre-election pastoral, 'Losing candidates and parties in a free and fair election do not find it difficult to accept defeat'. The same can not be said for Zimbabwe, though. Politics in this country means self-enrichment, and defeat economic ruin. Therefore leaders fight to the death to stay in power.

The ideology of national sovereignty and freedom is only a disguise. Mugabe's claim that 'only God can remove me from power' is blasphemy and expression of his hubris.

'The tyrant seems to imply that he has been put into his position of power by God and that he rules with divine support,' the Jesuit e-newsletter *In Touch* said. 'It is time for Zimbabwe's ruler to accept the will of the people who must be respected as God's sons and daughters.'

The Bishops of Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia have all demanded an immediate end to violence.

The place of plastic

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Plastic is for when when durability is required. It has been in widespread use for only half a century. It has come to be associated with modernity. Indeed water in plastic bottles is almost regarded as a fashion accessory.

Ingenious marketing has conned consumers into believing that tap water is less healthy. In fact bottled water is arguably less healthy, if people are missing out on fluoride available in tap water, or if bacteria accumulate in an opened bottle because the water is not drunk immediately.

Public debate about bottled water is only beginning. A recent discussion paper released by the Edmund Rice Centre calls on consumers of bottled water to be more thoughtful about the consequences of their practice:

‘Have we considered whether it is environmentally, economically and politically sustainable? We need to think more consciously about what we are doing.’

On the other hand, there is some progress towards reducing the use of plastic bags. Earlier this month, the South Australian Government introduced legislation to ban lightweight plastic shopping bags that are used to carry items home from the supermarket.

Unfortunately a mooted national ban was rejected last January, and most other states except Victoria appear to be resisting pressure for a ban in the near future. In Victoria, up to 10 Safeway and Coles supermarkets are being recruited by the State Government for a month-long trial beginning in August. Shoppers at participating supermarkets will pay between 10 and 25 cents per plastic bag. The levy is set to become a major ‘kitchen table’ political issue, with yesterday’s *Herald-Sun* front page story describing it as ‘another financial blow to cash-strapped consumers’.

Like water bottles, the bags are designed for single or short-term use. Because they are durable, they take hundreds of years to break down in landfill. They are produced from plastic polymer, which is derived from non-renewable resources. South Australia’s Zerowaste website asserts that while plastic bags can be recycled, only a tiny proportion of plastic bags are in fact collected and reprocessed.

The website also urges consumers to rethink their use of bin liners. It says using plastic bags to line bins has become an easy, but environmentally unfriendly, alternative to wrapping rubbish or washing bins.

Bin liners have been used for only a few decades. Prior to that, people wrapped rubbish in

newspaper or put it directly into the bin and washed it after emptying. We have come to believe that such practices are necessarily unhygienic. In all likelihood, it's the convenience and modernity of bin liners that appeals to us.

Plastic has its place, when durability is required. The use of plastics in the manufacture of household appliances has enabled them to be priced at a level affordable to most people. But such durability has a significant environmental cost. It is precious, to be used for the sake of necessity rather than convenience.

Democrats' bastard demise

POLITICS

Tony Smith

The party formed in 1977 by Liberal rebel Don Chipp to 'Keep the Bastards Honest' has achieved a great deal. By providing an alternative to the major Labor and Coalition blocs the Australian Democrats rejuvenated politics, increased the electorate's interest in issues and improved numerous bills by advancing sensible amendments.



The rejuvenation was attributable to the party's status as a new force in politics. Free of the organisational and ideological baggage of the major blocs, the Democrats represented the possibility that people of talent could rise quickly through the ranks without becoming cynical.

The Democrats began in an era when equal opportunity was coming to be regarded as a necessary principle for any organisation that aspired to promote fairness and justice. One clear result of the party's open and democratic processes has been the quality of the party's senators, and particularly its leaders.

The older parties might boast of having the occasional woman in high positions — the Democrats entrusted their parliamentary leadership to several.

The strong, rational and compassionate leadership of the late Janine Haines established a style anyone would be proud to follow. Cheryl Kernot was, during her tenure, regarded as the country's most respected politician. Meg Lees and Lyn Allison both coped effectively with turbulent times within the party.

A highlight in terms of encouraging political participation was the election of the relatively young Natasha Stott-Despoja as leader and the Indigenous man Aden Ridgeway as her deputy. The party also endorsed an openly gay man, Brian Greig.

The Democrats' campaigns caused voters to think about a broader range of issues, which forced the major parties to consider their own policies carefully. Because of their relative lack of ideological baggage, the Democrats could address new issues such as equal opportunity and the environment and bring fresh insights to existing ones such as education and small business.

