

|   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| The false nationalism of Anzac Day and football |                           |
| <i>Ruby Murray</i> . . . . .                    | <a href="#"><u>1</u></a>  |
| The gospel according to Dostoevsky              |                           |
| <i>Cassandra Golds</i> . . . . .                | <a href="#"><u>4</u></a>  |
| A child's suffering for sainthood               |                           |
| <i>Tim Kroenert</i> . . . . .                   | <a href="#"><u>6</u></a>  |
| Kevin Rudd and the problem of evil              |                           |
| <i>Andrew Hamilton</i> . . . . .                | <a href="#"><u>8</u></a>  |
| Beginning of the end for US Cuban embargo       |                           |
| <i>Antonio Castillo</i> . . . . .               | <a href="#"><u>10</u></a> |
| Prayer for a drunk dad                          |                           |
| <i>Brian Doyle</i> . . . . .                    | <a href="#"><u>12</u></a> |
| Pictures of Stalin                              |                           |
| <i>James Waller</i> . . . . .                   | <a href="#"><u>14</u></a> |
| What Frank did                                  |                           |
| <i>Frank Brennan</i> . . . . .                  | <a href="#"><u>15</u></a> |
| Gallipoli Diggers and the 'forgotten' holocaust |                           |
| <i>Nicholas Toscano</i> . . . . .               | <a href="#"><u>17</u></a> |
| Howard asylum seeker policy must remain history |                           |
| <i>Michael Mullins</i> . . . . .                | <a href="#"><u>19</u></a> |
| An outsider's guide to the Tamil crisis         |                           |
| <i>Natalie Francis</i> . . . . .                | <a href="#"><u>21</u></a> |
| Portrait of the nun as a larrikin activist      |                           |
| <i>Andrena Jamieson</i> . . . . .               | <a href="#"><u>23</u></a> |
| Aged Lothario's terror and redemption           |                           |
| <i>Sarah Kanowski</i> . . . . .                 | <a href="#"><u>25</u></a> |
| The ethical cost of gardens                     |                           |
| <i>Roger Trowbridge</i> . . . . .               | <a href="#"><u>27</u></a> |
| Why St Mary's conflict had to happen            |                           |
| <i>Alan Austin</i> . . . . .                    | <a href="#"><u>29</u></a> |
| The gardener's prodigal son                     |                           |
| <i>Brian Matthews</i> . . . . .                 | <a href="#"><u>32</u></a> |
| Perhaps Aphrodite                               |                           |
| <i>William Rush</i> . . . . .                   | <a href="#"><u>34</u></a> |
| Joel's junkets                                  |                           |
| <i>John Warhurst</i> . . . . .                  | <a href="#"><u>36</u></a> |



---

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

©2009 EurekaStreet.com.au

©2009 EurekaStreet.com.au

## The false nationalism of Anzac Day and football

SPORT

*Ruby Murray*



Former Essendon coach Kevin Sheedy had a dream: All over Australia, on 25 April, Aussie patriots rising from their beds in the fading night and streaming into dawn services, to stand and pay their respects to the fallen. The same patriots flooding to the march, and after that ‘continu[ing] the pilgrimage’ into football stadiums across the nation and standing witness as Australia’s youth battled it out over footballs and swore at the umpires.

The matches were to be a celebration of the Australian character on that ‘most Australian of days’: Anzac Day.

In a country as hungry for a founding mythology as Australia, it doesn’t take long to establish traditions. The annual Anzac Day football match between Collingwood and Essendon began in 1995. By 1997 it was already ‘traditional’.

Fourteen years on, the symbolism and hype surrounding the match has accumulated to the point that ‘The Anzac Day Clash’ has reached near-sacred heights, with every possible chance taken to exploit the links between football, war, and the Australian national identity.

Asking what it means to have football played on Anzac Day is almost as risky as wondering why the Digger has become the most powerful expression of Australian identity.

The privileging of both football and the Digger as positive statements of what it means to be Australian involves an incredible amount of forgetting on a day supposedly set aside for remembrance.

