

Hamlet's complex adolescence	
<i>Ellena Savage</i>	<u>1</u>
A fair go for Gurkhas	
<i>Dan Read</i>	<u>3</u>
Coens' cynical spy spoof	
<i>Tim Kroenert</i>	<u>5</u>
Overworked Aussies' imperfect match	
<i>Tony Smith</i>	<u>7</u>
Something rotten in Islam	
<i>Irfan Yusuf</i>	<u>9</u>
Bankers conspire to cover their assets	
<i>Les Coleman</i>	<u>13</u>
Bipartisan games	
<i>John Warhurst</i>	<u>16</u>
Bad day pose	
<i>Isabella Fels</i>	<u>18</u>
Wall Street Blues	
<i>Jim McDermott</i>	<u>22</u>
ABC Radio National's bland vision	
<i>Michael Mullins</i>	<u>24</u>
Neither Scott nor Amrozi deserves death	
<i>Frank Brennan</i>	<u>26</u>
Inside the Brethren lobby horse	
<i>John Gunson</i>	<u>29</u>
Moral relativism's extreme close-up	
<i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	<u>31</u>
Wired, profound	
<i>Tim Kroenert</i>	<u>33</u>
State wards: parental guidance recommended	
<i>Philip Mendes</i>	<u>35</u>
The battle for the economy class armrest	
<i>Brian Matthews</i>	<u>37</u>
Eight months on, still sorry	
<i>Deborah Ruiz Wall</i>	<u>39</u>
Uganda's aggressive peace	
<i>Ben Fraser</i>	<u>41</u>
The chuckling economist	
<i>Bronwyn Lay</i>	<u>43</u>
Monastic gaze through money myopia	
<i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	<u>46</u>



Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

©2008 EurekaStreet.com.au

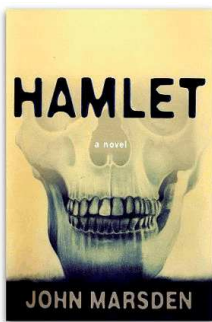
©2008 EurekaStreet.com.au

Hamlet's complex adolescence

BOOK FORUM

Ellena Savage

Marsden, John, *Hamlet, A Novel*. Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2008, RRP \$29.95. ISBN 9781921351471



I don't particularly like Hamlet. I love Shakespeare's play, and thoroughly enjoyed reading Marsden's novel adaptation of that play, *Hamlet, A Novel*. But there's something about young Hamlet that annoys me.

Perhaps it is his reckless ego, which I see as a product of an over-privileged upbringing. Where others read his soliloquising as the musings of a tortured humanist, I read them as indulgent admissions of egocentricity and adolescence.

Adolescence, however, cannot be overlooked as a central feature of Hamlet's angst. Marsden's *Hamlet, A Novel*, examines this.

Hamlet's place in the canon is largely due to the focus Shakespeare puts on Hamlet's interiority; the plot, refusing to pander to the populist lust for action, instead focuses on the psychology of inaction and melancholy. Marsden's novel further examines Hamlet's angst, which is brought on by the appearance of the ghost of his father, whose murder he promises to avenge.

It's the same with everything. I don't pick up the knife because I think too much about it and thinking paralyses my arm. Action is hot, and thought is cold.

It's our inability to understand Hamlet's deep privacy and his complex layers of madness (or feigned madness) that drives the play. His most famous soliloquy in act three, scene one, 'To be or not to be ...', popularly epitomises this complexity, and is rearticulated in a more adolescent language by Marsden's Hamlet:

Whether we are to live or not to live. To dance or to die. To breathe the painful air, or to sleep.

While his motive for writing the book was to 'try to get to know Hamlet better', Marsden doesn't completely satisfy the reader's desire to understand Hamlet. Instead, he responds to this desire by providing glimpses of Hamlet's personal history, adding new layers of ambiguity.

In one chapter, Marsden shows us Hamlet, Horatio and Ophelia as children playing in the forest. They come across a dying badger and agree that it needs to be euthanised. Hamlet stalls, and then violently attacks the badger, causing it more pain, and frightening his friends.

Hamlet realised the enormity of his mistake and stabbed wildly now, three, four times, until blood was everywhere across the ground and breath was leaving the spasming animal.

Hamlet, A Novel deals with the emotional complexities that young people face, in concise and unpatronising prose. For instance, Marsden examines Hamlet's perpetually (and inevitably) unconsummated relationship with Ophelia, capturing the irrational lust and dependence of adolescent love that is not realised in any tangible form.

Hamlet dreamed of Ophelia ... He dreamed in prepositions: beside, with, on top of, in, under, out. The dreams were unbearable sometimes, they sent him crazy, but he could not stop them, nor did he want to.

She turned to him and said, 'He has gone far away.'

The language of the novel, while written in Marsden's emotive narrative voice, occasionally adopts aspects of Elizabethan dramatic expression. For instance, when Hamlet, in a rage, articulates his feelings of angst concerning his uncle, the new King of Denmark:

That traitor. That bastard. That bloody bawdy villain, remorseless, treacherous, lecherous and vile.

Hamlet, A Novel, brings Elsinore to life richly and imaginatively. Marsden gives us new insight into familiar characters, allowing each flesh and substance enough to arouse the reader's interest and empathy. This is a gripping, fast-paced and delicately executed novel.

A fair go for Gurkhas

POLITICS

Dan Read

For decades, Nepalese troops have fought in the British army as specialist soldiers and experts in irregular warfare.

Famed for their courage, as well as their razor sharp 'kukri' blades, Gurkha regiments first gained notoriety in the west after inflicting significant casualties on Britain's East India Company during the 1815 invasion of Nepal. They subsequently fought in the trenches of the First World War, and again against the Japanese in the 1940s. Many of them never returned to their homes in Nepal.



In payment of such a debt, the British government has finally permitted veterans of the Gurkha regiments to settle in the UK.

It may seem odd that so much time has passed for such a decision to be made. In 1997, with the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, Gurkha headquarters was shifted from the island to the British mainland. This was, however, not met with legislation to allow existing soldiers or veterans to live permanently in the UK.

Even Victoria Cross winners such as Lichhiman Guring, 91, and Tul Bahadur Pun, 86 — both of whom were involved in the recent legal battle — fell into this trap, much to the distress of fellow veterans and supporters.

This changed this month when claimants, representing roughly 2000 veterans, brought their case against the UK government in a court of law. All of those involved had been denied the right to settle because they had not developed sufficiently 'strong ties' to Britain. However, this was thrown out by Judge Justice Blake, who summed up his verdict by speaking of the 'moral debt' owed by the British people to the 2000 men.

The decision to allow settlement rights was greeted by a roar of approval from the courtroom. Despite the jubilation, this success still fails to highlight a whole list of other inequalities, some of which veterans have struggled to rectify in recent years.

Historically Gurkhas were allocated a pension six times lower than that of their British counterparts. This was allegedly due to the fact that the cost of living in Nepal was significantly lower than that of the UK.

This was partially mitigated in 2007 when the Ministry of Defence announced that those retiring after 1997 would receive a basic soldier's pension. Unfortunately, this still leaves a

large number of veterans wishing to live in Britain out of pocket. This brackets a succession of earlier struggles from active soldiers to obtain pay on the same level as their British colleagues.

In 2007 several former soldiers lost their case against the Ministry of Defence. The four men had attempted to bring a case of racial discrimination against the ministry at an employment tribunal. This was thrown out on the grounds that it was 'too late' to initiate such proceedings. Apparently the case should have been forwarded within six months of the men being discharged from the army.

However, as the British army has been downscaled, so too have the Gurkhas regiments. While they reached peak strength of 112,000 in the Second World War, those now on active service number around the 3000 mark.

This has only increased the prestige granted to those able to pass the gruelling induction training back home in Nepal. Each year, thousands of hopeful young men compete for the scanty 200 places available, hoping in the process for a ticket out of poverty and a life overseas.

This much sought after prize does not always come, however. In fact, despite having recently become a formal republic after the departure of King Gyanendra, Nepal finds itself at a historical crossroads. Poverty in the country still reaches crippling levels, with unemployment thought to encompass fully half of the population.

Historically then, it is no wonder that such conditions have led to many Nepalese seeking employment in India, China, or the British army. But with Nepal continuing to flounder in poverty and with Britain downscaling its military might, the eagerly sought escape to foreign climes may not be an option for today's would-be soldiers.

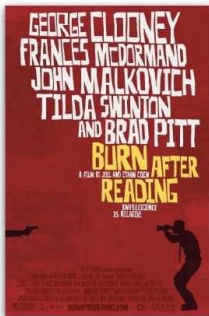
In that sense, the decision to allow the veterans of yesterday a home in Britain is to be commended. The problems that have caused Nepal's young men to leave their homeland to seek employment elsewhere, however, remain to be solved.

Coens' cynical spy spoof

FILM FORUM

Tim Kroenert

***Burn After Reading*: 96 minutes. Rated: MA. Directors: Ethan Coen, Joel Coen. Starring: Frances McDormand, Brad Pitt, John Malkovich, Tilda Swinton, George Clooney, J. K. Simmons, Richard Jenkins**



It can be hard to spot the villain in a Coen Brothers movie. In *No Country For Old Men*, Javier Bardem's ruthless bounty hunter was conspicuously evil; less obvious were the self-serving tendencies of his sullen quarry, the archetypal cowboy played by Josh Brolin, whose theft of a sack of drug money provoked the bloody pursuit.

