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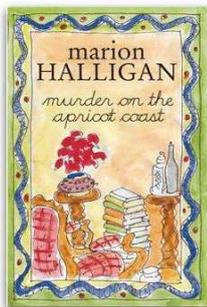
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Murder sequel has charm galore

BOOK REVIEW

Tony Smith

Halligan, Marion: *Murder on the Apricot Coast*. Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2008. RRP \$21.95. ISBN 978 1 74175 384 4



Marion Halligan has a fine appreciation of the literary process linking author and reader. She begins her latest novel as *Jane Eyre* ends: 'Reader, I married him'. She then teases the reader with a critique of sequels and argues that only the reader's imagination can extend the lives of literary characters.

Narrator Cassandra Travers met 'him', Al Marriott, the eponymous *Apricot Colonel* (Marion Halligan, 2006), when editing his Iraq War memoir and they solved a murder mystery set among Canberra's café society.

Cassandra and the Colonel have complementary skills. He is an enigma with secrets and he refers to his past career only obliquely. Cassandra uses her knowledge of words and characters to solve mysteries.

A couple of their acquaintance lose their daughter Fern, who struck Cassandra as 'beautiful with a ... mass of dark hair and huge dark eyes. The maiden in the wall painting, picking flowers in a field. Graceful. A bit melancholy.' These brief, sometimes verbless 'sentences' convey a narrator's thoughts and speech well, although the decision to eschew quotation marks grates sometimes.

Cassandra lives for literature. Her late father introduced her to the delights of reading and she enriches reality with remembered themes, plots and snippets of prose. When editing a messy manuscript she says that 'a book is about language as well as its subject' and that 'unless the words delight us there is no charm in reading it'.

Fern's death was apparently due to an accidental drug overdose, but she was studying creative writing and left behind a laptop with a memoir suggesting she paid her uni fees with sex work. When Al wonders whether it is fact or just fiction Cassandra laughs and objects, 'Just fiction'. She reminds him of literary hoaxes in which authors feigned experiences to boost sales: 'I'm a fiction person remember. I accept the truth of fiction. When it's honestly told.'

Cassandra is so calm and contented that no grizzly discovery disturbs her sunny outlook. The memoir's revelation that Asian children are imported and used horrifically fails to shock and when some students kidnap Cassandra believing she has the laptop, she finds that her kidnapper is a frustrated novelist and advises him to read more.

Perhaps it is all the green tea with lemongrass and ginger, or else the fine Riesling Cassandra consumes. Perhaps narrator Cassandra cannot dislike people or speak negatively about them, so not even the villains appear repulsive. On the available evidence Marion Halligan enjoys her work so much that her writing has charm galore.

WYD mass crosses cultures

RELIGION

Carmel Pilcher

I recently heard a playwright comment that a stage play with a strong, clear structure gives the actors a greater scope for creativity and spontaneity. As a long time student of the Eucharist I made an immediate connection. The structure of the Catholic Mass is well established and easily identifiable. The ritual structure requires creativity to invite the worshipping community to encounter the holy and live the truth of the gospel.



We thought long and hard about this when we prepared the papal Mass for the beatification of Mary MacKillop in January 1995. We hoped the ritual would call people to live the way of Mary, but first we had to name the values that Mary embodied.

We were careful to ensure that the liturgy reflected inclusivity and favoured the poor and oppressed. The first and last words of the mass were spoken by Aboriginal Australians. Those who received communion from the Pope were the little ones of our society, rather than corporate sponsors. Ministers of the word reflected the multicultural richness of our nation with a diversity of language, gesture and costume.

This week's World Youth Day ceremony began with a visual spectacle of colourful national flags, Aboriginal music, song and dance and the grand entrance of the cross and icon, culminating with words of welcome from the Prime Minister. The Mass began with a similar spectacle — a procession of cardinals and bishops, and words of welcome from Cardinal Pell.

These two welcomes paralleled each other — one seen to be 'secular' and the other formally part of the mass. With some careful choreography the two could perhaps have been integrated into one gathering rite, reflecting the many cultures celebrating a Roman rite within a distinctly Australian context.

The setting for the liturgy was stunning. The simply crafted liturgical furnishings containing different wood from each Australian state complemented the beauty of the surroundings. While the strong red walls evoked our spiritual centre Uluru, they also seemed to be a visual barrier distancing clerics from the assembly. This was heightened as darkness fell and the light on the 'sanctuary' more strikingly delineated the two groups.

The Liturgy of the Word was rich with the diversity of languages spoken. Cardinal Pell delivered a carefully prepared homily. Connecting the image from Ezekiel of the valley of dry bones with the ongoing drought was an immediately identifiable image for his Australian hearers.

Torres Strait Islanders danced with the word, using the ceremony they ritualise regularly to

keep the memory of their original encounter with God's word in the Christian scriptures. As they approached the podium the book was handed to a deacon and organ music sounded.

The Islanders moved away before the word was proclaimed, leaving an ambiguous sense that somehow their dance was a prelude rather than an integral part of the gospel proclamation.

The size of the assembly at the opening Mass of World Youth Day is comparable to the throngs who celebrated the beatification of Mary MacKillop. At that Mass we carefully determined how many ministers would be needed to serve communion to such a large assembly, and how the distribution could happen in an efficient yet reverent and timely way. One thousand ministers — half of them ushers — were engaged in this process.

The number of ministers who took communion to the assembly on Tuesday was far less. This leaves me wondering how many people were denied communion, and therefore deprived of the possibility of fully participating in this significant celebration.

It is always difficult to choreograph a Mass on such a large scale, and I sympathise with the organisers. For many this celebration would have been a wonderful event because it was such a tremendous spectacle. In such an environment one cannot but be inspired by the faith of so many young people.

But I am left with two major concerns. For the first I will repeat a question posed to us by the then papal master of ceremonies, Archbishop Piero Marini: 'How does this liturgy reflect your Australian culture?' He went on to add: 'If we wanted a Roman Mass we would have held it in Rome.'

The organisers did not attempt to integrate Australian elements into the mass, but rather made these extraneous to the ritual structure.

Secondly more attention needed to be given to the key principle of the liturgical reform — the full participation of *all* at worship: clergy and also the lay faithful.

Humanity trumps moralism in WYD film festival

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert



Take it as given that any short film festival program will feature a diverse range of approaches, and that most will connect with someone but few will connect with everyone.

That must be especially true of short films with a religious theme, as a person's response will largely be determined by the substance and form of their spiritual beliefs, as much as it is determined by their taste in films.

Father Christof Wolf SJ, director of the second Inigo Film Festival, held this week as part of World Youth Day celebrations in Sydney, [told](#) Jesuit news bulletin *Province Express* the festival focuses 'on young filmmakers who grapple with the spiritual dimension of life'.

'We honour films which reflect the spiritual yearnings and experiences of young people today, which show the presence and/or absence of God in our modern secularised world or which take into account the twin dimensions of faith and justice.'

That's the mandate. What are the results? Predictably, varied. Given my opening disclaimers ('different strokes for different folks'), in this review I'll simply point to a few of the more interesting highlights of the festival program.

Humour, when well executed, is an effective tool for communicating to a broad audience. For the young heroine of *Under There*, a condescending stranger's feeble attempt at explaining the concepts of 'soul' and 'heaven' can't compete with the sheer joy of kicking a soccer ball playfully against her deceased brother's gravestone. Her simple belief that her brother is now living happily 'under there' is all the understanding of death that she needs.

For my money, surreal touches always appeal. In *La Liberte de L'Interieur*, a prisoner discovers a magic means of escaping his tiny, drab cell. Once outside, he's free to share the key to his liberation with the prisoners of other similar cells. What the 'key' symbolises — presumably a religious or political ideology — is open to interpretation.

Film is rarely an effective medium for proselytising. Moral messages are best communicated if a film's focus is on story and character. *Cocoon*, in which a professional dancer muses upon her unplanned pregnancy, is patently 'pro-life'. But its lyrical rendition of the central character's emotional journey and the actor's internalised performance make it a humane and non-judgemental contribution to conversations about abortion.

Not all of the films address spiritual themes as obliquely. In *Un Eclat (The Sparkle)* a widower burdened by 15-year-old grief experiences a turbulent spiritual reawakening after

performing a reverent restoration on a piece of religious art. The film reveals the power of symbols to connect minds and hearts with a sense of the divine.

Religious iconography also plays a central role in this reviewer's 'pick' of the festival line-up — the animation *The Judas Pane* (pictured).