As a result of their confinement to the upper house, the Democrats encouraged the electorate to think in terms of legislative insurance. There is a feeling in parts of the electorate that the government should not have a majority in the upper house — that such a majority might allow them to rubber-stamp executive decisions or adopt radical policies. When a party such as the Democrats has the balance of power, it forces the government to reconsider

legislation and proceed more slowly, enabling it to moderate its aims and behave responsibly.

Although consideration of the GST legislation is regarded as the Democrats' undoing, they did manage to improve the bills. By referring the bills to committees, the Democrats delayed the legislation by some months, during which time the Government, which had argued that the legislation was already perfect, introduced many amendments of its own.

At their best, the Democrats refused to indulge in legislative trade-offs, viewing such compromise of principle as the first step towards cynicism and the valuing of pragmatic power for its own sake.

By their membership of various sorts of Standing, Select and Legislative Committees alongside members of major parties, they often enabled common ground to be found. They gained respect from other senators and encouraged higher standards of debate.

Perhaps the party's great strengths were also its most telling weaknesses. Its members were entitled to vote according to their consciences rather than a party 'whip', and the national membership had to be polled on major issues. This meant that internal disagreements were frequent and difficult to resolve.

Low points for the party included rumours of an affair between leader Janet Powell and another Democrats senator, and the loss of Kernot. Equally telling was the undermining of Stott-Despoja, who was elected by the extra-parliamentary party — some senators, especially Senator Murray, remained loyal to Lees.

Stott-Despoja's deputy Senator Aden Ridgeway was accused of not being supportive enough. Stott-Despoja's chief media officer reported that when asked about his public statements Ridgeway used what became known as the 'Aden defence': he had not expected a particular line of questioning or had been taken out of context.

Perhaps the same indecisiveness can be seen in the way Andrew Bartlett hung onto the leadership despite having admitted to harassing a female senator while inebriated. Lack of quick action made the party a ready target for a hostile media.

When the collective crossbench, and the Democrats specifically, lost the balance of power following the 2004 election, many feared for the future of democracy.

Following the installation of the senators elected at the 2007 poll, the Labor Government will again have to deal with a finely balanced upper house, but the composition of the cross bench will be very different without the Democrats. The Greens, for example, have a tighter ideological approach, and will find it difficult to deal with legislation as openly as the Democrats did.

Should deadlocks and legislative logjams beset the months ahead, people might well wish for the return of the parliamentary style perfected over three decades by the now departed

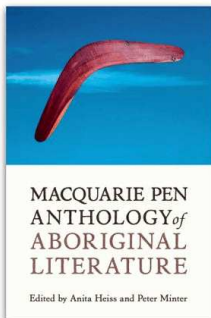
Democrats.

Aboriginal voices resist colonial history

BOOK REVIEW

Kevin Brophy

Heiss, Anita (ed.), Minter, Peter (general ed.): *The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*. Allen and Unwin, 2008, RRP \$39.95, ISBN 9781741754984.



The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature is a 260-page introduction to Aboriginal writers who have, since the 18th century, been taking up the English language to make their presence felt in the face of an imposed history of colonisation.

The writing included is broader than the genres often included under 'literature', though the anthology as a whole suggests a national counter-narrative.

The early parts record Aboriginals experiencing European society from early in the history of contact. The first entry is a brief letter to Mr Philips from Bennelong, written in 1796. It is written with dignity, tolerance and formality as it describes a parlous life of reliance on handouts and rebuffs from his own people, including being abandoned by his wife.

Reading through these early letters, chronicles and petitions I was close to tears. Mary Anne Arthur in 1846 wrote from Flinders Island to the Colonial Secretary: 'I hope the Govr will not let Dr Jeanneret put us into Jail as he likes for nothing at all as he used he says he will do it & frightens us much with his big talk about our writing to the Queen he calls us liars ... I remain, Sir, Your humble Aborigine Child.'

Soon afterwards her husband, Walter, wrote again to the Secretary: '... I did nothing to make Doctor Jeanneret put me into Jail but because I was one of the people who signed the Letter for to be sent to the Governor and because my wife put her name down in it both Doctor Jeanneret and Mrs Jeanneret Called her a Villain ... All I now request of his Excellency is that he will have full Justice done to me the same as he would have done to a white man ...' The name, D. Jeanneret, worthy of a place in a Monty Python sketch, reverberates.

In 1927 Norman Harris wrote to demand from the WA premier 'one law for us all'. The 'Abo', he wrote, has 'not a fare go': 'He is not allowed in a Pub not to have a gun, not to camp on revers because squatters stock are there, he is not to have dogs near stock. He is not to grow grapes because he may make wine and get drunk. They bar him in football and cricket must not be in town to long after dark ... In the North has you know they were never given wages just work for kick in the sturn and a little tucker ...'