The Coens' latest offering, the spy comedy *Burn After Reading*, is not as bleak as *No Country For Old Men*. But it does jostle with unlikeable characters, a fact that tends to blur the lines of responsibility for its tragic outcomes.

Like *No Country For Old Men* (and, for that matter, the Coens' other masterpiece, *Fargo*), *Burn After Reading* chronicles the fatal fallout that takes place due to an inept scheme executed by an ostensibly decent human being. In this case the instigator of the scam is endearingly goofy gym employee Linda Litzke (McDormand).

Middle-aged, single, and surrounded daily by the gym's fit clients, Linda dreams of being able to afford the cosmetic surgery that she believes will give her body, and therefore her life, perfection. When her incessantly upbeat associate Chad (a hilarious Pitt) discovers that a disk found on the gym floor contains classified CIA information, she sees her chance, and enlists Chad's help to blackmail the disk's owner.

Said owner is one Osbourne Cox (Malkovich), an alcoholic ex-CIA analyst with a monstrous ego and a grudge to match. He's no pushover, and what Linda envisioned as a straightforward scam gets complicated.

She fails, for example, to account for the fact that the information on the disk might not be as valuable as she imagined. She also doesn't plan for the presence in Cox's world of womanising and increasingly paranoid treasury agent Harry Pfarrer (Clooney), a man with an itchy trigger finger, who has been sleeping with Cox's ill-tempered wife Katie (Swinton) and, coincidentally, is the same Harry that Linda recently hooked up with via an internet dating site.

Convoluting, yes, and, like any good spy thriller, each convolution exacerbates the layers of intrigue. But it's all very farcical, closer in tone to other Coen comedies such as *The Big*

Lebowski and *Oh Brother Where Art Thou?* than *Fargo* or *Miller's Crossing*. Yet the dire consequences of Linda and Chad's ill-fated espionage pack a punch, even amid the dark absurdity.

Burn After Reading may not be bleak, but it is cynical about the human potential for reckless self-interest. It is preoccupied with issues of sexual identity and fidelity, which bear disproportionately on the events. Linda's desire for a perfect body is motivated by her desire for a perfect man. She's oblivious to the awkward advances of her gentle employer, Ted (Jenkins). She mistakes Harry for Mr Right, and is as blind to his flaws as Katie is.

Harry's own sense of self-worth is so bound up with sex that he's been secretly building an elaborate masturbation device, intended as a grotesquely misguided gift for his wife.

The film is equally cynical about soulless bureaucracy. Its most hilarious, defining moments belong to Simmons as the CIA superior who, baffled by the strange and fatal reports surrounding the blackmail attempt against their former agent Cox, revels in blithely sweeping the whole mess under the rug.

The loss of innocent lives is no concern of his, as long as it doesn't disrupt business as usual.

Overworked Aussies' imperfect match

SPORT

Tony Smith

The creed of Rampaging Roy Slaven and Dr H. G. Nelson has one basic tenet: too much sport is barely enough. In those long hot summers of Australian childhood three, four or five decades ago, it would have been regarded as heresy should anyone have suggested that there could be too much cricket.



The plight of the Australian team currently touring India suggests, however, that the unthinkable has now become a reality. The commercial necessity to play many pointless matches has taken the sting from our fast bowlers and might even have devalued the privilege of wearing the 'baggy green'.

Captain Ricky Ponting has been quick to deny any talk of a falling out with chief 'quick' Brett Lee. Apparently, there was a moment in the recent test when Lee believed he should have been thrown the ball, but really, that is a given for any quick. Fast bowlers are traditionally a volatile breed. Most have a temperament ready to erupt should things not go their way.

They are after all, strike bowlers used in explosive bursts and thrive on confrontation and intimidation. A few exceptional fast bowlers have been mild mannered and unflappable, but most have had quick tempers even towards their own team-mates.

Fast bowlers put such energy and self-belief into their bowling that they expect a wicket with every ball. Unless physically exhausted, this attitude makes them reluctant to accept that anyone else should ever be thrown the ball, except to hold up the other end, and some probably think they should bowl from both ends if the laws permitted.

The handling of the pace attack might well be the real test of captaincy skills. Spinners have always had a great say in the setting of their fields, but captains tend to think they know best when the quicks are on. It is reasonable that the skipper should want to stamp his or her authority on the game in that first over when the pitch is at its greenest, the ball its reddest and the creams their whitest. The relationship between captain and fast bowler adds to the air of anticipation and keeps everyone alert.

Occasionally the tension can become negative. There was an alleged incident between Allan Border and Craig McDermott when the dour skipper reminded the red-headed speedster just who captained the Australian side, and there was talk of someone having to pack his bags if he did not like it.

Originally a Sydneysider, Border had become a proud Queenslander. So, his difference

with McDermott could have been aggravated by their being Sunshine State team-mates.

Border recalled that his Queensland pride might actually have threatened the life of Victorian Dean Jones. Jones made a very brave double century in India despite being physically ill and extremely dehydrated. When Jones suggested that perhaps he should retire hurt, Border told him that perhaps he should — perhaps he should get out of the way so that he could get someone tough, like another Queenslander, out into the middle.

Jones batted on and, as a result, needed to be hospitalised when he eventually left the ground.

No observer would wish physical illness on any cricketer, and it does seem as though the 2008 tour is being spared the dietary trauma which has befallen so many Australian tourists in South Asia. Unfortunately the cricketers may now be showing signs of psychological problems that can be even more difficult to overcome.

The likes of Brett Lee, Mitchell Johnson and even the incredibly strong and stable Stuart Clark must be threatened constantly with mental tiredness. The promising Shaun Tait seems to have succumbed temporarily, but it is difficult to see signs that administrators have learnt from his experience. Today, cricketers must play not only test matches but also one day internationals and more recently, even shorter games.

It is not the players who desire such an intensive schedule and few fans could follow all forms of the game. Clearly, the program is being driven by those who value the relationship between players and fans most: those who profit from the creation of a pool of stars who are instantly recognisable and constantly available.

These entrepreneurs are only slightly disconcerted when a star burns out, because they have the power to create others in their place. The players, and especially the fast bowlers, are devalued as never before.

Cricket is a mind game. The psychological condition of any individual in a team affects the whole 11. The Indian cricketers talk Australia up, suggesting we will bounce back even stronger. At the same time, they will work hard to ensure that the recovery is delayed.

Indian conditions have always disadvantaged Australian quicks, but teams have coped with strong batting, fielding and slow bowling. In 2008 however, the conditions have revealed the true plight of our quicks.

With so much cricket being played, too little value is placed on test matches and too little thought given to the best means of winning them. Let's hope that Ricky Ponting is being paid handsomely because he has been placed into an impossible position.

Something rotten in Islam

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

Irfan Yusuf



A Muslim proverb says that a child's first university is her or his mother's lap. Young children at this age are like soft clay and can be moulded into more or less a permanent shape that will prove difficult to change in later years. It's a process that might be called education by osmosis.

I graduated from the university of my Indian mother's lap with a fear of the prayers of others, especially those I have wronged. The word for oppression in both Arabic and Urdu (my mother's North Indian dialect) is *zulm*. An oppressor is *zaalim* and the oppressed is *muzloom*. Mum's Urdu formula was fairly straight forward.

Zulm na karo. Kiyun kar Allah Ta'ala muzloom ka dua hamesha soontahey, chahe muzloom kaafir ho aur zaalim musalman.

Literally this means: 'Do not oppress. Because God Almighty always hears and responds to the prayers of the oppressed, even where the oppressed refuse to acknowledge Him and the oppressor believes in Him.'

Collective oppression

What happens when the oppression is collective? What happens when communities oppress themselves? And do so in the name of establishing God's law?

I could apply mum's proverb to many Muslim communities and come up with an explanation as to why so many are politically, economically and socially backward. At least 51 per cent of Muslims are women. And whether Muslim men accept it or not, many are the subject of the collective negative prayers of their mothers, sisters, daughters and wives.

So often I hear Muslim imams, preachers and apologists reminding me that Islam gave women certain rights at least a thousand years before Europe did, that the rules of Islamic sacred law (also known as the sharia) cannot be legitimately applied in a manner which causes injustice to women, and that Muslim women have equal (if not always the same) rights as men.

That might be the case in textbooks of theology and sacred law. But what is the current reality on the ground?

Something is rotten

Something is rotten in the state of Islam. Perhaps not in the sacred texts nor even in the vast legal tradition. Muslims can debate among themselves whether the source of the problem lies

in the religion itself. But the reality is beyond debate.

Something certainly is rotten in many of the 58 states that make up the organisation of Islamic Conference. A cruel sickness of absurd and oppressive gender-based practices and attitudes is poisoning the lives of men and women in Muslim societies.

Such practices and attitudes aren't limited to ignorant villagers, nor are they random acts of murder committed by strangers. It wasn't an unlettered stranger who murdered 17-year-old student Rand Abdel-Qader in Basra on 16 March this year. She was murdered by her father, a government employee who worked in Iraq's Health Department.

Rand's mother tried to save her from this barbarism but to no effect. *The Observer* reported on 11 May:

Though her horrified mother, Leila Hussein, called Rand's two brothers, Hassan, 23, and Haydar, 21, to restrain Abdel-Qader as he choked her with his foot on her throat, they joined in. Her shrouded corpse was then tossed into a makeshift grave without ceremony as her uncles spat on it in disgust.

What was her crime? This young student at Basra University had worked as a volunteer with displaced Iraqi families. Over a period of some four months, and after a few short conversations, the young woman had become infatuated with a 22-year-old British soldier.