The Judas figure in a stained-glass tableau, cast forever as a scowling villain by the artist who created him, obtains absolution after witnessing the depiction in a separate pane of his doppelganger's notorious role in the passion story. It's a funny, clever and poignant twist on a simple redemption story, which plays upon traditional understandings of the gospels while critiquing the subjective role of artists in depicting religious icons.

Festival screenings take place Thursday 17 July at Loreto Kirribilli from 7pm to 10pm. The three best films will be announced at an awards ceremony on Friday 18 July at 2pm.

The Pope with something to say

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

To spell out the difference between Protestant and Catholic Christians people make jokes, write books, create aphorisms. Most of them are pretty unhelpful. But one of the more thought-provoking is the insight that Protestantism is a religion of the ear, whereas Catholicism is a religion of the eye.

It catches the emphasis that Luther put on hearing the Word as against the emphasis of Catholics on the sacraments and tabernacle, the austerity of Protestant churches as against the rich decoration in Catholic ones, and even the strikingly different media images of the two Sydney Archbishops: Cardinal Pell in full robes and Archbishop Jensen in suit and tie. Food for thought, but further thought soon reveals that the contrast soon breaks down.

Against that background it is intriguing that, when young people talk of World Youth Day, they commonly say that they are going to hear Pope Benedict. At previous World Youth Days they spoke of going to see John Paul II.

Does this mean that in being heard rather than seen Benedict is shaping up as a Protestant Pope? That would really stretch credulity. The change is of everyday significance. It reflects the differing personal style of the two Popes that the young people have caught.

The previous Pope had an instinctive feel for an audience and an occasion. He was a media performer, a Pope for television. Even though what he said was often deep, his speaking was theatre and what he said was declaratory. So people went to see him speak.

Benedict is a scholar and a naturally reserved man. Public performance comes less easily to him. He has a care for words and argument, and many Western readers find him easier to understand than his predecessor. For all his taste for colourful and ancient clothing, he is perhaps a Pope for radio.

In his intellectual style, too, Pope Benedict belongs to the university, to a world where different positions can be heard, argued and evaluated. Even his sermons are conversational in the sense that his imagery allows each reader to appropriate what is said in a personal way. He is a man whom we might go to hear speak.

Underlying the personal differences, however, is a different Papal style. Pope John Paul inherited a Polish history whose decisive encounters with the West were with the medieval church. The Pope was at the centre both of political and of church unity. After the Reformation the central focus on the Pope became stronger even as his political role diminished. The Pope



was the universal face of the Church. Pope John Paul II enacted this role especially in his journeys. Wherever he went he often described himself to the people as 'your Pope'.

Pope Benedict comes from Bavaria, whose Christian beginnings in the fourth century are still a living memory. His history and his studies make him at home in an earlier church where the Bishop of Rome had a central place in guaranteeing the unity of the Church, but was placed within a network of significant Churches each of which claimed foundation by the Apostles and each of which had its own tradition. A central task of the Pope was to encourage and to strengthen the local Churches.

These subtle differences of personal and papal style may help explain why the present Pope, despite the fears stirred by his media image as 'God's enforcer' when Prefect of the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith, has seemed a more eirenic figure within the Church than was his predecessor. Certainly many tensions and conflicts about what it means for the Church to be faithful to the Gospel remain. But the conversation about them is not as fraught.

World Youth Day is a celebration for young Catholics. But it is also a theatrical event whose climax is the Papal Mass. There the Pope is on show to gather the whole event together. Whether pilgrims came to see or hear the Pope, they will take home the memory of being there, of seeing and hearing.

But the depth of their experience will depend on the quality of conversation that the event generates, the sense that as well as hearing they have been heard. Both active and passive voices are important in Popes.

Muslim and Catholic pilgrims share the wisdom of travel

MULTICULTURALISM

Irfan Yusuf



While scanning the travel section of a weekend paper, I came across a story on Oman. Beneath the headline were words that went something like this: 'Don't tell me how much you know. Instead, tell me how much you have travelled.'

These words were attributed to Muhammad, a seventh century Arab whom Muslims (including myself) regard as God's final prophet. It was the first time I'd come across this saying, and I was a little sceptical about its authenticity. Muslims are real sticklers when it comes to quoting their last prophet, treating every quote with scepticism until satisfied it comes from an authentic source.

Then again, perhaps I should focus less on its authenticity (or otherwise) and more on its wisdom. After all, another saying of the Prophet (the authenticity of which is said to be beyond dispute) goes: 'Wisdom is the lost property of the believer. Take it wherever you happen to find it.'

The inherent wisdom of travel is a notion common to all faiths. It is one thing to gain knowledge by comfortably sitting in an air conditioned library reading books. It's another thing altogether to gain knowledge through the toil and sacrifice that comes with travel.

The Oxford Dictionary provides us with two definitions of the word 'pilgrim'. The first is 'one who journeys to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion'. Pilgrims regard certain places as sacred. They see spiritual merit in travelling to and spending time in these places.

The second definition is (or at least should be deemed) connected to the first. It is: 'persons regarded as journeying to a future life'.

Death is a fact of life. Deny God all you like, but only a fool denies death. We're all walking toward our graves. If we had a greater sense of our own mortality, it's likely our morality would skyrocket. Now there's a sobering thought.

Here's an even more sobering death-related thought. Let us, both Catholics and Muslims, be honest with ourselves. There have been times in history when (alleged) followers of both our faiths used death and destruction to spread faith or defend its honour.

It is true that the etymological meaning of the word Catholic is 'universal', and that of Islam is 'peace'. Yet I wonder just what universalist sentiments inspired the European Crusaders who shed enough Jerusalemite blood to flow at knee's height, just as I wonder what peaceful intentions my Turkish ancestors had when they murdered and looted and pillaged during

their conquests of India.

These examples of allegedly religious travel were really more about politics, wealth, ego and conquest. Last week, at a Sydney conference on secularism, I had to put up with barbs from a number of delegates who subscribed to what can only be described as evangelical atheism. They frequently reminded me of just how much war had been caused by religion. It was as if communism had never existed in their minds.

But then, must we define communism, atheism or religion by roving warmongers using these beliefs as excuses to shed blood? This is where pilgrims play such an important role. Pilgrims are also travelling warriors. However, their battles are internal and spiritual.

Pilgrims don't travel with a view to loot or pillage. Pilgrims travel in God's path. They know that in the very act of travelling, they will learn things about themselves that they could never learn in books or in attending sermons at their local church or mosque. The inconveniences pilgrims face — delays and queues and expense and unfamiliar surrounds — are all part of the pilgrimage experience.

Pilgrims overcome these obstacles by relying on each other. They learn that they cannot undertake this journey on their own. The process of pilgrimage helps foster a greater feeling of community among both pilgrims and their hosts.

As a Muslim, I believe I can relate to what the thousands of young (and young-at-heart) Catholic pilgrims converging in Sydney must be feeling. It is the same feeling my many Muslim relatives and friends have experienced when they arrive in Mecca for the annual Hadj, the pilgrimage all able-bodied and debt-free Muslims are obliged to make at least once in their lifetime.

I'm pleased a number of Muslim families and schools are hosting their Catholic brothers and sisters visiting Sydney for the WYD pilgrimage. Perhaps when WYD is over and everyone has gone home, both Muslim hosts and their Catholic guests should remain conscious that our pilgrimage to God has not ended.

Pope invokes 'spirituality of the land'

ES CLASSIC

Chris McGillion

The following is an edited extract from an article that appeared in Eureka Street, April 1995, following Pope John Paul II's visit to Australia in January 1995.



In January I wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the Papal Mass at Sydney's Randwick racecourse was the most significant religious event in this country in the past 200 years. It owed this significance to the inclusion of the Aboriginal smoking ceremony in the liturgy. This introduced a distinctive Australian spirituality in which reflection on the physical environment could lead Australians to a deeper understanding of who they are and what it means to live a moral life.

Brought together here were the barest threads of a spirituality in which the physical environment becomes available to Australians not merely to adorn their religious ceremonies, but to instruct their religious life. What I had in mind was that the bare threads of this spirituality needed to be woven together into a well-tailored garment through further theological reflection.

A spirituality of the land must be infused with a certain potency if it is to catch on and make a difference in the way people think and live. That means relating it much more clearly and closely to the everyday experience of ordinary Australians.