This is writing worthy of Jonathan Swift, though if Swift had written it we would know he

was inventing and exaggerating for the sake of spicing his satire. If you open this book to browse, I urge you to read the rest of Norman Harris' letter, which ends with a final instruction: 'Burn this when you are finished with it ...'

By 1938 there was a shift from the poignant to announcements of Aboriginals as Australians. 'You are the New Australians,' William Ferguson and John Patten wrote on Australia Day in 1938, 'but we are the Old Australians. We have in our arteries the blood of the Original Australians.'

Pearl Gibbs continued to record publicly the virtual apartheid operating in Australia in the 1940s when she spoke on a radio broadcast: 'Aborigines are roped off in some of the picture halls, churches and other places. Various papers make crude jokes about us. We are slighted in all sorts of mean and petty ways.'

These hard truths were now tempered by the hand of a fellow citizen stretched across the race divide: 'My friends,' Pearl goes on, 'I'm asking for friendship. We Aborigines need help and encouragement, the same as you white people.'

In 1964 Oodgeroo Noonuccal expressed her concern for her people as fringe dwellers, for the discussion of Aboriginality had moved on from the fate of a conquered people to the place that Aboriginality might find within mainstream Australia.

The wider story here is that of a people resisting the genocidal impulse of an invader. In 1967 Vincent Lingiari, leader of the Gurindji people, wrote, 'In August last year, we walked away from the Wave Hill Cattle Station. It was said that we did this because wages were very poor (only six dollars per week), living conditions fit only for dogs, and rations consisting mainly of salt beef and bread.

'True enough. But we walked away for other reasons as well. To protect our women and our tribe, to try to stand on our own feet. We will never go back there.'

Equality as citizen, soldier, woman and worker had to be won inch by inch from white society.

The later selections detail the flowering of memoir, fiction, plays and poetry as Aboriginal writers engage with contemporary culture. There are brilliant examples from Larissa Behrendt, Lisa Bellear, Tony Birch, Alexis Wright and Kim Scott to name only a few. One has a sense that there is a growing Aboriginal audience for this writing.

The editing achievement of Anita Heiss and Peter Minter is a signal to the wider culture that Australians have more than one story to tell.

The truth about coal climate 'solutions'

ENVIRONMENT

Tony Kevin

We face, in coming weeks, a political tipping point in how Professor Ross Garnaut's Climate Change Review report will be publicly received and debated.

The Garnaut Climate Change Review draft report will be issued publicly on Friday 4 July. A couple of weeks after that, the Government will issue a Green Paper, which, according to Climate Change Minister Senator Penny Wong, 'will outline Government's thinking informed by a range of matters' including the report, advice from within the Government and consultations with business and industry.



Garnaut believes transport fuels should be included in a carbon emissions trading scheme. He told the *Canberra Times* earlier this month that it was 'Kevin Rudd's and Penny Wong's job to decide what they can manage, but I can't see any good reason for excluding transport'.

A carbon emissions price of between \$20 and \$40 per tonne — an average expectation of where the market price might settle — would increase the price of petrol by between 5 and 10 cents per litre.

Neither major party is now committing itself on whether motor fuels should be included in a carbon emissions trading system. The recent public furore over increased petrol prices has spooked them both.

But Malcolm Turnbull (*Canberra Times*, 25 June) sensibly suggests that one option is to 'keep the carbon price across the board, including liquid fuels, but reduce the excise as you impose the carbon price'. In other words, leave the market price unchanged, through Government forgoing the excise tax.

This makes economic and psychological sense. If the carbon emissions trading system is to have any real economic effect, it has to be universal. Once exceptions start to be allowed, everyone will want special treatment and the integrity and credibility of the system will be lost. The burden on those industries left in the system will be proportionately higher, or the system will be watered down so far as to simply become window-dressing.

The purpose of carbon trading is to kick-start a process of real reduction in how we consume fossil fuels, using market forces as the generator of beneficial change. We need an economic jolt to begin to restructure our economy towards non-emitting renewable energy technologies, across the board — in industry, transport, our homes and workplaces. There simply is no time now to tinker with half-measures.

The informed public knows this, but disturbingly we are not included in Senator Wong's list of stakeholders to whom she will listen when considering Garnaut's recommendations. Those inconvenienced by change will always shout louder than the majority — and that means all of us — who stand to benefit from it.