That's it. She had feelings. Her father came to know of this. He saw her talking to the British soldier in public. He dug a makeshift grave. He murdered his own daughter. His sons joined in, spilling the blood of their own sister, their own flesh and blood.

Why? Apparently this act has become known as an 'honour killing'. It seems that for some men, the only way to restore the honour of their family is to kill family members.

Concentric circles of oppression?

Some have argued that this incident was a symptom of the wider oppression of Iraqis, of the foreign occupation which hasn't brought the promised peace and order promised by the self-styled Coalition of the Willing.

It is true that the brutality of occupation can lead to other forms of brutality. Tortured, humiliated and oppressed men need some kind of outlet. All too often, such men end up torturing, humiliating and oppressing their wives, sisters and even mothers.

But such incidents also happen where there are no brutal occupiers present. In April 2006, hacked pieces of 20 year old Bahnaz Mahmud Agha's body were found in a suitcase in London. In June 2007, a London court had convicted Bahnaz's father and uncle of her murder.

Bahnaz had entered a marriage arranged by her Kurdish-Iraqi father when she was just 17. Her husband had repeatedly raped and abused her, even knocking out one of her front teeth after she called him by his first name in public. In late 2005, by which time she was 20, Bahnaz

had left this abusive relationship and fallen in love with another Kurdish man from a different tribe.

Bahnaz's uncle convened a family council during which it was decided that the family's honour could only be restored by killing her. Bahnaz's mother alerted her to the plot, but police didn't believe the story. With her family against her and the police refusing to assist, to whom could this young woman turn?

Again, concentric circles of oppression operated. Again, Muslim religious and community leaders had more important things on their mind, such as the pressure of the post-7/7 environment, the increased public scrutiny, the struggle against oppressive anti-terror laws.

The ultimate victims of these concentric circles of oppression are the 51 per cent of Muslims that happen to be female. So what is the solution?

It's true that these practises are not religiously sanctioned (though theological justification is often found by misogynistic religious authorities), are not limited to Muslims and are found in non-Muslim communities in South Asia, the Middle East and Africa also. But Muslim men can not afford to live in denial about their prevalence.

The double standard

Muslim faith communities suffer from multiple personality disorder, applying one standard to the male and another to our female side. And we impose our double standards under the garb of tradition or sharia.

We speak of reviving the age of Muslim glory, when Muslims were the most civilised nation on earth. But what characterised that civilisation?

There is the story of one Muslim woman who was kidnapped by the Byzantine empire. The Caliph in Baghdad wrote a letter threatening to send an army whose length stretched from Baghdad to Constantinople.

Today, Muslim Presidents and Kings and Generals do nothing to help women being mistreated and held in captivity in their own countries. Without international pressure, one wonders whether Pakistan's General Musharraf would have allowed Mukhtar Mai liberty within her own homeland.

Perhaps the most obvious example of our double standards is in our domestic relations. Many Muslim men regularly beat their wives. Unlike their non-Muslim brothers, Muslim men don't require excessive alcohol or narcotics in their system to beat their wives.

There are few laws in Muslim countries protecting women from domestic violence. Worse still, those responsible for enforcing the law — police and the judiciary — are open to bribery by the usually wealthier male perpetrators. What makes the problem worse is that imams rarely mention the problem to their (mostly male) congregation.

Muslim and ethnic language newspapers commonly read by Muslims rarely mention the issue. It is as if we are pretending the problem just doesn't exist. Or worse still, it's as if it isn't even a problem.

Raising voices

Some years back, a group of men in Canada decided that they would take a stand on violence against women. The result was UNIFEM White Ribbon Day. Each year, men where white ribbons to take a stand, to show that they regard violence against women as an abomination.

I'm not suggesting that the solution is Muslim men merely wearing white ribbons. But the philosophy of WRD is one worth promoting — that violence against women is a men's issue and that the situation won't change until men speak out against it.

Because if we stay silent, we might as well be lending a hand to the perpetrators of violence. Today it may be a stranger. Tomorrow, it could be our mother, our sister, our daughter. Paradise can be found under the feet of mothers. Yet millions of Muslim mothers and sisters and daughters are living in hell on this earth.

I wish more Muslim men stopped justifying theology or pointing to historical precedents and address current gender realities in Muslim communities. I wish more influential men in nominally Muslim communities and countries raised their voices against the continued exploitation of at least half of their community.

With that in mind, I'll start by raising my voice.

Bankers conspire to cover their assets

ECONOMICS

Les Coleman

I'm no conspiracy theorist, but circumstantial evidence builds a fascinating case which suggests that during the past few weeks we have seen a massive manipulation of monetary policy to support US bank stocks.



There are several parties who, motivated by self-protection, would be interested in executing such manipulation. Primarily these are the banking executives and regulators who, should the banks collapse, would be revealed as having insufficient competence to secure banks' viability.

Managers would lose their jobs, not to mention any money invested in their employer (which is often substantial thanks to generous stock option packages), and would face trouble with future employment.

The best example of poor management on Wall Street was seen in the Board of Lehman Brothers. Out of 11 directors in 2006, five were aged over 75 years, including an ex-Broadway producer and an 82-year-old former actress. Hardly the right personnel to manage one of the world's great risk machines!

Then there's the regulators. Despite all the puff about tighter bank regulation, the truth is banks are already heavily regulated. Central banks fix the price of the core commodity (money), and regulators receive continuous reports of banks' financial status. Failure of any bank raises questions regarding regulators' competence.

The Federal Reserve regulates US banks and has a massive conflict of interest, as it has also 'pumped money' into the credit markets to give ailing banks enough funds to limp along. Like a desperate gambler, it can get in too deep and, intimidated by potential losses from collapse, convince itself the bank is too big to fail.

Other conflicts arise from the revolving door that moves senior officials between banks and regulators and establishes a spiderweb of connections. No doubt they find it hard to separate favours to old mates from sensible support for troubled institutions.

A third important group of stakeholders is US politicians facing re-election. Even if the risk of collapse was low, few of these politicians could take the chance of standing up against even the most outrageous claims of the bankers and regulators.

So there is motive aplenty for the manipulation of monetary policy. But where is the opportunity?

The global credit system is so complex and opaque that it deflects scrutiny from all but a

few of the most determined analysts. Journalists have been required to explain the financial meltdown to readers, but have no idea of what is happening.

Step in economists and talking heads from the investment banks — the institutions with most to lose. Their blindingly simple strategy was to feed the media a consistent line, that financial Armageddon is nigh without taxpayer rescue. It was a tiny step for politicians to go from recognising that only the ‘experts’ understand what is happening to blindly accepting their policy recommendations.

Where, then, is the evidence for all this? In fact, much of the manipulation has been played out in plain view, which, of course, is the best place to hide a secret.

As President Bush and his top officials delivered calming assurances, parallels were immediately drawn with Iraq, Hurricane Katrina and other policy disasters on Bush’s watch.

The bailout was to be led by Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, who had stood idle as the crisis unfolded. If they did not see disaster looming, where had they gained the foresight to fix it now? When track record is everything, how could they retain any shred of credibility?

Was the bailout well-founded? Surely not. The impressive roll call of critics includes major investors George Soros and Carl Icahn, more than 100 US academic economists who wrote to Congress, and Nobel economics laureate [Joseph Stiglitz](#) .

We can never know what would have happened without the bailout. Nor the consequences of a better executed strategy.

In relation to the latter, recall the mixed signals sent by Bush, Paulson and Bernanke within less than a fortnight in September as they took over Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, but midwived the sale of Merrill Lynch to Bank of America and allowed Lehman Brothers to file for bankruptcy; then, just two days later, bailed out insurance giant American International Group, and on 19 September unveiled a rescue plan for the remaining banks.

Policy makers either did not understand what was happening or believed that markets could somehow be trusted to use the money as a hand up, not a handout. No wonder equity markets whipsawed, too.

I hope this scenario is wrong. Not just because of the waste and the encouragement that it gives to shysters, but because it feeds the scepticism that too many people feel for government, and because it may hurt the borrowing capability of creditworthy businesses and households, and destroy value for all investors.

A broader reason to hope this scenario is wrong is the possibility that it is a canary for political management of other complex global issues such as climate change, pandemics and terrorism.

The final stage of the 2007-8 sub-prime crisis was played out in public, with its main events covering a short, intense period. It is well-documented. We can easily spot the vested interests, panicked ceding of policy formulation to murky experts, potentially vast waste of monies, and general inefficiency in the process. Why should we imagine that policy is better conceived behind closed doors?

Bipartisan games

POLITICS

John Warhurst



The era of Kevin Rudd versus Malcolm Turnbull has begun with lots of bipartisan games. Rudd began by offering Turnbull bipartisanship on a republic. Turnbull countered with an offer of bipartisanship on economic challenges. Rudd responded that economic bipartisanship should start with Coalition support for the Budget bills in the Senate. Now the two are trading insults over bipartisanship in responding to the global economic crisis.

But there is no future in such grandstanding. True bipartisanship, like equality in any worthwhile relationship, is not about being macho and scoring points but about being sensitive towards the other person's needs. One of those needs is for each side to emerge with their dignity intact.

Bipartisanship is a hard thing to achieve in our parliamentary system and is therefore rare in practice on major issues. If it were more common the cross-bench, Greens and Independents, would be out of a job. The reason they are not is that partisanship is deeply ingrained. Partisans want their party to win above all else.

All ministers and shadow ministers are partisan. Above all the parliamentary process itself is partisan. Question Time, where many of the taunts about bipartisanship have taken place, encourages adversarial politics.