An obvious starting point for theologians and others who are interested is traditional Aboriginal spirituality. Given the realisation by anthropologists and comparative religionists of the sophistication of Aboriginal religious systems, and the antiquity of the Aboriginal experience of and attachment to this land, it would be unusual if traditional Aboriginal spirituality did not have something to offer the rest of us.

In fact, as Eugene Stockton's book *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation* demonstrates, it has a good deal to offer. And given the Second Vatican Council's acknowledgement that the Catholic Church (indeed, Christianity generally) doesn't have all the answers, there is no reason to balk at examining what's on offer.

Stockton, an archaeologist and Catholic priest, has a timely caution, however, for the over-eager: 'Aboriginal influence on Australian spirituality (is) a challenge to look again, and more deeply, at our traditions, to re-emphasise elements in that tradition that are in tune with our time and place'.

The last thing non-Aborigines should entertain is the delusion that Aboriginal spirituality can mean the same thing to all people; the last thing that Aborigines need is another

appropriation by members of the dominant culture of what is distinctively theirs.

For the rest of us, ecological imperatives are likely to be just as important as any new interest in Aboriginal culture in inducing a sense of wonder at our surroundings.

That presents both opportunities and problems. A prerequisite for the exploitation of the natural environment by Western societies has been its 'disenchantment', in the name of rationality and the cause of production.

The new interest in conservation and sustainable development, especially among the young, should make people receptive to a spirituality of the land, especially one that takes their immediate concerns seriously but also develops them into a more comprehensive and ultimately satisfying transcendent self-knowledge.

On the other hand, however, the mainstream churches have been slow to respond to a growing environmental movement and many people (again, especially young people) have adopted 'green' political activism as a pseudo-religion.

Winning them back, if that be the exercise, will take imagination and courage. Simply issuing statements is no substitute for taking the church and its resources into the places where the environmental debate is being waged, thus making both an environmental ethic and a spirituality of the land acutely present in the lives of ordinary people.

That's one ingredient of the potency referred to above. The other is relevance.

Non-Aborigines came very slowly to an appreciation of the beauty of this land, and slower and more hesitantly still to a feeling of belonging to it. Romanticised images of Australia, however, won't hold them to it in any meaningful way.

The 'bush' and 'the outback' have only limited meaning to most Australians today, who are coastal dwellers and cosmopolitans. And talk of the 'Red Centre' as some sort of silent, knowing presence at the heart of our consciousness is nothing more than 'white fella's dreaming'.

Just look at the way most non-Aboriginal Australians relate, for instance, to Uluru; they climb to the top to assert their dominance over nature. So much for a change of attitude expressed in a change of name. Moreover, they do this on what are, essentially, exotic holidays from 'home'. They are visitors to the centre, not people journeying to the core, the mother-lode of their psyches.

Most of us, in our less sentimental moments, see ourselves more as a sunburnt people than as people of a sunburnt country. A spirituality of the land must be a spirituality of the entire physical environment as people experience it and confront its challenges.

That may be less idyllic but it will also be more real and hence more powerful. Soil and smoke and references to Isaiah are the beginnings of a profound rethink of who we are and

what we are called to be.

But this spirituality won't be complete, and won't be something most of us can relate to, until we can see something of God not just in the wilderness but in the breakers off Bondi, bushfires in the Dandenongs, and, yes, a sweltering suburban summer's day.

Guernseys of sackcloth and ashes

POETRY

B. N. Oakman

My Football Team Is Hopeless

My team's motto is 'Born to Disappoint'.

Well, it isn't really. But it ought to be.

We measure our losing streaks in decades.

Junior members ask grandparents when we last won.

There's more silver in my teeth

than in our trophy cupboard.

Gravestones bear witness to our only premiership.

Every year we leap for the heavens

and flop in the gutter.

Fortune despises us. Injury dogs our stars.

Battlers make the side week after week

while our best stagger about on crutches.

If King Lear ever turns to umpiring

he'll be assigned to our games.

Should some unhinged bookmaker

rate us hot favourites,

we are moral certainties to collapse on match day.

Our guernseys are of sackcloth and of ashes.

We are depressed.

We drink too much.

We eat too much — except those who threw

their false teeth at an umpire.

I told the president to register the club as a charity.

My membership is under review.
The members wonder why they do it.
I wonder why I do it.
Life's hard enough without this mob to fret about.
My football team is hopeless.
But sometimes, just sometimes, after the pundits
proclaim we'll be murdered, we go out and clean-up
some outfit of silverspooners, pampered creatures
who outspend us ten dollars to one, and play
like it's the Grand Final of Armageddon.
Then the defeats of all my seasons are lost,
left to stumble through the ragged forests
of our pennants, their naggings inaudible
above the pounding waves of our songs,
their sorrows forgotten in the rapture
of a winter's afternoon made now, and forever, ours.

Liniment Mist

I knew him from his glory days
when he flew along the wing
borne on gusts of adulation
and the ball seemed his alone
while opponents plodded at his heels
but now
clutching a morning paper
he shuffles across a road dusted with frost
his quick breaths making little white puffs
and he shivers

like those blonded girls in short skirts
who lingered on frigid evenings
in scented shrouds of liniment mist
outside the changing rooms of youth.

WYD hope for Third World pilgrims

SPIRITUALITY

Margaret Rice



When Chantelle Ogilvie was at World Youth Day in Cologne in 2000, she attended a forum where she heard a young South American woman crying as she explained: 'I can't believe there are so many people who care about what's happening in our village.'

It showed Chantelle another side of World Youth Day — the positive impact it has on those from the majority world.

Religious experience in the majority world seems more intense and Catholicism seems edgier in its action, the further we move away from privilege.

Examples abound. When the Government of Northern Uganda was negotiating a peace settlement with the Lords' Resistance Army some years ago, it was a Catholic agency that was trusted by both sides to facilitate.

Colombia has been in the headlines recently because of the dramatic rescue of Ingrid Betancourt. There, left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary and the army struggle for control. Currently, it is the Colombian Catholic bishops who are talking with these groups, in an attempt to broker a negotiated peace.

Margareta Brosnan, who now works for the Catholic Church's aid agency Caritas Australia, spent the last four years working in Paris with the International Young Catholic Students Association. During that time she travelled to 32 different countries in the majority world visiting places as diverse as Haiti, Uganda and Sri Lanka.

Faith, she explains, gives hope in some pretty desperate situations, for example to the Palestinian Christians.

'Young people in the majority world are more called to faithful institutions because of the sense of hope that these institutions are able to instil. They provide a sense of hope and community that young people otherwise wouldn't find,' she says, adding that it is not necessarily just Catholic faith communities that have the effect.

Sister Clemencia Kobi, OLSH, from Papua New Guinea, believes that for young people from her country World Youth Day will be an opportunity to move out of 'their own corner'.

She agrees that the experience of faith is more intense for her Papua New Guinean people than it is for those from the privileged world. 'Our faith is so rich in our place there,' she says.

Sr Kobi believes it is harder for young people in the affluent world to experience such rich

faith, because they have so much access to technology and other distractions.

Chantelle echoes the idea: 'I often joke that in the West we don't need God because we've got air-conditioning.'

One of Chantelle's parents is Australian, the other is from the Philippines, so Chantelle grew up with a foot in both worlds. 'People from the privileged world have the illusion that they are in control of their lives,' she says.

Not so in the majority world, she adds, where natural disasters jostle with man-made calamities to lead one to despair. The experience of work is often brutal — if you can get work, you have little power to negotiate it. The vulnerability of the individual is more keenly felt, hence a greater reliance on faith and community.

Talking with a group freshly arrived for World Youth Day it is easy to see what she means.

Nadeem Bashir is a Catholic from Islamic Pakistan. He works for the Young Christian Workers organisation, which was recently involved in the negotiations to free 25 Christians kidnapped by Muslim extremists.

Nadeem's working day involves fighting for justice for factory and construction workers. For him, World Youth Day is an opportunity to meet new friends and to understand the problems of people from other parts of the world.

Andy Predicala comes from the Philippines, a mainly Catholic country, where many people work seven days a week, with no rest. 'They have no time for Church or bible studies, for their communities and families,' he says.

He is informed in his fight against such corrosive circumstances by his faith — 'It is my motivation,' he says. He can't wait to meet other young people to compare experiences.

Nalini Peries of Sri Lanka finds that she is preoccupied with the needs of women. One of the major issues she is addressing is the high level of rape in her country. 'Coming to World Youth Day is a big step for me,' she says. 'I trust God very much, so I want to develop my faith with this World Youth Day.'