The coal industry has enormous lobbying and decision-corrupting influence over the political process, and I fear it may succeed in diluting Garnaut's recommendations to a level at which they will have no real effect on society's expectations and behaviour.

The recent furore over petrol price increases came at the worst possible time for intelligent public debate of the Garnaut recommendations. Public panic gives the coal industry an enormous opportunity to scaremonger and to push phoney solutions such as conversion of coal or gas into diesel fuel, and generation of hydrogen fuel.

All these so-called solutions emit greenhouse gases as coal and oil do. The only real solution is the fastest possible move to a renewable energy-based economy.

Turnbull's suggestion (not at this stage backed by Coalition parties, which are riding the tiger of public anxiety about motor fuel price rises, looking thereby to maximise their short-term political advantage) is a sensible circuit-breaker. Putting motor fuels within a universal carbon trading system would send the right message to the Australian public, that we are all in the climate change alleviation challenge together.

Commensurately removing the fuel excise tax at the same time would send the important message that the Government understands the burdens that ordinary people — motorists, farmers — are facing from rising fuel prices in a society that depends on petrol or diesel motors for so much of the way we now produce and live.

Prepare for a lot of powerfully funded special interest lobbying against the Garnaut Report when it is issued. The real risk is that the Government will lose its nerve and fudge it.

We, ordinary citizens concerned about the sustainability of our world, are the stakeholders who really matter in this debate. We, the people, must make our voices heard in all political parties in coming weeks. This will be a vital debate.

Life becomes her

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

***Happy-Go-Lucky*: 118 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Mike Leigh. Starring: Sally Hawkins, Alexis Zegerman, Eddie Marsan**



During a rare subdued scene in this colourful comedy, the effervescent heroine Poppy (Hawkins) encounters a homeless man under a bridge at night.

The derelict man is delusional and gibbering, yet where most people would react with fear or disdain, Poppy responds with empathy. She not only approaches but lingers to listen. She may not understand his words, but she perceives his hurt, and his need to be listened to.

It's a revelatory moment, occurring at the end of the first half of the film. Much of what has preceded it is upbeat and frivolous. This is the first indication that there's a darker subtext to UK writer-director Mike Leigh's chosen palette of humour and primary colours.

Poppy is endearing but sometimes infuriating. She has a kind word for everyone, and a grin and gleeful gasp for each sentence she utters. Thirty, single and with an almost-sickly positive outlook, primary school teacher Poppy trampolines for exercise and enjoys an alcohol-driven social life.

Her relationship with flatmate Zoe (Zegerman) epitomises her happy-go-lucky existence. Armed with Leigh's sparkling dialogue, Hawkins and Zegerman are a memorable double act, as Zoe's po-faced one-liners go beat-for-beat with Poppy's rapid-fire gags and guffaws. The ease of their coexistence makes for ecstatic viewing.

Poppy's married and pregnant younger sister Helen (Caroline Martin) provides a point of contrast for Poppy's unfettered lifestyle. Helen lectures Poppy on the lack of structure in her life, but a moment later expresses resentment toward her own idyllic suburban life.

But her words don't indict either lifestyle. They reveal Helen's own insecurities. The tension between personal and social expectations about how best to live emerges as a key theme in the film, particularly in relation to the idea of being an adult, and the versions of 'adulthood' people embrace.

This is played out most dramatically in the antagonistic relationship Poppy shares with her recently acquired driving instructor, Scott (Marsan).

Grumpy and opinionated, Scott initially seems to play the straight man to Poppy's easygoing humour. They rub each other the wrong way, and as the film progresses and some

of its more serious subtexts emerge, the friction leads to emotional broken skin and eruptions.

Scott has cast himself as a rebel, critic and prophet, raging against the oppressions of society while proving to be a most fascist driving instructor.

But the film juxtaposes his anger with that of one of Poppy's young students who has been bullied at home and is now bullying his classmates. The implication is that Scott carries a lot of long-held resentment, which, as an adult, keeps him from wholeness.

To hear him lecture Poppy on the importance of being an individual is, therefore, ironic. If at times Poppy seems flaky, she is, nonetheless, the character who best understands who she is, and why.

Her empathy for the homeless man, the school bully and Scott alike — her ability to see beyond aggression and identify the hurts that lie behind them — affirms both their humanity, and her own.

Incivility trumps the empty dance of manners

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

I knew a man once who never spoke with the slightest courtesy or civility.

Whatever you said, be it hello, how are you, is that your real nose, or were you really once arrested for stealing a camel from a circus, the answers would always be forms of piss off, leave me alone, don't ask stupid questions, are you always such an idiot, or why did your people ever leave the sad wet rock on which they were born.