Genuine bipartisanship has a number of elements. It is about both style and substance. As far as style goes it is best done quietly and it attempts to find common ground in discussions about issues. It exhibits restraint in baiting or criticising the other side when to do so would inhibit finding that common ground. In particular it avoids actions which aggravate divisions within the other party — so-called 'wedging'.

Bipartisanship involves compromise between two initial positions. It does not mean asking the other person to give you their full, uncritical support. That would mean political death for any parliamentary leader as it would look like caving in.

There are occasions when bipartisanship can be achieved in public forums but generally it comes, like diplomacy or interfaith dialogue, through private discussion. When agreement does occur in the Federal Parliament, it is usually the result of behind-the-scenes negotiation, not grandstanding.

The Prime Minister has a patchy record of bipartisanship. He made genuine and largely successful efforts to make the Apology to the Stolen Generations bipartisan by involving then opposition leader Brendan Nelson.

But attempts to build on this through bipartisan committees failed because Nelson believed he was not being kept in the loop and that as a consequence Rudd's bipartisanship was superficial. Once Nelson believed Rudd was manipulating the supposed bipartisanship then the attempt was doomed.

The first issue on which Rudd offered Turnbull bipartisanship was the republic. But attempts at bipartisanship need to take sensitivities into account.

Rudd and Turnbull together offer the best chance yet for the republican movement. Yet bipartisanship won't happen overnight. Each of them has to develop their own approach, independent of the other, before seeking agreement and compromise.

Rudd offered Turnbull bipartisanship in a way that broke many of the rules about achieving the best outcome. He caught Turnbull unawares and was provocative in the way he immediately raised the issue on Turnbull's first day in office. If it was a genuine offer of bipartisanship then it was clumsily done. Not surprisingly a round of tit-for-tat followed and has not stopped.

Bipartisanship will not flourish across the chamber at Question Time, nor is it best sought through the media in formal addresses to the nation. Avenues out of the limelight should be utilised instead.

Both leaders are just playing with bipartisanship. Now they should put it into practice. The steps have to be non-threatening. In particular, partisan advantage has to be put to one side. That is against the grain but it can be done.

Bad day pose

POETRY

Isabella Fels

Shapes

What is the difference between a square and a rectangle?

I have no spatial knowledge. I get confused.

I can't describe. Difference. Why bother trying.

Adieu to Burn Out

My dearest bed

I would like to apologise for weighing you down

I've been too much lately haven't I?

Suffocating you with my dreams

Keeping you awake with my snoring

Bullying you with my tosses and turns

Overstaying my welcome in your well mannered heaven

I've let you down by not looking after you

By not making you up

By pretending to be your closest intimate buddy

But leaving you for dead

Every time my other friend

The fridge entices me with her sensuous delights

I can understand it if you no longer want me near you

I agree we should just be friends and see each other only occasionally

Night times are best for both of us. Don't you think?

Adieu mon amie

Until the moon floats through the air

Adieu

Jewellery

A ring magically encircles my finger
A necklace swings gracefully like a dancer
Earrings dangle around my crazy head
An anklet delightfully enchains me
A chain is extra special when it has a cross
Bracelets run rings around me
Nose rings? Don't these people pick their noses?

Bank Accounts

I.
Ever diminishing
Not growing
Impossible to save
Temptations
Never enough money

II.
Breaking my brain
Breaking my back with their bad balance
Breaking my heart not being able to buy things
Breaking me up into small change

Driving people away

Life as a vacuum
Just watch me in my ivory tower
I hated the litter of us
There were too many skies to climb
Your eyes stay still as my hair sways
The stereo blasting, lights switched on

Drowns the small clicks of her feet

Celebrity status

Red the color of danger

The way to go

Look delicious

Looking at me

I feel paranoid

Practically naked

Gawking and staring

I just want to relax

The camera notices

Admired

Turn cameras off on bad days

Blowouts from night before

Life in the public eye is hard

Self-conscious

I just want to hide under the waves

And drag my body along

Beached Whale

Love

1. I watch him listening to me

Head to one side

Eyes searching

Ears pinned back

His shoulders ready to steady me

2. See how he cares for me

Deeply as the sea

3. He understands me like a book he'll
Never have to read

Wall Street Blues

ECONOMICS

Jim McDermott

Over the course of the last year the Dow has lost 35 per cent of its value, amounting to trillions of dollars. Newspapers here in the States are peppered with references to the market 'cratering', a bleak term that for me conjures the desolate, lifeless landscape of the moon. A friend suggested another interpretation: 'A crater — it's what's left after a massive explosion.'



Which is funny, because to me our situation has none of the immediacy or clarity of an explosion. It turns out the idea of a 'stock market crash' is a misnomer. Things don't happen all at once. Anything but.

First the mortgages, then the banks, then industry ... it's the slow-motion collapse of a building, floor by floor, or the implosion of a web, a broken strand in one section causing undue pressure and breaks in altogether different and hard to predict areas.

While we in the States were caught up with evaluating our \$850 billion bailout, the European banks began to wobble significantly. Today the conventional wisdom is that only by working together internationally can we address the crises we face. And even after we begin to do that, the market tumbles.

Everywhere in the news we hear of the 'panic'. Yet as I walk through the streets of Manhattan these days, things seem much the same as always. Passersby brusque as ever, pushing their way down the sidewalks, irrespective of signals or other pedestrians. Vendors selling ice cream and hot dogs on street corners. The sirens of police cars sounding in the distance. Tourists wandering through midtown hand in hand, off to see a show or wonder at the nighttime pulse of Times Square, while failed or failing investment firms stand unseen all around them.

I'm not sure what that points to, that odd disconnection between physical and financial realities. And the mind plays funny tricks in the gaps, seeks consistency or a narrative where maybe there is none.

A newspaper box on a street corner, the papers within a week old. Has the paper abandoned it because of the financial crisis? *The New York Times*, the United States' premier newspaper, recently announced it was merging a few sections. Was this long in the works, or a consequence of the last few weeks?

Suddenly everything is about the crisis, even that which isn't. I saw tourists in Central Park taking a picture in front of a grand old building and wondered if that building stood for them as a sort of memorial of a time of wealth, a way of taking things for granted now on the way

out. But it wasn't, it was just a nice photo op.

The moon rose in midafternoon over the weekend and it seemed eerie and apocalyptic. I've seen too many movies not to turn readily to the end of things.

But the sun still shines and the birds still sing. And my dad, 62, a retired steamfitter and my mom, 61, a secretary, have their pension invested in stocks, but still talk mostly of the trip they're going to take in November to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary.

Maybe it's all about trust. Not just in the stock market, its every rise and fall these days a punctuation mark on people's confidence or lack thereof, but also in everything else in our lives.

We get up in the morning, go outside and every move we make is conditional on a certain amount of trust: that drivers will stop at stop lights and cashiers give us correct change; that gravity will work today the same as it did yesterday; and even more fundamentally, whether stock prices go high or low, whether our families or our bodies thrive or diminish.

That there is good in this world and I will have the chance in some way to savour that goodness today. Perhaps that is all the narrative we need.

ABC Radio National's bland vision

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



On Thursday, the Senate called on ABC management to immediately make public the reasons for its decision to cut programs from Radio National's 2009 schedule.

That followed *Religion Report* presenter Stephen Crittenden's [announcement](#) to his listeners on Wednesday that eight programs including his own were being 'decommissioned'.

Crittenden said: 'The ABC's specialist units have been under attack for years, but the decapitation of the flagship program of the religion department effectively spells the death of religion at the ABC. That such decision has been taken in an era when religion vies with economics as a determinant of everything that's going on in the world almost beggars belief.'

Religious commentator Paul Collins developed the argument further in Wednesday's *Crikey*, [suggesting](#) that replacing Radio National's specialist programming with interdisciplinary content is 'derived from the half-witted, post-modern conviction that everyone can do anything'.

He said it produces 'a few prosaic 'man-in-the-street' questions [from] the type of journalist who doesn't know the difference between an Anglo-Catholic and an Evangelical'.

The problem is that the only statement from ABC management was both brief and lame, and did not even admit to a move away from specialisation. Hence the Senate's 'please explain'.

In announcing a review of the ABC and SBS, Minister for Communications Stephen Conroy said on Thursday: 'We need to make the right decisions now if the national broadcasters are to thrive in a digital, online and global media environment.'

It appears that the main reason for Radio National's changes is the reality that its content has more of a future in podcasts and other forms of digital delivery, than traditional broadcast radio. This is about making the most of new technology, and only to be admired. In fact, it's precisely what *Eureka Street* did when we abandoned print for online in 2006.

But the issue of digital delivery is being confused with the actual content. The station is currently conducting a listener [survey](#) aimed to assist it to provide a 'better service'. But all the questions are about delivery platforms. There is no opportunity for listeners to tell management that they believe a better service means maintaining and enhancing specialist content. It seems specialist content is simply not on the mind of the station's management.

The need for the ABC, and Radio National in particular, to provide a serious forum for informed debate has only increased with Fairfax's commercially-motivated decision earlier this year to dilute its editorial content.

As journalism educator Chris McGillion [wrote](#) in *Eureka Street* in September: 'Fairfax's latest decision to cut jobs means that, more than ever, the standard in investigative and in-depth reporting — the test of the 'brand' — must be set by the one mass, non-commercial operator. This is the ABC.'

It is fortuitous that Senator Conroy has announced the review at this time, and we hope that those who value specialist content will speak up. For its part, Radio National management might consider postponing these significant programming changes until the voice of the people has been heard.