Of course, no one group has a monopoly on faith. Bailey Murillo, 18 years old, is from Black Forest, Colorado. More innocent than the others, he is here for a faith experience. He is contemplating becoming a priest and believes that World Youth Day will help him decide.

When it comes to international aid, Australians pride themselves on their generosity. In that regard, World Youth Day should be acknowledged for the supportive role it can play for young people of all walks of life.

Minister's moment of grace at WYD

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

NSW Government World Youth Day spokesperson Kristina Keneally MP has [described](#) World Youth Day as a 'happy event', which the people of Sydney can 'choose to share in and enjoy — if they want to'.

Some people will not want to share the joy because of the way the Government's so-called anti-annoyance laws were enacted. They have a point. Others will regard the laws as merely a stumbling block on the way to embracing the event.

Keneally would argue that the intention of the laws was to create the conditions necessary for Sydneysiders and visitors to share in the joy of the event. Intimidating and distasteful actions by individuals hostile to the event would take away this freedom.

What is the particular joy that comes to Sydney with World Youth Day? It's something that cannot be quantified, but has to be experienced. Keneally [reflected](#) in *Compass Theology Review* on how it hit her at World Youth Day 1991 in Czestochowa, Poland, where she met her husband Ben.

My job was to read the English version of the second reading in the vigil service. Speaking to one of the Australian delegates, Ben Keneally, before the liturgy, I remarked on how unsettling it was to see the euphoria and the near hero worship of the Pope that was displayed by many of the young people.

For goodness sake, I told Ben, this was just a man. All the crying, the emotion and the adulation seemed a bit unwarranted. Ben agreed.

I did the second reading and at the last minute, thinking I was quite clever, I made unapproved changes to the text to render it gender inclusive. Then, as I had been instructed to do, I turned to the Pope and bowed. At that point he looked directly at me, smiled and nodded.

She went on to describe the experience as a 'moment of grace', adding that she 'felt holiness'.

In the many years since that event, she has held on to both her Catholic faith and her feminist convictions. World Youth Day was indeed a life-changing event for Kristina Keneally.



Miracle plant's monstrous potential

ENVIRONMENT

Harry Nicolaidis



It began innocently enough, like any other workshop — a large university auditorium, speakers from the UN, business, government and an obscure member of the Thai Royal family ringing an auspicious gong.

However, the delegates were not investors or scientists but raw-boned, Thai rice farmers, plied with a lavish two-day luncheon and meditation sessions to hear that if they chose to grow jatropha they could make profits within 12 months.

They were even offered free seeds to start their own plantations and ‘grow a golden egg that could be passed from father to son to grandson’. However, unlike the fabled Jack and the Beanstalk, the Thai farmers would be giving up much more than a cow for their handful of seeds and promise of untold wealth.

Much has been written about jatropha, the so-called miracle plant that the *New York Times* recently called the darling of the second-generation biofuels, and which Goldman Sachs, the world’s largest investment bank, has identified as a promising source of biofuel in the future.

Farmers in China, India, Indonesia and Africa are rushing to plant jatropha in what can only be compared to the mass hysteria to grow tulips in the Netherlands in the late 17th century — before the speculative bubble burst.

However, some say the farming of jatropha is a future natural disaster waiting to happen, especially if hybrid strains outgrow plantations and propagate wildly across farmlands, contaminating soil and displacing native species — and eventually people.



While the monstrous, animal-like plants of the post-apocalyptic novel *The Day of the Triffids* remain science fiction, it is worth noting that the jatropha plant propels insects and animals, lives up to 50 years, and that its cuttings take root quickly and easily.

Some claim jatropha will relieve poverty throughout the Third World by allowing the poor to cash in on a low maintenance cash crop that grows anywhere, including rocky and saline soil. There is no evidence though that it can produce seeds under these conditions, especially in the longer term. In fact, there has to date been no substantive research into the long term benefits or effects of farming jatropha.

With corporations currently sizing-up jatropha as a socially acceptable biofuel alternative to fossil fuels, what we do hear is the hype of a potential billion dollar industry — that is billions of dollars of savings and profit for corporations and governments.

Air New Zealand, in collaboration with Rolls Royce and Boeing, claims it will soon launch a test flight of a 747 powered by jatropha biofuel. Phoenix-based Honeywell Aerospace, Airbus, JetBlue Airways and others are working on a Jatropha-based biofuel to reduce costs and increase profitability.



The military regime of Burma has ordered poor subsistence farmers to stop growing rice, once a major export crop, and plant Jatropha as biofuel for domestic consumption and export.

In India, the widespread popularity of Jatropha farming has taken on such epidemic proportions that many are comparing the phenomenon to the 1956 sci-fi film, *Invasion of the Body Snatches*, where townsfolk are subverted by alien imposters grown from plant-like pods.

However, not everyone is blinded by the hyperbole and hysteria of farming Jatropha. An India-based Yahoo internet group has formed to fight the growing craze and expose the dangers of jatropha, reporting that 50 children were hospitalised by eating jatropha seeds from a plantation near a school.

In Australia the farming of jatropha has been banned in two states as it was deemed harmful to livestock, other plants and people. The ingestion of only four small seeds is said to be fatal.

In the Philippines farmers have already begun abandoning their Jatropha plantations after discovering poor yields and a non-existent market for seeds.

In East Africa there is concern that Jatropha plants in large project areas may invade farmland with a devastating impact on the local food chain and natural biodiversity.

In Thailand, the farmers at the workshop were encouraged to plant Jatropha without being told that there are no trucks, storage facilities or refineries to process the seeds into oil.



The real cost to Thai farmers is much more than any biofuel profits could ever hope to restore. Seventy per cent of all Thais live and work in rural areas outside of Bangkok. Rice farming is part of their traditional lifestyles and history. The planting and harvesting of rice is also celebrated in Thai art, music and poetry.

Biofuel profits would only be spent on a new Toyota pick-up truck or Honda motorbike enriching those corporations and impoverishing the Thai farmers who have to run them at

today's fuel prices.

With many of the world's poorest nations teetering on collapse because of rising food prices and civil unrest, how many more farmers will be beguiled — and subverted — by biofuel's blue-sky promise before the speculative greening of the gold rush ends?

Resist? They're here already! You're next!

WYD blooms beneath the aphids

SPIRITUALITY

Andrew Hamilton



World Youth Day is multifaceted. It has been seen in many different ways and subjected to many kinds of analysis. A preacher might compare it to an autumn rose, full, richly coloured and perfectly formed. It would be right to notice the aphids, black spot and the drought that affect the plant. But if we focus only on these things, and regard the rose as a nest of horticultural problems and biological infestations, we might not stop to wonder at the beauty of the rose. And that after all is reason why the rose was planted.

Observers of the World Youth Day event have found much to question in its organisation, in the role played by Government, in the image of the Catholic Church communicated through it, and in its effectiveness in encouraging faith in young adults.

But these are secondary aspects of the event. They will certainly bear reflection after World Youth Day. But the main story is surely the experience of the young people who gather from around Australia and the world and the exuberance of their celebration.

The texture of World Youth Day is already apparent. Young people from Asia and beyond have gathered in Australia. Most have been offered hospitality by Australian families. In local church communities they have met young Australians whom they may accompany to Sydney.

The energies created in these meetings will be intensified in Sydney both through the main and the ancillary events. Many of these strongly emphasise social justice and encourage participants to reflect on their lives and their world. All this shapes a rich and exuberant experience which will be appropriated in very different ways.

Although World Youth Day is a Catholic Church celebration, it is also of broader interest. At the heart of the experience is shared meaning and connection. They feed the energy of the event. For a few days the young people have the opportunity to explore together basic symbols of Catholic faith about which many would ordinarily be ambivalent. They find themselves celebrating in the company of young Catholics of other nations who may instinctively and naturally identify with these symbols.

In Australia connection and meaning are problematic. From the tabloids to the scholarly quarterlies, observers remark on the superficiality of connection and meaning in Australian society. Binge drinking, gangs and a selfish materialism are only a few of the phenomena attributed to the young as evidence for these weaknesses. It is no wonder that so many fear that Australians risk losing any strong sense of national identity.

It would be easy to exaggerate the defects of Australian youth culture and to oppose this

culture to an idealised and nostalgic image of a communal and decent past. But the concern about connection and meaning makes interesting all large events where young people find simple ways of celebrating meaning and connection.

Whether these events are associated with sport, with Hillsong, with environmental movements or with political change, they suggest ways in which young people may enter easily into larger human and civic values.