You think I am exaggerating but I swear I am not.

Yet he was the nicest guy imaginable. Many other people were as startled as I by the paradoxicality of the man. He was a pillar of his community, a veteran and esteemed employee of the brave nonprofit for which he had worked for 30 years, sober as a judge, married, graced with children, a taxpayer, even once a candidate for local government in his town, although he garnered only 90 votes, losing to a woman who taught math.

(Interestingly she died two weeks after taking office, and the town held a special election to fill her seat, and he lost that election also, this time to a man who taught spelling.)

I spent five years working with this man, and they were remarkable years, with many misadventures.

One time we were in a meeting when a very important person proposed a very stupid idea. I was sitting behind my uncivil friend, with two other people, and we looked at each other with fear and trembling, for we knew beyond doubt that he would pop a gasket, melt the polar cap, and heap mountainous abuse on his interlocutor.

Then we would all be summarily fired, and forced back to the toy factories from which we had come, weary of putting the ears on Mr Potato Head all day long.

Indeed he did explode, albeit in memorably calm and incisive fashion. He began obliquely by telling the story about how he had indeed stolen a camel, then observed that what the camel left behind in steaming redolent mounds could and should be compared to some ideas from some people, not to name names or anything.

I still savor the shimmering silence in that room when he finished speaking. A great silence is a remarkable sound.

There were many moments like that, most of them funny, although some were not so

funny, such as the time a doctor told my uncivil friend that his beloved daughter had a tumor the size of a sparrow in her belly, and my friend excoriated the doctor with such foul and vituperative language that his wife hauled him away by the arm weeping with shame and fear.

Later I found him sprawled and sobbing on the floor of a chapel, and I began to realise then that his fury and testiness were masks of some sort, disguises, skins without which perhaps he could not live, for reasons beyond my ken, and perhaps his — who among us can safely say he knows anything of who he is or how he came to be?

As another friend observed, maybe our uncivil friend's snarling mask was a prison that had grown to fit his face. Perhaps he had deliberately tried uncivility when young, perhaps from rage at or exhaustion from the mincing empty dance of manners, perhaps as a way to be different, and had been caught by it, caught in it. Perhaps he even hammered at the bars and wished to be released, for all we knew. But we did not know.

There are lots more stories, like the torrent of oaths with which he flayed a priest who had lied and lied and lied about raping children, or the startling string of oaths he would emit when he smelled the least pomposity or fatuousness or unpreparedness, or the parade of oaths he used whenever he got fed up with the general cultural absorption in sport, or the marching bands of oaths he reserved for brilliant murderous liars like Stalin, or the imaginative oaths he issued when he caught the slightest scent of condescension.

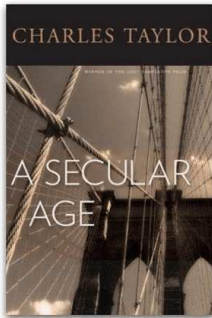
But I'd be weeks telling all those stories, and I should cut to the chase for once, and tell you that eventually he died, and while this grieved me then and saddens me still — because he really was, beneath his brusque and thorny mask, a witty and gentle soul — I savor a story of his passing, told to me by his second son.

A priest had come, at the end, to anoint the dying man and shrive his sins, and my uncivil friend was either consistent to the end, or he ran one last goof on his old friend the priest, for, as the son tells it, the priest slipped and made one incautious remark about death not being an end but a beginning, and my uncivil friend whispered, with one of the very last breaths of his life, 'Piss off, Paul', which, as the son told me, made his children and his wife and the priest roar with laughter, and then weep bitter tears.

In bed with the secular spirit

SPIRITUALITY

James McEvoy



'Some of my students turn to Madonna for spiritual inspiration ... and they're not thinking of the mother of Jesus,' a teacher from a Catholic college blurted out to me at a recent seminar on the place of faith in contemporary society.

Bewildered by the profusion of sources from which students seek spiritual sustenance, she was suggesting that many of these sources have little or no capacity to sustain the human spirit.

Her remark captures some dimensions of the context in which churches today proclaim their message. Over the past 50 years or so, a multitude of spiritual options have exploded into western societies. Christian denominations, other world religions, and humanism are among these options, along with numerous combinations of, and variations on, the above. Even inert objects like crystals are invested with spiritual power today.

It is possible to judge the gamut of spiritual options, particularly the more exotic forms, as compelling evidence of the trivialisation of religion. But such a judgement misses a deeper dimension of the cultural change. In the latter half of the 20th century, a culture of authenticity has developed in which not just elites but people generally seek their own way and their deepest fulfilment as best they understand it.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor explores this line of thought in his 2007 work, *A Secular Age*. While the emergence of the culture of authenticity means people can turn to what seem shallow and undemanding spiritual practices, the new culture has also transformed the lives of adherents to mainstream religions.