There’s nothing new in worrying that the kind of Australian identity glorified by Anzac Day is restrictive. Over the last century, various groups and individuals have questioned what it means to have reified the ‘Anzac Tradition’ to the point that discussion of the complex trauma and evils of war is neglected.

In the 1980s, when women marched during the Anzac Day parades asking that Australia remember that war involves rape and violence against women, then Victorian President of the RSL Bruce Ruxton commented to *The Age* newspaper that ‘if one looked at [the women marching], I wonder how rape would be possible’.

In this century, feminists no longer march in the streets, concern over the role of Anzac Day seems to have subsided, and commercialisation along with a demand for nationalist meaning has only increased the public’s appetite for all things Anzac.

Reading the Sports pages after an Anzac Day match shows just how obliging the

symbolism of sport and war is. A 2001 description of a Collingwood Anzac Day loss runs as follows:

‘At first, there was no sound. The battle was over and night was falling. Some sat slumped against bare walls and dabbed at their wounds. Others whispered among themselves. One wiped away tears. A harsh, scraping noise carried from an anteroom. It was of a bootstudder’s brush at work, but it was also the sound of a trench long ago and far away.

‘At length, though, a murmur could be heard, a thin smile seen, a backslap felt. It was as if a soothing breeze had come in. A sense began to grow that this was for Collingwood what the Gallipoli landings were for Australia, a defeat that concealed a victory, a defeat that was also a defining moment, a defeat that was also a crucible.’

Given the romantic appeal and emptiness of such descriptions, along with our insatiable appetite for all things commodifiable, it’s perhaps not surprising that my generation, Gen Y, has taken up the tradition of Anzac Day with such fervor, wrapping ourselves in Australian flags and screaming at the footballers on field.

After all, in terms of real and immediate grief, what does Anzac Day mean to us, so few of whom have parents who were in Vietnam, and so few of whom have ever been touched by the societal trauma inflicted by war?

What we’re remembering when we stand in front of memorials or lie in a drunken coma on the beaches of Anzac Cove is not our own trauma, but the imagined beginnings of our nation, supposedly authentic, cleanly de-politicised and made simple for us to understand.

The vigor and vim with which Anzac Day is promoted as Australia’s ‘most patriotic day’ has led to its gradual symbolic transformation: no longer a time of mourning, it’s beginning to adopt a righteousness at odds with the events the day originally commemorated.

For some members of my generation, who hear the echoes of America in everything we do, Anzac Day is gradually becoming an Australian Fourth of July, and filling the hole so many of us feel exists in Australian nationalist history.

Foreshadowing this re-imagining of the Gallipoli campaign, in 1997 Essendon captain James Hird wrote in *The Herald Sun*:

‘What the Anzacs and their successors did was help form the sort of society we have today. They fought for Australia and what it stood for and for the right of Australians to make decisions about how their country would develop. Without their contribution we may not have become as open and free a society as we are today.’

But Anzac Day is not a festival of nationhood, and as we stand in the MCG amid the yelling fans and perform its most recent ‘tradition’ we are letting it slide uncritically into a day of celebration. While remembering the dead is important, it’s also important that we remember

that not all wars are the same, that war in itself is ugly, awful, and traumatising.

It's important that when we applaud nobility in conflict we remember that we are applauding it not because noble behaviour is the norm, but because it is the exception.

It's important that we remember courage in all its forms: the courage of those who stay at home in times of war and conflict, the courage of those who speak out against violence and war, who refuse to be silenced, the courage of the bereaved, the courage of the traumatised, the courage of those who return with the memories of the atrocities committed by both sides.

No matter how we try to romanticise it, the trauma of war stays with those who fight in them, and those who are caught in the middle. Acts of war are only romantic in the florid writing of sports reporters. It's when we forget to remember the complex horrors of war that we risk turning Anzac Day into a celebration of nation.