In Australia Anzac Day offers the most thought-provoking secular parallel with World Youth Day. Young people increasingly include Anzac Cove in their overseas travels. Many also join the local celebration of the day. They find in it some sense of connection and meaning.

As with World Youth Day, it is common to question the depth and durability of the experience of Anzac Day, the motives of Government in endorsing it, and the values that it embodies. The questions are legitimate. But the phenomenon itself has much to commend it.

Gatherings of young people, including World Youth Day, in which the participants are encouraged to enjoy one another's company and to be reflective are precious. World Youth Day encourages families within the Catholic Church to offer hospitality and nurture to the young of their own communities and of overseas communities.

It encourages the young people to reflect on the meaning of their lives and on how they might live generously. Many will begin deep and lasting connections with their companions from other nations. This kind of event is a building block for a generous and decent Australia.

Imagination beguiles in dystopic Russian debut

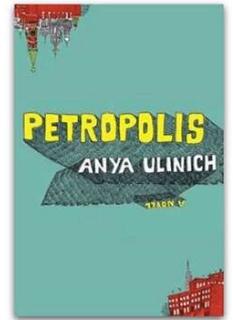
BOOK REVIEW

Jen Vuk

Ulinich, Anya: *Petropolis*. Scribe, 2008. RRP \$29.95. ISBN 9780670038190

As if producing a debut novel with the punch to stop a pugilist in their tracks wasn't enough, author Anya Ulinich manages to do so in a second language.

Such is the verve of the 34-year-old Russian-born, US-based writer. Ulinich's novel *Petropolis* (taken from a poem by late Russian poet Osip Mandelstam), which charts the life and times of unlikely heroine Sasha Golberg, begins in the depths of a Siberian winter before arcing halfway around the world to a quixotic Arizonian summer.



When we first meet Sasha she's a guileless 14-year-old living among the Eastern Bloc ruins in a town called Asbestos 2 with her still beautiful but slightly demented mother. Despite the old-school melancholy of her surroundings Sasha is no Russian doll. Chubby, ruddy complexioned and with blood of Negritianka running through her veins, Sasha wears her disenfranchisement like a seasoned dissident, much to her mother's chagrin.

A throwback to the pre-Gorbachev intelligencia, Mrs Goldberg clings to her idealism like a person drowning. She is prepared to sacrifice everything to turn her daughter into a good little Soviet, even her wiles, which she stashed away (along with the contraband cognac) after her husband Victor cut himself loose and scampered to America.

At the local art school, where Mrs Goldberg secures Sasha a place, Sasha spies the sleek, surly Alexei, and art and politics soon go by the wayside. As do any thoughts of contraception.

After giving birth to a daughter, who her mother steps in to raise, Sasha finds herself suddenly free of Asbestos 2 and all its shackles. What's a nice Russian girl with no particular aspirations, even fewer rubles to her name and a faint desire to find her father to do? She takes the path of least resistance and signs up as a mail order bride.

Much has been said about the perils of memory in autobiographical-style writing. Whether Ulinich falls victim to this is up for conjecture, yet taking on board her assertion that while she draws from life, her protagonist is a work of fiction, it seems counterproductive to then pick over the bones of the narrative, especially when it shimmers like this:

'Outside, the sun hangs in the gray haze, unmoving, as if it's three in the afternoon. Sasha thinks about Brooklyn's starless darkness, humid summer nights saturated with orange light and ambulance sirens, with the sounds of breaking glass ...'

A successful painter before turning to writing, Ulinich's artistic background informs her work, and before I get carried away by such unbridled talent, the myriad bold ideas don't always hit the mark (lost in translation perhaps?). But I'm beguiled again and again by her masterstroke — her lively, lateral imagination that in turn surprises and subverts:

'Sasha felt sorry for the paintings. Away from the danger and excitement that produced them, they looked misplaced, like a pack of anonymous letters at a thrift store.'

Talk about deconstructing the moment. And yet Ulinich isn't simply showing off. Despite the narrative's clear comic thread and an obvious love of the absurd, her search is for something other than simply our laughter or approval.

From the opening pages of Sasha's fraught relationship with her domineering, distant mother to her journey across America to track down (and fill the absence of) her absconding father, we come to understand what shadows the narrative's beautifully 'perverse lucidity of nostalgia' — the human condition.

The tone may be droll but the subtext is palpable. When it comes to the bonds that tie there's also an element of choking involved. And yet without this thing called family we are all lost. Sure, it's a dystopic view but someone had to write about it, and fortunately for the reader that someone was Anya Ulinich.

German soldier's ugly art

EXHIBITIONS

John Bartlett



According to Jim, an attendant at the the National Gallery of Victoria, feelings ran high last Anzac Day against the exhibition of 51 drawings and etchings by Otto Dix, a German artist/soldier.

'In Adelaide,' he says, 'there were even some attempts to damage the prints.'

This is an exhibition that indeed provokes strong reactions from observers with its often grotesque and always confronting depictions of the realities of war on the Western Front during WWI. Dix said that 'there was a dimension of reality that had not been dealt with in art: the dimension of ugliness'.

In this exhibition there is an excess of ugliness. *Mealtime in the Trenches* depicts a soldier gulping down a hasty meal apparently indifferent to the human skeleton trapped in the frozen landscape beside him.

Equally harrowing are images of corpses ripped apart by bullets and bombs, dying soldiers and the victims of poison gas (ironically entitled *The Sleepers of Fort Vaux*). No wonder the *Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Art* describes Dix's cycle of prints as 'perhaps the most powerful as well as the most unpleasant anti-war statements in modern art'.

Born in 1891 Dix the artist volunteered as a machine-gunner, fought at the Somme in 1915 and was wounded a number of times, once almost fatally. My uncle was wounded at the Somme at the age of 17 (almost fatally too) and suffered for the rest of his life the effects of poison gas and a wound that fascinated us as children. We constantly pestered him to hold up his arm so we could see the sky through the hole in his wrist. I wondered if Dix had been the machine-gunner who had wounded my uncle and changed his life forever.

Jim, who paces this exhibition floor-space with a vigilance approaching maternal anxiety, admits that one drawing in particular is 'most disturbing'. This is plate 51, *Soldier Raping a Nun*, a horrific image which was suppressed when this portfolio of images was first published in 1924. Dix's publisher believed (understandably) that the image would be seen as a 'slap in the face for all those who celebrate our "heroes" [and] ... for all those who have a bourgeois conception of a front-line soldier'.

Nations need to believe in the nobility of their soldiers. Anything less would be unbearable and unacceptable to their myth-making. As a nation we cope with war by concentrating on stories of bravery not its ghastly acts. Valour informs a nation's myth-making, leaving no room for the unspeakable. Such myth-construction is a necessary bulwark against the reality

of acts too dreadful to face.

The paradox infusing this exhibition is that Dix never considered himself a pacifist nor was he interested in politics. He never intended his work to be taken as anti-war propaganda. He was horrified by war yet fascinated by his experiences. 'I was not seeking to depict ugliness,' he said. 'Everything I saw was beautiful.'

But by allowing an aesthetic to overlay moral questions around war are we merely glamorising and further mythologising its horrors?

Jim was a soldier for five years and only missed out on being sent to Vietnam on the accession of the Whitlam government. He's recently forbidden his son to join the army. 'I've seen what happens,' he says, 'when some people pick up guns — they go crazy.' He's Croatian in origin and understands first-hand what happens when you expose deep differences between cultures and religions.

It's difficult to know whether to feel pride or shame for our participation in past wars. Does our myth-making provide a convenient excuse merely to repeat the same conflicts endlessly?

Of the 51 images in Dix's exhibition only one, *Bomb Crater with Flowers*(pictured), offers any sense of hope. Battlefields do get covered over and horrors do fade. But perhaps it's the mythology that grows out of war that we're still not quite sure how to interpret.

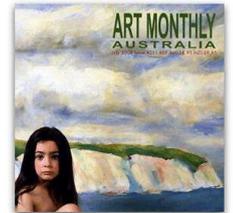
War: The Prints of Otto Dix is at the National Gallery of Victoria until 10 August, then will head to the Art Gallery of NSW from 22 August until 26 October. Otto Dix's Der Krieg Cycle of prints is owned by the National Gallery in Canberra.

The ethics of 'kidsploitation'

COMMUNITY

Moira Rayner

Children's rights are never simple and always subject to impassioned debate. We have just had such a debate about artistic integrity, and whether populist reactions to nude photographs of children are simply prurience or prudishness disguising the horned censor.