Indeed, the emphasis that religious practice must make sense of an individual's spiritual development as best they understand it is not at all foreign to the Christian tradition. Jesus often challenged his hearers to move beyond their concern with public manifestations of piety to a discipleship in which God transformed their hearts.

Over the centuries, this 'inward turn' has found expression in the documents of some church councils as they sought to enjoin personal devotion and ascetic discipline on all believers. Ignatius, the 16th-century founder of the Jesuits, developed a method of spiritual discernment that focused on the inner sense of joy or 'consolation' that God's presence brings in contrast to its opposite, desolation.

Christians wishing to proclaim their beliefs today must begin by recognising that our age is not devoid of God; that God's spirit is at work in new ways in this culture, penetrated by the

ethic of authenticity. Indeed, it is possible to see that the culture has sprung in part from Christian roots.

This is not to deny that an individual's spiritual search can lead into cul-de-sacs and dead-ends, nor that God can be rejected in a multitude of ways.

Christians today should remain alive to the questions of this age, while at the same time living a life rooted in God's love. In this way, each encounter opens up the possibility of dialogue. It allows the believer to be attentive to the other's search and to ask appropriately: Is not God at work here? Does the gospel enlighten this path?

From the perspective of the teacher at the Catholic college mentioned above, the task of proclamation requires her to find ways in which every aspect of the curriculum and of school life can lead students to wonder at the mystery of creation and to recognise God acting in human life and culture.

When students discover the mystery of God's presence in what had previously seemed mere material existence, they have embarked on a more sustaining spiritual journey.

Them blackfellas

POETRY

Chenoah Ellis

Cloncurry

Shadows are long in Cloncurry
And the streets are incredibly wide
The flies buzz in your face
Louder than the fatherless, Aboriginal boys
'Hey white girl! White girl!'
They shout from bikes, twelve years old
No one misses them from school
Them blackfellas, abos
'Hey white girl! You sexy! You so sexy!'
They laugh and throw rocks
Run past the Woolworths
Overturning stranded shopping carts
Sky is gigantic in Cloncurry
And the sun sets ever so late
The bars are open all night
So the drunks can get drunker
And their anger turn to hate
'Hey white girl! White girl!'
They call from stools, sixty years old
No one misses them from work
Them blackfellas, abos
'Hey white girl! You sexy! You so sexy!'
They laugh and throw change

Sway out the door, trip over the dog
Reaching over to one side, then the other
Long shadows and gigantic sky
Everyday, Cloncurry is just the same

Sixteen

'Life's so fucking complicated'

She said

And we were only sixteen

'I wish that we could simplify it'

We attempted to

But we were only sixteen

We sang John Lennon songs

While we ate pasta from a can

We said we would change the world

As if playing guitar fed the children

Like smoking weed made us smarter

And we were only sixteen

And we thought we were profound

War is wrong, we decided

Still we fought with our parents all the same

We said we would save the earth

But we refused to go to school

We outlined things to clarify

Because the details made us insane

We thought we had the answers

When we had a bus ticket to somewhere else

And we were only sixteen

And we thought we were messed-up

'This is bullshit'

We said

About everything

(A bunch of Holden Caulfields)

And he was only sixteen

So we could do the same

Spring

I follow, laughing

Into hot luring daylight

Through shifty, un-waxed souls

And silky night shadows

Coaxed by whispering petals

The terror that ended World War II

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Kevin Rudd visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park on his first prime ministerial visit to Japan this month, the first serving Western leader to do so.

His critics were outraged. *Herald-Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt subscribed to the theory that 'to visit is to encourage the offensive notion that the Japanese were victims of a western crime, and not of their own insane militarism'.

The time has come to admit the Japanese were the victims of both. The US response to Japan's insane militarism was, to quote the Second Vatican Council, 'a crime against God and man himself'.

The US objective in dropping the bomb was to end the war without needing to stage a bloody invasion of a nation whose leadership was implacably opposed to unconditional surrender. Without the bomb, war was expected to last another year. One million Allied troops were being moved into place for the invasion of Japan.

President Truman's military advice was that a land invasion of Japan 'would cost at a minimum a quarter of a million American casualties'. After the war, he observed that 'a quarter of a million of the flower of our young manhood were worth a couple of Japanese cities, and I still think they were and are'.

While some scientists urged that the bomb not be used until the enemy be first warned of its existence and prospective use, other scientists asked, 'Are not the men of the fighting forces ... who are risking their lives for the nation, entitled to the weapons which have been designed?'