Neither Scott nor Amrozi deserves death

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Last Friday, I visited 22-year-old Australian citizen Scott Rush in the Kerobokan prison on the Indonesian island of Bali where he is on death row for being a hapless drug mule. Scott wrote a letter that day to those attending a dinner organised by his parents in Brisbane for Australians Against Capital Punishment:



I'd like to thank you all for all that you are doing for me and the others here at the Death Tower. To all of you who have come to this function I would like to thank you for your caring and showing solidarity by your presence. There is not much that I can say in my circumstances but I can say this: I'm not a celebrity. I have committed a serious crime but I am reforming myself and want to show you that I am capable of complete reform.

Sunday was the sixth anniversary of the Bali bombings which claimed 202 lives, including 88 Australians. Early morning, the Australian Consulate hosted a memorial service for victims' families.

Made Pastika, the Balinese Governor who, as Head of Police, led the successful police investigation into the bombings, spoke at the service recalling how the paradise of Bali had been transformed into a living hell. He espoused the common humanity of all, reminding us that the victims were of all religions and none, of many races, of nationalities near and far.



The Indonesian choir sang 'Advance Australia Fair' with conviction and the 'Ave Maria' with reverence, as well as the Indonesian anthem and an Indonesian song.

Many wept as they came forward to place flowers at the foot of the wooden cross which had been erected outside the Consulate immediately after the bombing. All felt deep sympathy for the victims and their families. The media-amplified pleas of some of them that the bombers be executed, and quickly, were understandable.

For me, talk of the death penalty evoked the young, frightened face of Scott Rush, as well as the laughing, haughty faces of Amrozi, Mukhlas and Imam Samudra.

I had been troubled by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's response to the gloating Bali bombers at the end of Ramadan a couple of weeks earlier: 'The Bali bombers are cowards and murderers pure and simple, and frankly they can make whatever threats they like,' he said. 'They deserve the justice that we delivered to them.'

I thought the time had come when our national leaders could espouse that justice excludes the death penalty for anyone, no matter what their offence and no matter what their lack of remorse. After all, just before Christmas, the new Rudd Government had voted at the UN for a motion urging retentionist States to 'establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty'.

When Australian citizen Nguyen Tuong Van was facing the death penalty in Singapore in 2005, Kevin Rudd told Parliament: 'We hold one fundamental human value to be true, and that is the intrinsic dignity of all human life. It is for this reason that we oppose all forms of capital punishment. For our policy to be credible, we must apply it universally. We must be credible in our opposition to capital punishment as a matter of policy wherever it occurs.'



For Scott's sake, and for the sake of the community of nations working towards a moratorium on the death penalty, this should be Australia's position. Withholding none of the sympathy I felt all around me at the consulate last Sunday morning, I think Australia is ready to be led and to lead others down a more humane path, away from the death penalty.

Some of us have been waiting a long time for this lead. I have been waiting since I was 12 years old at a Queensland country boarding school.

It was 3 February 1967. Breakfast started at 7.45 a.m. The din of 300 boys at table was always deafening once the supervising priest declared, 'Deo Gratias'.

For the first and only time in my five years at the school, a handful of senior boys called for a minute's silence at 8.00 a.m. to mark the hanging of Ronald Ryan in Melbourne Jail. As Ryan dropped, you could hear a pin drop in faraway Toowoomba. The recollection still brings goose bumps. This was wrong. It should never happen again. How could a nation do this?

All Australian jurisdictions then abolished the death penalty, and now our government has joined the call for an international moratorium.



In 1995, I was working in a Sudanese refugee camp on the Uganda border. At night I would sit in my tent listening to the BBC World Service on the short wave radio. One night I heard the announcement that the South African Constitutional Court had ruled the death penalty unconstitutional.

The lead judgement had been written by the president of the court, Arthur Chaskalson. We had shared the platform at the opening of the Commonwealth Legal Convention in New Zealand a couple of years before. When returning to Australia via Johannesburg I met Arthur and he proudly gave me a copy of the judgement. He had quoted liberally from the dissenting jurisprudence of Justices Brennan and Thurgood Marshall on the US Supreme Court.

I happened to be on my way to Georgetown Law School on a Fulbright where I had the good fortune to meet regularly with my namesake Justice Brennan who, though retired, still came into chambers. Over lunch one day, I gave him my copy of Chaskalson's judgment. Tears welled up in his eyes as he realised that some of his most sterile and consistent dissent writing had borne fruit on the other side of the globe.

There is always point in standing up for principle even when the view expressed is unpopular and a minority view. Like Justices Chaskalson and Brennan, Prime Minister Rudd is well positioned to contribute to the abolition of the death penalty. None of us should ever again have to look into the eyes of Scott Rush returning to the Death Tower.

Inside the Brethren lobby horse

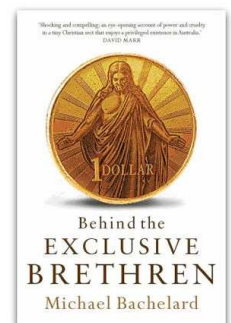
BOOK FORUM

John Gunson

Bachelard, Michael; *Behind the Exclusive Brethren*. Scribe Publications, Australia, 2008. RRP \$32.95. ISBN: 97819213722585

Australia's 15,000 Exclusive Brethren are easily recognised by their distinctive unworldly dress, especially in the rural areas where they are prominent. Many are involved in small business. One of the nation's structural landmarks, the gigantic metal flagpole astride Parliament House, was produced by a typical Brethren light industrial enterprise.

On the face of it, it seems the Brethren are simply a small business version of the agrarian Amish — reclusive and fundamentalist, but essentially industrious and harmless. But Michael Bachelard paints a different and thoroughly convincing picture in his readable and well researched investigation.



He focuses on Brethren efforts to secure favours from politicians and governments in Australia and New Zealand. Brethren members do not vote, but their lobbying efforts are extensive. Bachelard reminds us of their extraordinary involvement in the 2005 New Zealand election campaign where, in an attempt to establish a close working relationship with former opposition leader Don Brash, they ran anti-government advertisements that led to cries of foul play and eventually Brash's resignation.

The Brethren energetically and successfully cultivated a relationship with John Howard, from the earliest days of Howard's election to parliament. This secured them generous access to him while was prime minister. Kevin Rudd has made it clear he has no time for them, and they have 'gone quiet'. But they are expected to re-emerge when the political climate is more congenial.

There have been other exposes of the Brethren's involvement in politics, on the ABC's *4 Corners* and elsewhere. But Bachelard's is the most thorough examination. It incorporates a history of the sect, a description of Brethren life, an analysis of the sect's involvement in politics, and details of the Brethren approach to education, marriage breakdown and dissent.

At the core of Brethren doctrine is a belief in separation. It pivots on a verse in Paul's second letter to the Timothy which requires Christians to 'withdraw from iniquity'. Friendships with 'worldlies' are forbidden, and social intercourse is limited to necessary contact such as business negotiations. The sect's current leader Bruce Hales said: 'Unless you

come to a hatred of the world, you are likely to be sucked in by it.'

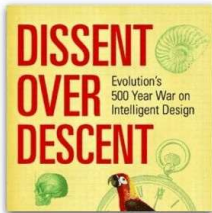
Bachelard details the Brethren response to family breakdown, and their relationship with the Family Law Act. In common with other sects, there is a high degree of tension when a non-sect parent wishes to have contact with their children who remain in the sect.

The Brethren resist scrutiny, and the release of Bachelard's *magnum opus* of investigative journalism will challenge their hierarchy, perhaps to the extent that they will understand why their energetic engagement with the body politic attracts scrutiny consistent with the value society places on transparency.

Moral relativism's extreme close-up

SPIRITUALITY

Andrew Hamilton



Relativism is a natural response to the world. It works like the move from close-up to broad perspective in films. The change of perspective deflates the significance of what we have just seen.

We see, for example, two people trying to kill one another. Then the camera moves back to reveal the audience and the stage. Or two people embrace intimately on a verandah. The camera moves higher and discloses a large housing estate where couples are embracing intimately on each verandah.

Many intellectual styles use the same technique. A [recent book](#) by Steve Fuller, for example, reflects on the controversy about the teaching of intelligent design and the opposition to it. Fuller takes a very broad view of the controversy, attending to the religious motivation for scientific advance, the struggle for funding and control of education that drove much scientific polemic against religion, the threat to scientific enquiry itself recognised by early critics of Darwin's theory of chance evolution, and the marked similarities between theories of astrology and evolution.

From close up, science and religion seem to be mortal foes. From the broader perspective, they are Siamese twins that need one another.

Religious believers who have suffered much in the name of science may not be disappointed to see their critics reduced to size. But they are less happy when their own critics take a similarly lofty view of religious faith and of moral convictions.

From this broad perspective differences between religions may seem insignificant. Firm moral convictions may be reduced to cultural influences and personal interests. Any view from above inherently makes battles and convictions seem of relative importance.

Within churches relativism in matters of religion, where anyone's convictions are as good as another's, gets a bad press. Pope Benedict, for example, has been particularly critical of moral relativism, seeing it as destructive of human happiness. Yet to take the longer and broader view, for all its limitations, has something going for it.

The longer view is a valuable aid to self-reflection, particularly in the midst of conflict. To see ourselves as the size of ants on a very large ant heap does invite us to look critically at our certainties. It may help us see the complexities both in our own arguments and in those of good people who differ passionately from us.

It also reminds us that our vision of the world we live in, and even of the tradition which

sustains us, is partial. It encourages magnanimity towards those who disagree with us. The longer view is part of the intellectual and personal discipline that makes fruitful conversation possible.