The editor of *Arts Monthly* has just hanged himself in an extension of that debate, using his own perceived artistic licence.

Of course, art has its special place and must be free. Ads, on the other hand, which involve not art but money and status, should not. Children shouldn't pay for either place.

The owners of the NSW gallery hosting the Bill Henson exhibition last month were either looking for publicity or, more likely, naïve, by placing these images not only on the exhibition invitation, but online as well. This took Henson's photographs out of (artistic) context and put them before people they might well disturb and provoke.

No one wants to go back to the bad old days of discretionary censorship by prudish police. Yet that is how the original argument ran: is it art, or is it obscene, and if so should someone be prosecuted? The natural reaction is no, and as a result nobody conceptualised this as a child protection issue. But beneath the rhetoric of artistic integrity and presumed wowsery, that's what it was.

Despite the dropping of the investigation, the arts community's umbrella body voluntarily undertook to develop its own protocols for artists' use and representation of immature child models — that is, of children who are probably unable to make consistently reliable decisions to protect themselves from exploitation.

This fluctuating competency is the only modern reason for lifting the age of consent to sexual relations from the Common Law age of ten to 16, while the age of full adult competence remains 18. Modern children may be more knowing but yet unwise, which is why our law makes youth a reason for both extra protection and more adult responsibility in dependency relationships. Parents continue to be foolish, sometimes, too.

Once police decided that the Henson photographs were not 'obscene', this issue of child protection still breathed within a small party of co-authors of a letter, of which I was one, who maintained that the real issue was not pornography or paedophilia, but the lack of ethical integrity in exploiting children for adult purposes.

Then the editor of *Arts Monthly* shot down the arts community's smart and timely move to

self-regulate. Last week his magazine decided to poke the beehive by featuring on its front cover a nude photo of an artfully posed six-year-old girl, accompanied by a poorly-written essay 'against censorship' inside the magazine.

When the public and child protection activists swarmed back into the air, the child herself, now 11, was paraded in front of reporters, there to protest on behalf of the editor's political campaign, that she had not been abused. If not by the photo, or by its decontextualised exposure, then surely by her being put in that position.

We have to do more than posture. Ethics is a process, not a position taken in the 'art/freedom of expression versus pornography' court battles of the sixties. Do Henson and *Art Monthly's* tactless editor seriously expect that the argument that there is no ethical issue affecting art — no issue about the exploitation of artists' models, particularly those who are required to shed their anonymity along with their clothes — to be taken seriously?

These objects of artistic attention are not objects, lumps of wood, nor passive participants. A model contributes to the artist's work. There are relationships to be considered. Where the model is a child, she is or he is legally and morally vulnerable, which imposes a far greater moral obligation on the stronger person in the relationship.

Parents are expected to put best interests first. Artists, on their own argument, put the art first.

There are no rules about how children are informed or assent let alone consent to their use now or in the future in artistic works. There is quite frankly no real possibility that a child of six could know how their image taken by mummy might in future be used to tantalise, politicise, tease or simply titillate others in years to come.

It is any adult's responsibility to protect, without conflict of interest, the rights of a child. Parents have the first privilege to protect their best interests, including the right to protect their child from exploitation. That does not relieve artists and the child's community from responding if the parent gets it wrong.

Though society may well value art for art's sake, works of art, publicly exhibited and offered for sale, have become articles of trade. They are compromised. The market has no morality.

If, as the absurdist playwright Jean Anouilh said, art's purpose was to give life a shape, then unless we find a way to address our ethical responsibilities perhaps the various kinds of trade in sexualised children and their images will be the enduring legacy of this 21st century.

Giving up on unreadable muck

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle



Another thing we don't talk about much when it comes to books and reading is how almost all readers finally arrive at one crucial and telling moment, one that changes their reading styles forever after — that instant when you realise you aren't going to finish the book you are diligently ploughing through, and you don't have to finish it, and you can fling it off the porch with a sigh of relief.

Such a fling does not mean you are an ignoramus, and in fact a book's unfinishability reflects less on the reader than on the writer, even on such otherwise excellent writers as, for example, James Joyce, whose *Dubliners* is taut and perfect and whose *Finnegan's Wake* is, let us admit cheerfully here in public, unreadable muck.

Almost every reader achieves this moment of maturity, it seems to me, and it is a remarkably freeing line to step over — to finally give up on reading all of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and realise happily that now you have years more to live, or, after two volumes of Marcel Proust, to say politely, 'Marcel, you are a wheezing neurotic nut, and I wish you the best, but I'd like to read books where things actually happen', or even to say to the genius Henry James, 'Hank, old pup, your infinitesimal gradations of social manners are incredibly boring, and reading your denser novels is like being drilled by a very slow dentist.' Isn't that a refreshing feeling?

There are, of course, many books in which slogging pays off wonderfully — Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, say, or Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, both of which demand maybe a hundred pages of patient muddling before they explode into such vast tremendous stories that you are, at the end, loath to leave their extraordinary worlds.

And there are many books, such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* or Melville's *Moby-Dick*, that are so huge and sprawling and labyrinthine that you are as pleasantly addled at the end as you were at the beginning, which is perhaps why you reread them with joy every few summers.

And there are books that are hard to read but riveting and unforgettable, and it would have been a real shame not to have played in their intense game, books like Annie Dillard's *For the Time Being*, or Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, or Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, or David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*.

I know only two people who still obsessively finish every book they begin, and in both cases I suspect they are the sort of people who organise the socks in their drawers by color and

manufacturer and country of origin, but I believe most readers are like me, and we pick up books so as to be grabbed, startled, snagged, riveted, knocked out, nailed, moved, amazed, absorbed, drawn irresistibly into a tale and a world and a tribe of characters who are completely and utterly real, within the first 50 pages or so, at most a hundred.

But after that, if you find your interest and energy flagging, and the page grows too heavy to turn, and the book sits dusty on the night-table, and your attitude has quietly morphed into maybe I'll finish that when I have the flu, then the book is, let's face it, doomed.

The best thing about not finishing books you do not wish to read anymore is the way it frees you to read books you do want to read but have not read yet, and books you stumble across, and books that are pressed upon you by cousins and other charlatans, and books on other people's night-stands, and books in the waiting rooms of very slow dentists, and books mentioned in the bibliographies of books you loved, and books lauded in book reviews, and books touted by prospective lovers, and books with shameless vulgar irresistible covers beaming at you from bookstores, and books you find in the basement that you were supposed to read in college but didn't, and books newly translated into your first language, and books discovered after the death of an author whose other books you admired, and books your kids are supposed to read for school but leave carelessly around the house, which is a mistake on their part, for that is how one of my sons did not read Jack London's *White Fang* but I did, which led me happily back to *The Sea-Wolf*, which led me to other salty American writers, including finally the great testy genius Henry Louis Mencken, but even Henry, great as he was, could not keep me at *The American Language*, which is said to be a total deathless classic but was so moaningly boring that after 30 pages I slammed it shut and grabbed a beer and a son and ran to the sea, the story from whence all stories come.

Dirty words for child labour

HUMAN RIGHTS

Saeed Saeed

Indian born Roghini Govindhan knows hardship. She was sold to a contractor at the age of 13 and, up until five years ago, she was working furious 11-hour days in a cramped damp room churning out match boxes.



Now 24, Govindhan has taken her first trip abroad, sharing her painful experiences with audiences of Australian school students, as part of World Vision's Don't Trade Lives anti-slavery campaign.

Govindhan acknowledges the rapid change in her fortunes has been dizzying.

'It was difficult at first,' she says. 'But I feel so accepted when I talk to the young people. It gives me confidence to speak about my story.'

Born and raised in Gudiyattam in the Vellore District, Govindhan's teenage years and education were abruptly cut short when her family fell behind in repaying the 2000 rupees (AUD\$48) loan they took to finance her elder sister's wedding. Govindhan was taken as bond by a contractor to work off the debt.

'Since I was younger and only studying, it was my responsibility to go to work for the family. My quota was 1400 matchboxes a day and the pay they give me is 15 paise (AUD\$0.36). I was given the paper and glue and a wooden platform. I sat with my legs crossed for 11 hours every day folding and gluing the paper.'

Inadequate lighting and a meagre diet of rice and water led to mistakes that served to increase the interest on Govindhan's debt. Her visual memory of her ordeal is hazy. She acutely remembers voices, particularly of the abusive factory manager she simply calls 'The Man'.

'Because so many of us were girls, the man in the house used to shout at us and threaten us. He spoke very dirty words and language to us to make us feel bad and humiliated.'