## The gospel according to Dostoevsky

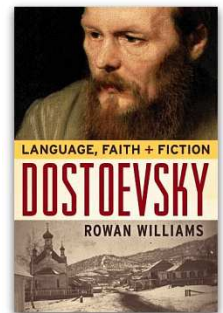
### BOOKS

*Cassandra Golds*

**Williams, Rowan: *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction*. Continuum, 2008. ISBN 9781847064257**

“‘The degree of civilisation in a society can be judged by observing its prisoners.’ Dostoevsky said that, after doing a little time.’ —John Cusack, playing US Marshal Vince Larkin, in *Con Air* (1997).

It is a little surprising to find Dostoevsky quoted in a Hollywood blockbuster, let alone a Jerry Bruckheimer film. Perhaps even more surprising that the quote is genuinely apposite, and less misrepresenting of Dostoevsky than is often the case when he is quoted out of context (although the punchline of the sentence is usually rendered ‘by entering its prisons’).



However, the quote occurs in *Notes from the Underground*, a book written in a voice which is not strictly speaking Dostoevsky’s own. And although the meaning of the statement might at first seem obvious, there is more than one possible interpretation.

‘As long as language remains possible, so does contradiction. There is nothing sayable that cannot be answered or continued or qualified in some way or another ... Thus there is no end to writing.’

That is the voice of Rowan Williams, developing his argument that the essence of Dostoevsky’s art as a novelist, and faith as a man, was a radical openness to argument and contradiction, to a ‘polyphony’ of voices — even a sense that ‘having the last word’, seeking to impose philosophical closure on a narrative, far from being one’s privilege as a novelist, is essentially demonic.

This makes quoting Dostoevsky a problematic exercise, and understanding his actual thinking a life long quest. But Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, theologian, literary critic and something of a fellow traveller when it comes to Russian Orthodoxy, brings a high degree of ‘street cred’ to the table. And the result is not only exciting but potentially life-changing.

It is Williams’ belief that Dostoevsky practises his understanding of Christianity in the very act of writing, that indeed he developed ‘a theology of writing’.

But this does not mean that he arrives forearmed with a set of incontrovertible dogmatic truths, and then moulds his narrative in accordance with them, making sure that it proves them correct and that it is obvious which character or systems of thought are endorsed, and



which are not. Nothing could be further from his understanding (or indeed any intelligent reading) of what Christianity demands from us.

Rather, in a kind of literary imitation of the Creation and the Incarnation, he practises the narrative, psychological and spiritual discipline of allowing each character, each point of view, to be genuinely heard, indeed entering the book only in the voice of a fellow character, whose views have no especial privilege over any others.

His writing allows the other truly to be the other, which is, perhaps, psychologically and socially, the ultimate Christian act. The irony is that this leaves him highly vulnerable to misreading. The glory is that this very vulnerability is (in a novelist's terms) Christ-like.

Williams' book is packed with paragraphs to commit to memory, nuggets of perception that offer more and more as one stretches to meet them. To read him is to grow intellectually. His discussion of icons in Dostoevsky (and in Russian Orthodox theology generally) is alone worth the price of the book.

Dostoevsky is often seen as the anguished agnostic par excellence. Williams argues this is a misinterpretation, that springs partly from his enthusiastic embrace by a post religious culture in the grip of mass amnesia about the nature of religion and religious world view, and of the great variety of cultural expressions — art, literature, philosophy — which have been informed, and formed, historically, by Christianity.

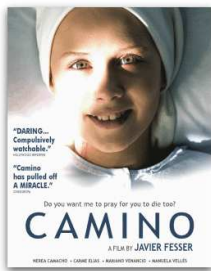
The tension in his novels is not one between atheism and theism. Rather it is around the question of whether 'we could imagine living in the consciousness of a solidity and depth in each other which no amount of failure, suffering or desolation could eradicate'. The catch is that, 'in order to put such a challenge, the novels have to invite us to imagine precisely those extremes of failure, suffering, and desolation.'

## A child's suffering for sainthood

### FILMS

Tim Kroenert

**Camino: 143 minutes. Director: Javier Fesser. Starring: Nerea Camacho, Carme Elias, Mariano Venancio, Manuella VellÃ©s**



'Camino is meant to be a story told from an objective angle, free from prejudice or stereotyped mindsets', says writer-director Javier Fesser. 'A film which regards reality with a generous gaze, without judging it. Rather like an x-ray image.'