They further asked, 'Are we to go on shedding American blood when we have available means to a steady victory? No! If we can save even a handful of American lives, then let us use this weapon — now!'

On the day he authorised the military to go ahead with preparations to use the bomb, Truman wrote in his diary: 'I have told the Sec of War, Mr Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children ... The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement asking the Japs to surrender and save lives.'

After the dropping of the second bomb, the Emperor decided to 'bear the unbearable' and surrender.



Three years later, at a meeting of the National Security Council to discuss the custody of the atomic bomb, Truman insisted that it remain under civilian control.

'I don't think we ought to use this thing unless we absolutely have to,' he said. 'It is a terrible thing to order the use of something that is so terribly destructive, destructive beyond anything we have ever had ... [T]his isn't a military weapon. It is used to wipe out women and children and unarmed people, and not for military uses. So we have got to treat this differently from rifles and cannon and ordinary things like that.'

I daresay most Australians still think President Truman did right in authorising the dropping of atomic bombs on Japanese cities, regardless of whether such bombs are classed as military weapons, and regardless of whether dropping them entailed an immoral attack on the rights of the innocent with a direct intent to do them injury.

They thought, and still do, that the obliteration of the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was morally excused because this, and only this, helped to end the war, without the need for hundreds of thousands of Allied Forces having to face annihilation invading Japan with its citizenry blindly committed to the Emperor's honour.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church declared: 'Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation.' There is no other church moral teaching which has been so solemnly declared.

Many democratic leaders, if placed in Truman's shoes, would, in good conscience and with a heavy heart, invoke an exception and do exactly the same again, no matter what any church leader said.

The American philosopher Michael Walzer has been a long time critic of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In *Just and Unjust Wars* he states 'Our purpose, then, was not to avert a 'butchery' that someone else was threatening, but one that we were threatening, and had already begun to carry out.'

He rightly distinguishes Japan from Germany and argues that there was no need to demand unconditional surrender. '[A]ll that was morally required was that they be defeated, not that they be conquered and totally overthrown.' Walzer claims, 'In the summer of 1945, the victorious Americans owed the Japanese people an experiment in negotiation.'

In the essay 'Terrorism and Just War', from his recent book of essays *Thinking Politically*, he says 'the American use of nuclear weapons against Japan in 1945 ... was surely an act of terrorism; innocent men and women were killed in order to spread fear across a nation and force the surrender of its government.'

'And this action went along with a demand for unconditional surrender, which is one of the forms that tyranny takes in wartime ... There can't be any doubt that the destruction of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki implied ... a radical devaluation of Japanese lives and a generalised threat to the Japanese people.'

Walzer is not one of those thinkers who yields to popular sentiment in recasting the balance between principle and pragmatism. Rudd's visit to Hiroshima is an uncomfortable call for the nation to examine its conscience on war and obliteration bombing.

This is an edited extract from Frank Brennan's Annual [Cardinal Newman Address](#).

Taking housing back from the banks

COMMUNITY

Chris Warren



The housing crisis is here, but its effects are just beginning to be realised. The market has outgrown itself, and the conventional method of buying homes has outlived its usefulness. There must be an alternative.

I started thinking about the power of the housing market when I first considered home ownership for my family. I did the usual calculations and found there is a ridiculous amount of money involved, and I started thinking there must be a way of subverting that power to make it available to those who can't access secure long term housing.

I now work in the crisis housing and support field, helping people who are subject to the desperate shortage of housing. There are two key reasons for the shortage. The first is that housing is controlled primarily by market forces, and a market is only able to understand money, not people — and especially not disadvantage.

The second is a lack of creative thinking and action by governments who are driven purely by economics and politics. Both the market and the government benefit from the way things are, and therefore neither can entertain the possibility of an alternative future.

In the current housing market, Joe and Jo, a young couple considering buying a first home for their family, will have to maintain a double income to do so. The wage of one would cover living expenses, while the other's wage repays the loan. Without interest, the loan would be repaid in 11 years. With interest, the repayment period is extended to 25 years.

In other words, for 14 years half of their work is for the profit of a financial corporation and its shareholders. That represents a high value, which can be used to subvert the conventional method of purchasing a home and create an alternative. Imagine if Jo's employer bought them a house and in return she worked for free for 25 years ...

An alternative source of capital is needed. No-interest capital can liberate a significant amount of people's time. Assuming a source of no-interest capital can be tapped, a 'common equity' housing model could be developed, consisting of a pool of communally owned houses paid off by the occupants at cost.