Three months into her contract, Govindhan swallowed a mouthful of pills in a failed suicide attempt. 'I had no education and no future,' she says. 'I was so depressed and always worried that I would never finish my schooling. I thought "why me?" and "what's the point of staying in this world?"'

UNICEF estimates there are 158 million children aged 5–14 currently involved in child labour, ranging from the mining and agricultural industry to prostitution and domestic servants. According to the Indian Census of 2001, 12 million children are recognised as being child labourers. Leading NGOs put the figure as high as 44 million.

‘We sort of tolerate it because we think these kids work to feed the family. We don’t realise that it’s modern slavery,’ World Vision CEO Tim Costello tells *Eureka Street*.

Combating child labour is a complex task as it involves understanding the cultural and economic sensitivities of third world nations. Although mass boycotting of products remains a popular weapon, it is seen as increasingly blunt as it allows child labour contractors to simply move children across to other unregulated industries. Furthermore, this approach can sometimes only serve to exacerbate the poverty that is at the root of this crisis.

A 1997 UNICEF study titled ‘The State of the World’s Children’ cites an example in which 5000–7000 Nepalese children turned to prostitution after the US banned the country’s carpet exports in the 1990s.

A United States Department of Labour report on Bangladesh acknowledges that contractors dismissed an estimated 50,000 children from their jobs in the garment industry in fear of the 1999 Child Labour Deterrence Act. For survival, some children were left to take on more harmful work such as stone crushing and prostitution.

The steady growth of Self Help Groups in Southern Indian communities presents some of the innovation required to combat this crisis. Initiated by NGOs, Self Help Groups economically empower poor communities by generating members’ income through a system of internal lending.

Each group consists of no more than 20 women who regularly make small fixed deposits to the group’s bank account. Once the group accumulates a healthy amount of resources it starts lending to its members. With the support of the group, members develop an understanding of credit, accountability and the importance of repayments. Most importantly, it keeps extortionate money lenders at bay.

‘Now the woman has purchasing power because they have money,’ says Parvati Raphael, who runs a Self Help Group called Trust located in Vellore District. ‘They can exercise their rights and don’t have to rely on anyone.’

Upon hearing Govindhan’s story, the women of Trust paid off the rest of her bond. Govindhan is now on course to finishing her nursing qualifications this August.

With the assistance of World Vision, Trust is using Govindhan’s experience and its resources to educate neighbouring communities on laws relating to child labour and fiscal responsibility.

‘Education is the best practice. The community needs to know about their rights and their children’s rights. But that’s not enough. They then have to act upon their rights.’

Costello says this message also carries potency here in the developed world.

‘We assume they have laws like there are here, and not that millions of kids are involved in

child labour. And we have no idea about how insidious and savage this practice is.'

The Inaugural Australian Trafficking Forum will take place at the University of Technology Sydney on Thursday 24 July. The issue of child labour will also be a focus of this year's World Vision [40 Hour Famine](#), being held from 15–17 August.

After the obscenity

POETRY

Jo McInerney

Return with effects

The following undated journal pages were among Corporal Ryan's personal effects. Include with items to be sent to his mother. Attach inventory.

I was 36 years old the day I arrived at Kure, south east of a city now known for an obscenity. Belsen, Dachau, or, closer to home, Changi. But also Dresden, Nagasaki and the capital of the prefecture where I am based — Hiroshima.

No longer young, I have spent my life with children. My boyhood sped in Fitzroy's narrow streets, playing cricket with paling bat and india-rubber ball or sailing in paper boat regattas when bluestone gutters brimmed and our vessels foundered or flew.

I became a country school teacher while still almost a child. Drawn to far, flat horizons and black skies blistered with stars. I grew used to earnest conversations in the local pub, where some farmer would ask, 'Is the moon over Ouyen the same one they see in Melbourne?'

My hungry heart has roamed. Whom have I known¹? For nearly twenty years I have been a flying Dutchman, a wandering Jew, carting enlightenment to the outer reaches of the Wimmera, the Mallee. Never in one place long enough to belong or marry, always the liked outsider.

I carried my books in packing cases from one town to another —

the world I made for myself after supper, by the light
of a kerosene lamp. I refined my schoolboy
Latin, Greek, read *The Iliad*. And then,
I studied Japanese.

I loved the intricate characters — word, picture, sound. In black sweeps
and scratchings, diverse elements compounded. My struggling
crosshatchings scraped with spattering nib
across the paper, until finally
there was order.

I enlisted early, only to be classified B2. I was relieved. But when
Japan surrendered, I was suddenly of use — an Australian
with a degree in Japanese. No one now expected to fight,
we were an occupation force. I was to be
a translator.

Feasible, if all I had to do was read and write — I could not
speak the language. More Caliban than Prospero,
I had no words to make my purposes known².
But I did not hate. The war had not
touched me.

No one close to me had died. My brother deserted when our part
had just begun. My father is an old man. Japan,
not the enemy, but a land of myth and mystery.

The Japanese turned out to watch
when we arrived.

Not like the newsreels of liberated France. No cheering crowds,
just ragged soldiers and rows of women in kimonos,
blank faced, babies on their backs. They made

no sound. No roses in our way,
no myrtle³.

We were freighted to the warehouses of Kaitaichi, five miles
from Hiroshima. One day I took the train to see the ruins.

It was easy to find the centre of the blast — poles
and steel stanchions bent like stamens
from the dead heart.

No memorials, just an eternity of razed houses, a stony desert.

Everywhere a level scree of broken pottery and tiles.

Such a fragile world to destroy with such force⁴.

I strained the pieces through my fingers,
dead soil, waiting for rain.

One skeletal structure remains⁵, its hive stripped bare; its metal
spokes framing air. A slatted dome, no steeple, open doors,
no people. Covered in fine dust,

I scrambled within its
rock-strewn centre.

The Americans' Geiger counters click like crickets. All interest,
no concern. They dart about rubbing their hands together,
believing high summer will last forever.

I am anxious. I feel the unseen drift
settle on my skin.

I write home often. My letters are cheerful. I remember birthdays.

At the army gift shop I buy embroidered handkerchiefs
for mother, stockings for my sister.

Later, I tell them, I will send
happy coats⁶.
I cannot imagine ever going back.

Notes

1. Tennyson's *Ulysses* 'For always roaming with a hungry heart / Much have I seen and known.'

2. *The Tempest* Act I Scene II. Miranda tells Caliban 'I endow'd thy purposes / With words that made them known.'

3. Browning's *The Patriot*

'It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had'

4. On witnessing the detonation of the first atomic bomb, Robert Oppenheimer famously uttered a line from the Bhagavad Gita, 'Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.'

5. The Hiroshima Prefectural Products Exhibition Hall was completed in April 1915. The 6 August 1945 nuclear explosion was almost directly above this building and it was the closest structure to withstand the explosion. The building has been preserved in virtually the same state as immediately after the bombing. It is commonly known as the Atomic Bomb Dome or A-Bomb Dome.

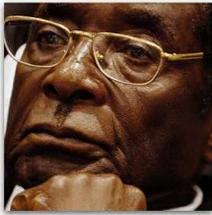
6. These details come from a letter Steve Ryan sent his mother and sister from Kure on 24 November. (The letter does not indicate the year.)

Steve Ryan was my uncle and his experiences with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan were the starting point for this poem. Unlike the persona assumed here, my uncle survived his time in Japan.

Genesis of a tyrant

POLITICS

Oskar Wermter



More than 100 people have been killed. Many have been abducted, some probably never to be found again. Hundreds, thousands have been severely beaten, now in hospitals recovering from horrible wounds and fractures. Hunger is rampant, the monetary system destroyed, at least a quarter of the population sheltering in South Africa, Botswana and overseas countries as economic or political refugees.

One man is responsible for this national catastrophe, though his supporters share in his guilt: Robert Mugabe.

He told his police and party supporters, 'Bash them!' This is on record, it cannot be denied. The excuse that these atrocities are being committed by 'overenthusiastic' supporters without his knowledge and approval is demonstrably false. He does know and he approves.

Who is this man? Was he born such a fiend?

He grew up on a Catholic mission, Kutama, 90 km from Harare, where his father was employed as a carpenter. His mother was devoted to the Church and the bright young boy got a Catholic education in the family, from the French-Canadian Marist Brothers of Kutama College and his Jesuit parish priest, Fr Jerome O'Hea SJ.