Perhaps x-ray is not the right word. Rather, [Camino](#) provides an image of religion shown at close proximity. The result is a portrayal of the Catholic Church in Spain that is at once limited, humane and not entirely flattering.

It is set in the cloistered world of [Opus Dei](#), the lay Catholic movement in which the patriarchal is shown to border on the oppressive. Its hero is Camino (Camacho), a young girl drawn towards painful death by an insidious tumour.

The word *camino* is Spanish for path or journey. Tellingly, it is a masculine noun, and Camino's journey is defined by masculine forces.

The Opus Dei hierarchy and its emphasis upon a Father-God have displaced the nurturing instincts of Camino's mother, Gloria (Elias). Her piety shrouds her humanity, and so she lovingly urges Camino along the path of suffering, and implores her to be grateful that she has been chosen by God for the privilege.

There is little in Gloria's treatment of her daughter to evoke sympathy. The same can not be said of Camino's father, JosÃ© (Venancio), whose deep love for his daughter is undermined by his wife's overbearing piety.

He has been supplanted by the Church as the paternal figure in his family. His elder daughter, Nuria (VellÃ©s), has been called to a vocation within the movement, and Gloria is prompting Camino along the same path. JosÃ© has been emasculated, and thus seems unable to assert his more tender instincts towards his daughters. So Camino is left unshielded from her mother's persuasive rhetoric.

Camino's path leads towards sainthood. The film was inspired by the true case of [Montse Grases](#), a girl who died young and is in the process of being beatified. It raises questions about the manipulation of the process that leads to the beatification of one so young.

But these questions are not Camino's. Perfectly cast, Camacho brings to Camino a luminescence that dissipates the clouds that surround her.



To her, the idea of being 'chosen' by God brings an abiding terror. Camino is perplexed by her cooking teacher's waxing on the theme of vocation, and baffled by her sister's abandoning her world and worldliness to pursue a holier calling. She is haunted by dreams in which a wailing (male) angel descends upon her like a dragon.

But Camino finds the simplicity of faith and unconditional love in her everyday world. She is infatuated with a boy. This is a normal adolescent preoccupation, but for Camino the crush arrives with the force of providence.

The fact that the boy's name is Jesus hints that there is a mystical element to the attraction. It certainly gives her a particular understanding of her mother's talk of 'loving Jesus'. It also provides Camino with a unique means of coping with her ordeal, both more innocent and more profound than her mother's blinkered perspective.

There is a touch of the supernatural in Camino's journey. During a prologue, Camino, in the throes of a deathbed vision, tells of seeing an 'ugly face'. The utterance sets a sense of horror in the gut, which remains with the viewer as the film then flashes back to 'where it all began'. An eerie sense of the dark unknown, with hints of *The Exorcist*.

The intertextuality swings from horror to fairytales. Besides the unsettling wonderment of *Alice in Wonderland*, there are the uplifting, 'love conquers all' riffs of *Cinderella* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. All of which serve to evoke the childlikeness of the protagonist, and not to suggest the mores of religion are bound up with fantasy.

On the contrary, religion is shown to be present and pertinent, existing beyond either the dogma of the institutional Church on one side, and the capacity of the child to imagine or understand on the other.

Camino herself, vulnerable to the manipulation of those around her, succeeds in reinforcing their dogma. Yet at the same time she transcends it. She ends up in her father's arms; her path has led from patriarchal-oppressive to paternal-nurturing. That would seem a worthy aspiration for institutions and individuals alike.

## Kevin Rudd and the problem of evil

### APPLICATION

*Andrew Hamilton*

After both the bushfires and the recent explosion on the asylum seekers' boat, Mr Rudd expressed himself with uncharacteristic vehemence. In the first case he [spoke](#) of the evil of arson, and in the second he [said](#) that people smugglers could rot in hell.