The risk associated with the longer view is that it will treat all judgements as a matter of opinion, and the individual person as expendable. If we see human beings as ants, we are likely to treat individuals and their beliefs as interchangeable. We may hesitate to attribute inalienable value to each human being or to defend passionately the truth of what we believe. Whether or not it is right to torture people, for example, becomes a matter of opinion.

That is the kind of relativism that Pope Benedict is concerned about. It is one that uses a distancing lens whenever it touches beliefs or values. It claims the camera operator's privilege of detachment from the world that he observes. It does not stop in wonder or in love of its beauty. This is relativism lived out.

But the longer view need not lead to this kind of relativism. The enlarged perspective by which we move from a single couple embracing to see a whole housing state embracing need not devalue the value of the first relationship. It can encourage us to value more highly each relationship. That presupposes that we can close in wonder on the mystery of each person and at a reality of the world.

This attitude, fundamental for moral insight and for religious faith, protects us from the kind of relativism in which nothing matters very much.

The alternation of the long and short views of reality suggests that we should hesitate before condemning everything that looks like relativism. In practice, many people who are reluctant to speak of absolute truths have a deep sense of wonder at the world and at the value of each human being. When conversation moves from things they don't much worry about to what is important, they are passionate and speak in terms of truth and falsehood. Their relativism is a rhetorical trope.

To speak of relativism itself betrays the distancing lens at work. Such large categories conceal important differences between individual thinkers. To speak of relativism or any otherism safely we also need a passion for the particular.

Wired, profound

FILM FORUM

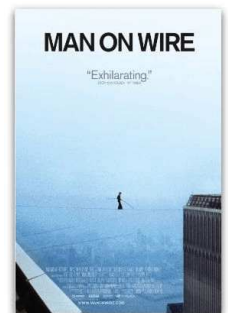
Tim Kroenert

***Man On Wire*: 94 minutes. Rated: PG. Director: James Marsh.**

***Young @ Heart*: 107 minutes. Rated: PG. Director: Stephen Walker.**

In 1974, Philippe Petit balanced mortality and destiny on a wire between New York City's Twin Towers, then the tallest buildings in the world. It was the fulfilment of an existential quest that began many years earlier, when the philosophical acrobat Petit first saw a diagram in a magazine of the soon-to-be-built towers.

Man On Wire recreates Petit's dizzying pursuit of those towers. Director James Marsh gives the documentary the tension of a crime caper thriller, winding vivid monologues from Petit, and the friends and shady ring-ins who helped him, around dramatic recreations and field footage from the event itself.



Logistically, Petit's inspirational but illegal feat had the hallmarks of a bank heist. Transporting the heavy cable to the towers' peak and then rigging it was difficult enough. Discovery by security guards would mean the end of months of planning and years of dreaming. Petit and his accomplices needed to be discreet.

That's not to mention the more obvious dangers of balancing on a wire suspended 400 metres above the streets of Manhattan. It gets pretty windy up there. The physics of the feat itself required as much forethought and planning as the logistics of being in position to perform it.

At the centre of it all is Petit, the driven, charismatic and decidedly self-obsessed French acrobat. During the years prior the Twin Towers walk he trod wires atop the turrets of Notre Dame and the uprights of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. He waxes lyrical about the physical poetry of conquering such beautiful stages. It is inspiring, despite the temptation to question his sanity.

Seeing footage of the wire-walker Petit alone, afloat in space, you appreciate the loneliness of his being. His closest friend, and his long-time girlfriend, faded from his life after helping him walk the Towers. They are less pragmatic about the parting of ways than he. It seems Petit's sense of destiny burned too hotly for these bonds to withstand it.

In contrast to Petit's unrelenting singularity of purpose, *Young @ Heart*, a very different but equally entertaining documentary in cinemas this week, is testament to the simple yet profound joy of having something to get out of bed for. For the members of the titular choir,

mortality is not a mythical abstract. Their average age is 80.

The chorus takes its repertoire from rock and pop bands such as The Clash and Coldplay. Many members hate the songs selected by chorus director Bob Cilman. Their undisguised distaste as rehearsals begin on Sonic Youth's noisome 'Schizophrenia' is hilarious. But they can't conceal their elation at audiences' responses to their one-of-a-kind live act.

In addition to conversations with the variously feisty or gentle chorus members, and rehearsal and performance footage, filmmaker Stephen Walker includes stylised, music video style segments, with the chorus members hamming it up in the spirit of MTV cheese. These more than anything else evoke the personalities of the individuals and the idiosyncratic premise of the choir itself.

It's all very feelgood and unashamedly schmaltzy — by turns hilarious and heartbreaking. Age and mortality are present realities, and two chorus members die during the course of filming. A vocal tribute to one of the fallen members, during a performance at a prison on the day of his death, is a perfectly contrived tearjerker moment.

Less manufactured moments are more affecting. When a former member returns from a long illness, he tells Walker, with tremendous gravity, that he'll be devastated if his longed-for comeback fails. It is heartbreaking to see him arrive at rehearsal looking feeble, and unable to give voice to his song.

The film's most enigmatic character is Cilman, whose motivations are never explored. The fact he has been leading the chorus for 20 years suggests love is a big part of it. Yet he's a hard taskmaster, abruptly abandoning one song — James Brown's 'I Feel Good' — when a soloist forgets the lyric.

Come showtime, the song is back on the agenda, with the soloist struggling until the last to remember his lines. It's a showstopper. This speaks volumes of Cilman's methods and motivation, and the compassion that underpins his leadership.

State wards: parental guidance recommended

COMMUNITY

Philip Mendes



Most families continue to support their children when they turn 18. They provide ongoing accommodation, money, food, clothing, health care, assistance with the cost of education or employment training, and emotional support.

In contrast, young people leaving state out-of-home care are expected to transition to virtually instant independence with little if any ongoing support from their state parents.

Leaving care is defined as the cessation of legal responsibility by the state for young people living in out-of-home care. But in practice, leaving care is a major life event and process.

Care leavers are not a homogeneous group. But compared to most young people, they face particular difficulties in accessing education, employment, housing and other developmental and transitional opportunities.

I first came across this problem as a young social work graduate working in child protection in the late 1980s. Young people living in residential care were often subjected to a regimented rule structure which limited their individual choices and development of life skills, and encouraged dependence. Even going to a friend's house to stay overnight required a formal letter signed by a manager from head office.

Yet when these young people turned 17 or 18, they were suddenly informed that their care order had finished, and they had gained their independence.

Some welcomed their newfound freedom and moved successfully into mainstream society. But others had limited skills in areas such as reading and writing, finances, cooking, and sexual knowledge. Many ended up homeless. Others developed severe mental health issues or drug and alcohol addiction, became involved in crime or street sex work, or gave birth to children at a very young age, who also ended up in state care.

But care leavers in those days enjoyed some advantages over contemporary young people. There was at least a limited youth labour market. I remember one young man with a slight intellectual disability who was placed in an apprenticeship with a leading department store. He was not bright, but he was strong and had a good work ethic.

Affordable housing was more readily available, and there were greater resources to prepare young people for the transition to adulthood. Perhaps this reflected the much smaller numbers of children in care in the 1980s.

Care leavers today seem to have it tougher. Many of the 20 care leavers interviewed for a Monash University [study](#) by Badal Moslehuddin and myself have experienced housing instability, poor educational and employment outcomes, resulting in poverty, poor physical and emotional health, involvement in crime, and early parenthood.

A number commented that they felt confused, uncertain, lonely and rejected on leaving care. It is not surprising that the recent [Green Paper on Homelessness](#) and the National Youth Commission report [Australia's Homeless Youth](#) found an over-representation of care leavers in the homeless population.

So why the poor outcomes for care leavers?

Firstly, many have experienced and are still recovering from considerable physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect prior to entering care.

Secondly, many young people have experienced inadequacies in state care including poor quality caregivers, and constant shifts of placement, carers, schools and workers.

Thirdly, many care leavers receive little, if any, direct family support, and few community networks to ease their transition into independent living.

In addition to these major disadvantages, many young people experience an abrupt end at 16–18 years of age to the formal support networks of state care. Many of the care leavers we interviewed expressed an ambivalence about this early departure. They felt excited and relieved, but also scared and uncertain about facing the real world.

International research suggests that three key reforms are required to improve outcomes for care leavers.

The first is improving the quality of care, as positive in-care experiences are essential in order to overcome damaging pre-care experiences of abuse or neglect.

The second is restructuring the transition from care, which needs to become a gradual and flexible process based on levels of maturity and skill development, rather than simply age.

The third is providing ongoing support until approximately 25 years of age, including specialist services in areas such as accommodation, finance, education, employment, health, and personal and family support networks.'

Rather than treating after-care supports as add-ons to be offered separately to in-care supports (if at all), we need to plan from the beginning for the preferred outcomes for these children as they transition to independence.

This means incorporating post-care supports formally via legislation and policy, so ensuring that the state care parent provides the same ongoing financial, social and emotional support and nurturing offered by most biological families.

The battle for the economy class armrest

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

Recent events both aeronautical and financial have been daunting enough to scare anyone off banks and aeroplanes forever. Forced however to do some time in the national capital, I found myself flying home last week via Melbourne: unless you depart at dawn or after sunset, you can't fly Canberra/Adelaide direct; you change in Melbourne, or Sydney, or possibly Luanprabang, or forget it.



I resolved to use my air time to think deeply about the global crisis. If I'm going to be 'on the brink of systemic meltdown' I want to know what exactly that means and where better to grapple with this conundrum than 37,000 feet up in the air precariously jousting with a different kind of brink?