Instead of buying a property conventionally, or renting from someone else, Joe and Jo could live in a common equity owned house. As a communally owned house, they would treat it as their own, live in it as though they own it, and make modifications and improvements to the property.

They would have security of tenure and could plan to be there for the long term with their family, neighbours and community. They would pay \$200 per week back into the common equity, so they can make more creative decisions about the balance between income generation, recreation/lifestyle, family and community.

A basic numeric model shows that with an initial no-interest investment of \$2 million, invested in 10 properties, with people paying \$200 per week to live in them, and a new property added whenever a balance of \$200,000 is reached, after 50 years there will be 115 properties in the common equity. After 100 years there will be 1446.

The key ingredient is an initial outlay of no-interest capital to get the ball rolling. Where it comes from, and how, I'm not yet sure. In wealthy countries, massive amounts of capital exist in churches, corporations, individuals and trusts — it's possible one of these sources could be tapped.

What happens when we take the financial institutions out of the housing market? I suspect eventually all properties will be de-valued by the amount represented by interest paid on loans.

It is the interest amount that puts most upward pressure on housing prices. When you sell a property, you want to make a profit over the combined cost of the property and interest. If no one has the burden of interest, when the time comes they can sell for less, as demanded by buyers, without making a loss. (This assumes there is sufficient housing available, which there currently is not — another effect of the overall high price of housing.)

Under the common equity model, everyone who is needed in the industry will still get paid — builders, developers, investors etc. Reductions in income will occur to anyone whose income derives from a percentage of the value of properties — councils, agents etc. The only total loss of income will be for financial lenders.

The result: housing is brought down to a level that is accessible to everyone and is a right rather than a privilege of the privileged. We can only hope.

There are myriad thoughts and ideas still required. More benefits could be mentioned, and more negative effects and impacts will need to be considered. What I suspect we need now are many key-holders to open the many locks in order to make it all work.

This article was adapted from Chris Warren's blog at [Bring Down the House](#). Bring Down the House is neither a commercial profit-making venture, nor a welfare program. The blog was set up to attract more minds to contribute to the project — people with the required expertise, passions and connections for it to become more than just an idea.

The skinny on 'fat' Australia

EDITORIAL

Tim Kroenert and Andrew Hamilton

'If we ran a fat Olympics we'd be gold medal winners,' says Simon Stewart, of the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute. According to the Institute's new report, *Australia's Future 'Fat Bomb'*, we are the fattest nation in the world. More than 9 million Australian adults rate as overweight.



'In terms of a public health crisis, there is nothing to rival this,' Professor Stewart, the report's lead author, told *The Age*. 'We've heard of AIDS orphans in Africa, we're looking at this time bomb going off where parents have to think about this carefully.'

Sloth and the prevalence of fast food cop the blame for Australia's bulging bellies. But that really translates to one thing: our lives of excess — in particular, excessive comfort and consumption — are catching up with us.

Clearly it's time we lift our game. Obesity comes from individual style of living, but it has an impact on society, not least through productivity and health expenditure. However, the public issues can be addressed only by personal change.

But weight loss is a tricky topic. There are myriad benefits and numerous pitfalls.

When someone sets out to lose weight and reaches that goal, it is an achievement. But if the achievement is viewed as a defining characteristic, that person's sense of worth can become invested wholly in it. Their holistic value can be diminished.

At root we need to encourage a broader sense of self than that related to body shape. A proper image of human happiness and virtue has many dimensions, of which a healthy body is one.

Another problem is that in Western society, health and fitness has become a commodity. It's the subject of television shows. Healthy eating regimes are sold to us via commercial channels. We pay to join gyms, and invest in the appropriate fitness wear.

In other words, we consume in order to lose weight. Like addicts substituting one drug for another — and there's no doubt dieting can be as addictive as overeating — we simply replace the object of our consumption, and fail to acknowledge that excessive consumption was the problem in the first place.

An emphasis on moderation, rather than excess, in the area of diet can shed light more generally on the excesses of our lives, and help us reflect seriously upon the ways in which these excesses impact upon the general lack experienced in many other nations.

All the above notwithstanding, it is hard to encourage a broader sense of self in a depressed economic and cultural environment. Images of well-off young people living in McMansions with consumer goodies and organic foods at their fingertips simply exclude the poor who haven't the facilities, skills or wealth to prepare healthy meals on a regular basis. So to tackle obesity we also need to tackle poverty.

If weight loss is pursued solely from vanity or self-interest, we reinforce individualistic attitudes and, ultimately, nothing changes. On the other hand, if the weight problem is addressed as part of a general realignment of attitudes towards human dignity and wholeness, then we are on course to a truly healthy Australia.