This kind of language echoes the tabloid characterisation of people who have done particularly foul deeds as monsters. Such strong language serves many purposes. It insists that there is a clear difference between right and wrong, and that moral standards are objective, not subjective. It cuts through moral complexities and through arguments that would diffuse or minimise the moral culpability of the perpetrators of monstrous deeds.

It also separates evil-doers from 'people like us', and effectively excommunicates them from society. Arsonists and people smugglers have abandoned themselves to an evil that is alien to the rest of us. By denouncing and excluding them we keep ourselves untainted by their evil.

This view, for all its uses, contrasts with the Christian view of moral evil. The Christian view is more complex and holds together under tension three different insights.

First, it sees sin as pervasive, present in every human heart, and as distorting every relationship and institution of society. Because sin is so pervasive, the crucial line of separation does not lie between monsters and ordinary human beings. It lies between movements of the human heart that are open to God and others, and those that are selfish and possessive. The difference between Hitler and ourselves is one of degree, not of kind.

Of course, simply to insist that sin is ordinary and universal risks domesticating it. If there is a little Hitler in every human being, then what Hitler did could also seem to be of little significance. The second strand of the Christian view of sin is to recognise its destructiveness. When we choose our individual interests over our relationship to God and to others, we incalculably harm both our world and ourselves.

The [BrisConnections](#) business illustrates this. The greed of the parties who structured the deal, lured investors into it and served their own interests in resolving its conflicts is ordinary enough. But its drabness may cause us to neglect the potential damage done to society when it leads observers sensibly to decide that neither the parties to the dispute nor similar financial organisations are trustworthy. Such withdrawal of trust led to the Recession and its diminishment of human lives.

To recognise simultaneously the havoc that sin wreaks in individuals and society, and its

pervasiveness in all human lives and relationships is challenging. It seems to encourage a grim view of the world. Indeed it is no wonder that people associate negativity and repression with Christianity and with any emphasis on sin. So the third strand of the Christian view of sin is also central. It is that God has overcome evil. So we can look honestly at our own lives and realistically at our world, confident that the Good News has outrun the bad.

The Christian attitude to people who have done monstrous deeds is complex. It encourages us to begin by seeing them as people like ourselves who are held in play by God's love. We recognise the twisted knots of motivation in them and the factors that lessen moral culpability. We also give weight to the harm they have done. That does not deprive them of the respect to which they are entitled by their shared humanity.

Seen in this light, the incident involving people smugglers and [asylum seekers](#) requires a more complex view than that taken by the Prime Minister. We should look carefully at all the people involved. They are human beings like us, and the line of sinfulness runs through them as for us.

But they are also caught up in the sin of others — embodied in the Russian occupation, the initial encouragement of the Taliban for geopolitical ends, the current military action, and the ethnic hostility between different tribal groups in Afghanistan.

We should also give full weight to the selfishness that has led Australians to evade the claims that asylum seekers make on us by virtue of their shared humanity. This is embodied in the artificial devices used to exclude asylum seekers, the pressure previously put on asylum seekers to return to their death in Afghanistan, the forced separation of refugees from their families through Temporary Protection Visas and so on.

But our focus throughout ought to be on the people caught in this story who are like us. They include the asylum seekers, the people smugglers, the officials administering an unjust policy, and Mr Rudd himself. Each makes claims on us that should be heard and judged. All are entitled to receive a hearing and a just judgment.

## Beginning of the end for US Cuban embargo

### POLITICS

*Antonio Castillo*



While the [Fifth Summit of the Americas](#) ended without an agreed final declaration, the gathering of hemispheric presidents will be better remembered for US President Obama's pledge to 'seek a new beginning with Cuba.'

While Cuba was not present at the gathering of 34 leaders — under Washington's instigation it has been barred since 1962 from the Organization of American States (OAS) — it was never out of sight. The nearly five decades of US embargo on the island took over the agenda from the very first day.

In the inaugural speech of the Summit, Argentinean President Cristina Kirchner urged Obama to lift the embargo on Cuba and to build new relations between the Americas. The US embargo has never been just a 'Cuban problem'. It has been — along with the Cuban exclusion from the OAS — a historic point of friction between Latin America and the US.