So, with an array of gloomily headlined morning papers, a heavy heart, light head, average knee and sluggish liver, I boarded what the pilots call 'our short flight down to Melbourne'.

Just my luck though. Having secured as always an aisle seat as far forward as possible, I find myself alongside a very large person, or, not to put too fine a point on it, grossly fat — a key player in one of the other crises of our anxious times: obesity.

His wife is small, but she takes the window. He, like many large people on planes, immediately overflows the middle seat and our shared armrest. Then he positions his newspaper so that it cuts out the sunlight (which in any case his wife, being not only small but apparently light-sensitive, cancels fully by pulling down the shade).

As for me, I'm leaning so far into the aisle that the pilot can hardly see to back out.

An idea I've had, which I intend to pass on to the appropriate philosophers who plan our wellbeing in the skies, is to take a line from clothing measurements and have Economy Class XOS. Every few rows, they could have not three seats but one XOS (probably about double size) alongside one ordinary economy squeezey.

During the safety demonstration I consider the problem presented by my adipose companion. Not wishing to look like an aeronautical neophyte, I generally don't watch the safety demonstration — I already have noticed that all aeroplanes 'subtly' differ from each other — but I have to admit to a sneaking regard for the Life Belt instruction which involves complex references to tags, tapes, passing things round your waist and tying them somewhere, pulling down on this one but not on that one, blowing whistles and turning on lights, not to mention visions of being stuck in the doorway inflated beyond the dreams of physics, while panicking passengers jab at you from behind with pins. So I take unobtrusive

glances at that bit: if we're going to come down in the Hume Weir, I'll be ready.

It turns out to be a tough struggle with my amplitudinous travelling companion and this renders my plan of thinking through the troubles of the hour, let alone reading about them in umbrella sized broadsheet pages, almost untenable. Bracing myself by anchoring a foot against the seat in front, I make guerrilla attacks on the armrest, taking valuable territory when he turns a page, losing it again when he resettles.

A baby behind us proves an unexpected ally: when she begins to scream loudly, my seat mate says 'Oh shit' and puts both hands over his ears; whereupon of course, I enfilade the armrest, bracket his base position, and have troops bivouacking deep inside his territory before you can say 'The two biggest share routs on record were the 49.2 per cent crash of 1987 and the 46 per cent plunge of 1929'.

Then the baby cops a mouthful of dummy and I'm once again fending off beefy biceps in the shade of his Sumo shoulder.

In cases like this, you have to try everything — get the enemy off guard. 'What's your favourite scientific principle?' I say to him suddenly. 'What!' A real charmer this one. 'Mine's Bernoulli's Principle,' I tell him. 'Air passing at speed over a curved surface creates a vacuum. Very important to us at the moment — it's why planes fly. Let's hear it for Bernoulli, what do you reckon?'

He gives me as much of a pitying look as shuddering, overlapping jowls will allow, and his petite missus shows her disdain by turning to look out the window — which is bad luck because the shade's down and the effect is lost.

All in all, not a good trip. I get no thinking done and so the great problems of the day remain unresolved. Personally, I blame Bernoulli. We probably weren't meant to fly — especially the larger among us. It's not conducive to deep thought: it's not only above the curved surface of the wing that you find a vacuum on planes.

Eight months on, still sorry

POETRY

Deborah Ruiz Wall



Day of atonement

a blip in empty space,
a wilderness that held us in awe,
a paradise to steal from the 'noble savage'
so we poisoned their waterholes, used their women,
took the 'half-caste' away, worked them for rations,
their outreached hand yearned for understanding
with their tales writ on the land, painted on canvas
with symbols alien to our eyes,
so we sent the anthropologists and musicologists
to the bush to find the translation,
then we harvested their art designs for a profit,
ignoring their meaning ... we gathered the smoke of the gum leaves
onto our faces, usurping their ritual blessing with hardened hearts,
and still we turned our heads away, biding our time,
their stories of pain falling on deaf ears,
but behind the façade was a cry
from the depths that rang in our ears,
disturbed our restful slumber,
left us no peace until we turned around,
and listened ...
some of us struggled to retrace our steps
and remember where we stumbled whilst in the throes

of founding a nation, where in the groove of history
we could pick ourselves up, and begin to set things right,
and so it was, in Canberra,
alongside screens from across the globe,
where many eyes focused on this fateful day to witness
a new national leader seize the first opportunity
to begin his regime with one word
offered to those who were hardly a blip in empty space,
and bound to be bred out and consigned to oblivion!
on this day, our peace offering began with one word
that reverberated from beyond the grave to the living.
what past, what present, what future
could be conceived
with a simple acknowledgement
that realises, that to trample on our first people's rights
would sow the seeds of our own destruction,
for they are at the core of our collective soul —
theirs was the gift of oneness with the land;
oneness with the Spirit.
with one word that creates a ray of hope,
that respects their sacred presence in our midst,
we say,
—'SORRY!'—
oh what a mighty word this has become
to begin Australia's healing;
their song lines now await
our spiritual re-birth.

Uganda's aggressive peace

POLITICS

Ben Fraser

In the northern reaches of Uganda, conflict has adulterated the lives of millions and deeply permeated behavioural norms. For many, religion was the ballast against this tide of violence. For others it was purely an instrument of war.



Alice Lakwena, the 'supernatural' rebel leader of the Holy Spirit Movement in Uganda steeled her fighters before battle by telling them that bullets would bounce off their chests and that stones would become grenades when pitched at the enemy. Even today, 20 years after her defeat, her name and exploits remain etched in the memories of her foes and followers alike, an embodiment of rigid faith and ruthless struggle.

For more than 20 years, the Acholi, Iteso and Langi regions of northern Uganda have been terrorised by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a guerrilla force notorious for its recruitment and enslavement of child soldiers.

Born out of a zealous Christian spiritualism centred on its prophetic leader, Joseph Kony (pictured), a cousin of Lakwena, and radical Acholi nationalism challenging the southern government, the LRA preyed on the fears and vulnerabilities of the northern population and mercilessly exploited its land and people.

The Acholi have ironically been the principle victims of the LRA conflict, seemingly as a perverse means of discrediting the government's capacity to protect its own citizens in the north. The LRA has used this artifice to conduct well-organised insurgent attacks in the north, killing and maiming the innocent, re-supplying their ranks and effectively goading the government into retaliatory attacks deep in their jungle lairs.

In recent years the LRA and Kony in particular have become increasingly isolated, with defections from their ranks, and ruptures in the bedrock of Acholi nationalism.

While Kony has spoken of peace and LRA representatives have participated in the most recent peace talks in southern Sudan, he has balked at ratifying a final peace agreement.

Kony, who has found sanctuary at a base in the Central African Republic, was indicted with four of his commanders by the International Criminal Court in October 2005 for crimes against humanity and war crimes, specifically, rape, murder, enslavement (including sexual enslavement) and the forced enlistment of children.

But an agreement signed by the Government and the LRA in 2007 determined that ultimate accountability for LRA prosecutions should lie domestically with a special division of the High

Court in Uganda and not with the ICC.

Complimentarily, traditional justice systems (similar to the Gacaca community court systems established for reconciliation after the genocide in Rwanda), punitive sentences and reparations would also be employed to deal with less serious cases.

This position appears to reaffirm the Ugandan government's ability to manipulate the process to suit its longer-term strategic aims in the north and does little to galvanise international opinion and action for post-war justice and reconciliation. Moreover there are precedents in Africa for culpable leaders retiring to comfortable exile.

Ultimately, the ICC can re-instate the charges if the Ugandan government's judicial efforts do not meet international benchmarks. It would undoubtedly be prudent for government leaders to commit themselves fully to the effort.

Uganda has earned international praise for its strong commitment to the millennium development goals and in tackling the HIV/AIDS crisis. Despite likely international disfavour for its failure to protect human rights, the government seems determined to deal with issues of peace as aggressively as it conducted the northern war.

Many of Kony's conscripts, including thousands of child abductees, have since embraced a government amnesty for combatants renouncing the LRA and the conflict. While demobilisation has brought rewards for them, passive victims of the conflict remain dispossessed, traumatised and battle scarred

As some angrily strive for restorative justice by claiming compensation for injury, medical expenses, lost cattle and land, others simply pray for the peace to hold, allowing them to make best of what little they have.

A government sponsored Peace, Recovery and Development Plan has channelled millions of dollars into northern Uganda. It remains to be seen what this money actually delivers. Failing infrastructure, a scarcity of trained professionals, and a decline in humanitarian presence following the end of fighting have placed district governments and community based organisations at the vanguard of the north's revival.

They now carry a weighty responsibility not only to restore livelihood but also to promote peace and reconciliation.

The power of the church is absolute in Uganda. Perhaps in this lies the best opportunity to heal rifts and build a foundation for future prosperity in northern Uganda. Although international and national instruments of justice are the preferred mechanisms for dealing with the most egregious aspects of the conflict, grass roots dialogue, for which the church is ideally placed, is a necessary adjunct.

'Truth telling' is a poignant and productive start.

The chuckling economist

ECONOMICS

Bronwyn Lay



On the night of 6 October 2008 the Nobel Laureate economist stood before a crowded lecture theatre in Geneva and grinned like a five-year-old at his own birthday party.

Two extra theatres, complete with big screens, were opened to accommodate the punters. Students, academics, UN workers, private bankers, and the odd housewife, such as myself, crowded around like it was a football game.