He was very keen on his school work and was always seen with a book in his hand even when herding cattle. Father O'Hea thought highly of him and, like his stern mother, expected great things from him. He was a loner and reacted with anger to the other children making fun of him.

According to Heidi Holland, his recent biographer (*Dinner with Mugabe*, Penguin Books SA, 2008), he suffered a deep trauma when his father left wife and family to work in a faraway city where he married another woman. Suddenly the young boy was head of the family. Bright and ambitious, but essentially angry, lonely and insecure — that about seems to sum up young Robert.

Apparently he has never really changed. Just as he reacted with anger to this rejection by his father so he has reacted to any other rejection he had to endure in later life. The Rhodesians put him into detention without trial for 11 years, and when his only child, a little boy called Nhamo ('Suffering') born him by his beloved first wife Sally died in Ghana, they denied him permission to go and bury him. He has never forgotten.

After Independence he tried to reach out to the whites, even Ian Smith. They were happy enough that he did not touch them then, but, not really trusting him, they gave him the cold shoulder, another rejection for which he did not forgive them. When they supported the opposition he saw this as another treachery. He took his revenge. In the process he destroyed agriculture.

He took a string of degrees while in detention. He studied law and economics, but he never practiced law and was never in business. And studying in the loneliness of his prison cell, he was never exposed to the cut and thrust of intellectual debate.

He learnt his politics in the fratricidal infighting of the liberation movements. His personal experience was: you must be tough, uncompromising, aggressive, and use violence to get anywhere. The other leaders who agreed to negotiate fell by the wayside. He came out tops holding out until the end. He does not believe in dialogue. You can only lose.

This is his greatest weakness: he cannot accept criticism, being called into question, meeting opposition of any kind. He responds with anger and aggression. The whole of Africa is learning that now, to its cost.

His inability to face opposition and deal with criticism has destroyed him intellectually. He has produced a false ideology for himself which serves his political purposes but does not stand any reality test.

He is stuck in the past and keeps fighting the whites, the British, the western colonial powers. Since he never has to face critics nobody tells him the world has moved on. And he gets uncontrollably angry when somebody tries to do so, like those unfortunate journalists in Egypt recently.

Some years back, before another election, he met church people. He was very friendly, even charming, and praised the Church for its great work. When some leaders got up and asked for dialogue between church and government to continue after the elections, he promised that would be no problem.

But when the Catholic Bishops wanted to talk to him over the report 'Breaking the Silence' on the civil war in Matabeleland 1983—87, in which his troops slaughtered maybe 15,000 civilians, he refused to meet them.

Even as far back as 1983 when the Bishops for the first time had to denounce his government's action in the Matabeleland conflict, he hit back fiercely and ridiculed the Bishops as those 'sanctimonious prelates', despite the fact that he was being celebrated as hero and liberator by many church people.

This was the time when his admirers first allowed him to address congregations in church, an opportunity he has been exploiting to his political advantage ever since.

Maybe the Church should have retained a little bit more self-respect and dignity in dealing with him. While showing courtesy and respect, the Church might have done better to retain a certain distance and independence, while keeping lines of communication open for critical dialogue.

It is probably too late now. What went wrong? There will have to be one big post-mortem once he is gone, and this will be one of the questions to ask.

Anti-annoyance law will return to bite Church

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Last Thursday, Frank Brennan [wrote](#) in *Eureka Street* that the NSW Government's controversial World Youth Day Amendment Regulation is 'a dreadful interference with civil liberties, and contrary to the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching on human rights'.



The freedom of expression which the Amendment Regulation curtails is a right on which the Catholic Church itself relies in order to exist as a functioning faith community. In a secular society, some groups will be annoyed by public religious symbols like crosses, and others by protests defending the right to life.

This initiative of the NSW Government appears well-intentioned but ill-considered. It aims to do the right thing by the Church and the general community, and eliminate so-called annoying behaviour. But instead it's likely to foster serious belligerence, and perhaps open hostility and even isolated violence.

Protesters would have done little more than humour the pilgrims with their own playful exuberance, wearing pointedly-worded T-shirts, and handing out condoms as if they were how-to-vote cards. Existing laws empower police to deal with genuinely intolerable behaviour, such as targeting the Pope with a laser pointer.

In May, the Dean of Sydney's St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral, Phillip Jensen [wrote](#) an opinion article for the *Sydney Morning Herald* titled 'Church of Rome hath erred, but Anglicans won't rain on Pope's parade'. The article itself is contentious, implying that what divides Christians is more significant than what unites them. But he did assert the right of the Church and WYD pilgrims to be treated like any other group in the community. 'World Youth Day does not compromise the separation of church and state. Nor does it undermine secular government. The Government provides facilities and security for any group, either religious or non-religious. We can only complain when there is favouritism for any particular group.'

The favouritism he was referring to gives preference to 'the secularists [who] wish to impose atheistic belief on society through government'. But despite government denials, it appears the favouritism is ironically designed to help the Catholic Church.

The Church needs to go beyond the benign 'we didn't ask for it' excuse for tolerating the laws that it can only regard as convenient. Its answer to the Premier must be 'Thanks, but no thanks!' The Church's own right to strident expression of its views is at stake.

Workaholic Australians can't buy time

COMMUNITY

Michele Freeman



A recent report by the Productivity Commission into part-time work in Australia confirms what many have long suspected: people would like to work less.

As Kevin Rudd calls for longer and harder hours from Australian public servants, and leads by example to the point of exhaustion, the study has found that there are twice the number of people wanting to move out of full-time work and into part-time work, than the other way around.

I for one do not find this surprising. When discussing my own part-time work arrangements a common reaction I get is: 'I'd love to do that'. But I must say, an equally common reaction is genuine perplexity.

Once people discover that I don't have children, a second job, or a study load, their friendly faces become confused and with crinkled foreheads they ask, 'but what do you do?'

In our society it is largely expected that people only work part-time because of childcare or study commitments, or as a bridge to retirement, excluding the option of part-time work as a lifestyle choice.

Nowhere is this attitude more alarming than in the Victorian Police Force, where policy actually prohibits people working part-time out of choice. Prospective part-time workers must meet one of three eligibility criteria, and unsurprisingly, not one of them is related to lifestyle choice — the bridge to retirement is out too.

It seems that all too often the dominant focus of part-time work is on reconciling work and family, overlooking the importance of creating time for ourselves and our communities.

I know it's not simply a matter of choice, there are very real, complex restrictions — gender, class and ethnic differences — that make striking a healthy work life balance difficult for many people.

But still I can't help wonder why some of the hardest working people in the world, in an economic boom time, won't act on their self-confessed desire to work less.

A survey in 2007 by the Work + Life Centre found that part-time employees more frequently reported feeling satisfied than full-timers, and that part-time hours were associated with better work/life outcomes. This was confirmed by the Productivity Commission report, which also stated that part-time work arrangements lift workforce participation levels and offer benefits to industry.

So if a lack of beneficial outcomes doesn't seem to be the culprit, perhaps a more likely place to point the finger is at cultural constraints.

Because, outside the need to validate lifestyle choice as a reason for part-time work, institutional structures and workplace culture could do with a shake up too.

Full-time work remains the 'norm' while part-time is generally seen as the 'lesser other'. Part-time workers constantly report facing the attitude that they are less committed than their full-time counterparts.

This is particularly the case in the non-profit sector in which I work, where commitment — not just to your job but to saving the world in general — is measured by the amount of time you spend at work.

But perhaps one of the saddest cultural constraints of all is the idea that wealth is related to happiness. Often, tapped on to the end of the 'I'd love to do that' confessions I hear the words: 'if I could afford it'.

Average Australian personal debt, between \$6—14,000, is at record levels. Debt, and attitudes of being unable to afford 'time', are the results of a consumer culture that says money, and what it buys, is the key to a good life.

But wise people have long said that money doesn't equal happiness. Community, family and relationships do, yet these are often the first things to suffer in a culture of overwork. The Work + Life Centre survey also found that 47 per cent of people felt work interfered with their capacity to maintain community connections and friendships.

Research into the links between wealth and happiness doesn't paint a much better picture. The Australia Institute found that around 1 per cent of Australians live in households with a net worth of approximately \$3 million, but many of them aren't satisfied with their financial position. In households with people living on less than \$25,000 a year, 21 per cent felt totally satisfied.

None of this is to say that work, full-time work included, isn't fulfilling and stimulating. But when large numbers of people indicate they would like to work less, yet they are not making any correlating lifestyle changes, could the reason be that we exist in a world that tells us we need to work more, to have more, to be happy?