That day the markets had bled over the world and the University flooded with people waiting to hear his diagnosis, but Joseph Stiglitz couldn't stop chuckling. Perhaps it was because he stood minutes from the UN, where he used to be Chief Economist of the World Bank, and where he ended his term in fisty cuffs with the IMF and the US treasury over their financial bullying of developing nations.

When he stood at the podium, Joseph Stiglitz had *schadenfreude* written all over his face.

As bankers pressed their suits against my back and French translations echoed over the crowd, Stiglitz commenced by quoting Keynes and 'the importance of the influence of ideas' on the markets. He called for the revitalisation of history and traditional economic laws, and for the financial markets to be populated by people with a solid generalist education rather than narrow 'financial' specialists who don't know the first thing about human behaviour.

To make his point he quoted George Bush's summation of the financial crisis, 'We built too many houses'.

Stiglitz giggled with the audience, who laughed like the wonderful Europeans they are, but as a sobering follow-on, he stated that three million Americans have lost their homes and in the coming months another two million people will have their houses foreclosed.

He added, with raised eyebrows, that many of these houses are being bulldozed because they are vacant, then shook his head and mentioned waste. I wondered about increased homeless rates, increased unemployment and where all those families of those vacant houses were now.

Stiglitz argued that the markets had failed in their three main tasks: to mobilise savings, manage risk and allocate capital. The US has no savings to write home about, their debt runs indefinitely into the future, risk hasn't been managed — Look above! The sky's falling in — and capital, well all those vacant houses speak volumes.

Stiglitz calculated that the current American bailout package is equivalent to the amount that developed nations give in foreign aid to developing nations over a decade, and asked us to remember that the dodgy loans that caused this crisis were given to low income families who couldn't afford them. This collapse of the markets wasn't just about big men falling from power.

The audience shook its head, groaned as one, and he went on to say that the current US debt hasn't yet accounted for future medical needs of returning veterans from the Iraq war, estimated at half a trillion dollars. It will only get worse.

As I sat in that theatre, on a cold Monday evening surrounded by well-dressed Swiss, I could almost hear old wise voices rise through the carpet. Old-fashioned warnings like greed, pride, hubris and lack of trust riddled Stiglitz's speech. These basic vices, that centuries of education have warned us against, rose through his analysis of the financial markets like warm swords.

What shocked my non-economic brain was the explanation of how these sub-prime mortgages were made pretty and sold onto unsuspecting customers in America and abroad. Stiglitz explained how, up in the air, up in the unregulated ether, someone desperate to save their own overstretched skin, took these mortgages and 'spliced and diced' them into fancy financial products and then had the gall to sell them on.

I had images of a celestial butcher, blood over his apron as he hacked at the rotten mortgage carcass, 'splicing and dicing' and pulling out entrails, which he mixed with sawdust and animal fat, then wrapped in shiny plastic to be sold as meat. Stiglitz said these 'cut up' financial products were 'not fit for human consumption', and needed warnings attached to them before they could be sold with a clear conscience. I imagined the elderly, the pension funds and local councillors, taking a bite from the putrid 'meat' and falling dead to the floor.

I used to think that financial products were generally benign, if not boring, because only those with spare cash could afford them, but I forgot the age-old spiritual cliché and current reality of the globalised world: we are all connected. This enormous and desperate overreaching of empire, boiled in the cauldron of the illusive financial markets and manifested in these financial products, is bound to hurt the little guy. History proves that one.

Many times during the lecture Stiglitz lamented the lack of regulation. Greenspan was meant to take the punchbowl away when the party got too rowdy but he didn't. Instead he refilled the punchbowl over and over until everyone was so drunk they didn't know their own name and tripped over each other in a consumption stupor.

Stiglitz is no socialist. How far have we come as a species if those in the centre cry out for regulation, for accountability, for an understanding of history and a deeper respect for an obvious aspect of human life? If people panic, lose trust, then the human collective is at risk of some sort of Armageddon.

We need trust; we need to remember what has gone before us. We need to remember the lessons of the Great Depression; we need to hear the voices of philosophers and the saints warning us of pride and greed.

And now we need to remember that when something presents itself as an untouchable specialisation and uses incomprehensible gobbledegook to sell a product, we need wise eyes to check it before we swallow its promises.

I understood, as I sat amongst the powerful and the interested, that, at its most rudimentary level, economics is about how human beings organise themselves materially and what a mess, monetarily and environmentally, we have made of that in the last few years.

Stiglitz argued that deregulation is the problem, proposing increased nationalising of the banks akin to the Swedish model, and I had a strong sense of a tide turning. Perhaps the end of the American empire, but also a return to fiscal regulation and increased socialised public assets, something I thought my children might see, but never expected in my lifetime. There is nothing like a dead duck president to speed things up.

The financial markets have been in the ether above our heads for a long time. Most of us pay scant regard to them, only watching the home-loan rates and hoping we can make it through the next month while, rightly, shaking our heads at executive pay packets.

Listening to Stiglitz, I was relieved that someone was coming down from the economic high plains and explaining what these cowboys had done. It wasn't pretty. The markets are falling from the sky, from places where they have remained unchecked by any democratic, or proper regulatory system. I realised that, all over this small world of ours, they will continue to fall unless something serious changes in how things are done.

Stiglitz said it may not be too late, but between you and me, he didn't look too convinced.

Stiglitz was still smiling at the end of his talk. Perhaps it is some sort of personal soap opera for him: finally vindicated after years of fighting with the US treasury and the IMF. I walked back into the cold Geneva night and had a beer, but I couldn't shake the thought of that butcher in the sky, slicing and dicing up a financial product, someone's home, until it was sexy, but rancid.

I raised my glass with my friend and we bitterly toasted the end of empire. What next? An awful reversal of the trickle-down effect? How hard will the fall be? It was cold, rainy and downright sad. We toasted Stiglitz as well. We may not have understood or agreed with everything we heard but finally his voice calling for someone, somewhere, to get some decent digs on the Emperor — and fast — has been heard.

We are all connected and none of us want to be in the way when a fat, drunk, naked Emperor falls from the sky.

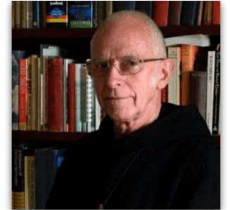
Monastic gaze through money myopia

EUOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton

Last week Dom Placid Spearritt, the Abbot of New Norcia Abbey, died suddenly in England. News of his death was set among the daily chronicles of financial collapse around the world. That seemed paradoxical.

But to the contemporary eye the life of monks itself is a paradox. Monks travel lightly in terms of possessions, relationships, and measurable achievement. But they are chained for life to church, ceremonies, the daily rule and to a single monastery.



For many monks, including Placid, the paradox goes deeper. Their search for God leaves them scanning the horizon knowing that God is always beyond their reach. That intuition led them to become monks. The dress, chant, daily rule, prayers, ceremonies and location are simply blinkers that fix their gaze on the horizon. Placid once said that when he recited the psalms in choir he did not listen to the words, but to the silence between the words.

In this, Placid inherited a long tradition tracing back to scholar monks like Evagrius. Like Evagrius in the fourth century, Placid was deeply shaped by his study of late Roman Platonism, with its passion for an unknown God and its conviction that the way to God lies through silence. That lay at the heart of his years teaching at Ampleforth Abbey in England. That was where he died.

To be so detached from things that others take so seriously, and constantly to look out to sea in love with what lies beyond the horizon but with no possibility of seeing it, is commonly thought to make you unapproachable, other-worldly and impractical.

So it may seem paradoxical that the opposite was true of Placid. His passion for what was enduring and unattainable gave him an astringent eye for any attempt to build castles out of canvas, and a practical interest in what could reasonably be done. He was free from fantasies of greatness and fear of mistakes.

After he accepted the request to come to New Norcia, he set out to assure the viability of the sprawling Abbey settlement, closing the school and establishing the farm on a thoroughly professional and environmentally respectful basis. He also set up the splendid Abbey library in a way that opened it to scholars and visitors.

He helped make New Norcia the beautiful place that it is. Yet, when asked which vantage point yielded the most attractive view of the Abbey, he wryly answered, 'In the rear vision of the car mirror on the way to Perth'.

He was a great conversation partner and friend, at once serious and irreverent. He was not afraid of his own vulnerability and uncertainties, His tolerant observation of the ways in which insecurity breeds certainties encouraged you to be honest when reflecting on your own life. He was a perceptive and faithful companion for many people in their journey to faith. He recognised the many ways in which people journeyed.

Placid did not grow up in the Catholic Church. So he came as an outsider to its devotional practices and to the efflorescence of its structure. He was never likely to make a God out of Catholicism. Many people come to monasteries looking for reinforcement of their securities in this apparently traditional Catholic world. Placid took a mischievous delight in relieving them of their illusions and in introducing them to the austere trust that lies at the heart of the monastic life.

In an address to a conference on spirituality he was asked to speak on the spirituality of the early church. His definition of the early church as the church of the first ten millennia gave him ample space to tease current certainties.

The paradox of Placid's life does not lie in the monk being worldly wise, effective, and an enduring friend, but in people expecting that it would be otherwise. After all, to have your eye fixed beyond the horizon, with the detached tolerance that this enjoins for human achievement, ambition, institutions and fine words, makes one more able to see the reality of people and to their enterprises. That is a good starting point when doing business.

So Placid Spearritt's sudden death in the midst of the current financial crisis is not paradoxical. The financial crisis has exposed vanities and myopia. Death is the end of vanity, the time when the horizon opens in welcome. The conjunction illuminates both Placid's calling and the world in which he lived.

Placid Spearritt OSB died on Saturday 4 October at the age of 75.