Obama responded swiftly. 'The United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba,' he told the gathering. His remark, and his pledge to talk to Raúl Castro — who replaced his aging brother Fidel as Cuban president — are the clearest signals in decades of the US policy shift toward La Havana.

President Obama's new approach to Cuba began unfolding a few days before the Summit of the Americas. On 13 April he announced that travel restrictions to Cuban-Americans visiting the island were to be scrapped, and that the limit on remittances sent to Cuba from the US would be raised.

He also gave the green light to US telecommunications companies to start flirting with business on the island. In addition, the sending of goods to Cuba such as clothing, seeds, medicines and veterinary products, are no longer considered 'banned donations'.

While it is true that Obama left in place the core measures that form the embargo, his announcement is a major step in thawing relations between Washington and La Havana.

The measures were widely applauded, even by the staunch anticommunist Cuban-American community of Florida. Ramón Sánchez, one of the most respected Cuban exiles living in the US and leader of the Democracy Movement, not only congratulated Obama's decision, but also favoured a change of US policy toward Cuba.

The relaxation of the embargo announced by Obama came in the context of growing US public opinion favouring a change of policy towards La Havana. A recent US Opinion

Dynamics poll showed that 59 per cent of respondents said the US should lift the embargo.

And a December 2008 poll by the Florida International University (FIU) indicated that the majority of Cuban-American voters would support bilateral dialogue and normal diplomatic ties with Cuba.

A few months ago Republican Senator Richard Lugar, considered one of the statesman of US foreign policy, said in a report that the unilateral embargo on Cuba had failed. He went even further and called on Obama to lift all travel restrictions and to forge full bilateral diplomatic ties around issues such as drug traffic, energy and immigration.

The US business sector — largely unable to invest in the island unlike its counterparts from China, Europe and Canada — has also joined the cause to end the embargo. Myron Brilliant, the vice president of the United States Chamber of Commerce, described Obama's measures as 'encouraging' and said that the 'last 50 years of our embargo on Cuba has demonstrated that unilateral sanctions don't work'.

In 'US Policy toward a Cuba in Transition', published by the Brookings Institution, 19 academics, opinion leaders, and international diplomats said, 'The nearly 50-year-old policy toward Cuba has failed.' The document indicates that 'Cuba should be a pressing issue for the Obama administration' and called Obama to commit 'to a long-term process of critical and constructive engagement at all levels including with the Cuban government'.

US announcements to end the embargo have been made previously without any concrete results. However this time a few favourable factors may allow President Obama to push this policy shift further.

First, his Democrat Party controls Congress. It is in the Congress where the decision to lift the embargo lies. Second — and perhaps more importantly — is that the Cuban-American lobby, unwavering defenders of the embargo, is no longer the only referent for the US administration. There is an increasing number of Cuban-Americans who think the embargo is no longer viable, and their voices are reaching Capital Hill.

And in contrast to many previous American presidents, Obama is not indebted to Florida Cuban-American voters.

The failed embargo on Cuba, in place since 1962, has outlasted nine American presidents, from John F. Kennedy, who first imposed the embargo, to George W. Bush. It has isolated the US from Latin America. And it has brought wide international condemnation, including from the United Nations, which has passed dozens of condemnatory resolutions.

President Obama has two options. He could either end up as the tenth president outlasted by the embargo. Or he could be remembered as the statesman who ended this anachronistic US foreign policy blunder that has caused so much pain to Cuba and its people.

## Prayer for a drunk dad

NON-FICTION

*Brian Doyle*

Well, here's a story I never told before, but it's been haunting me, so I think I have to tell it, because I'm pretty sure no one else will, and if a story doesn't get told, isn't that a door that never gets a chance to open, and isn't that a shame and a sin?



So then.

I was in college. This was in the middle of America 30 years ago. It was the last night I was ever in college. The next afternoon we graduated. But the night before we graduated there was a huge roaring tumultuous party in our hall. It was a very old hall with ironwork everywhere and vaulted ceilings and all the students who were not graduating were gone so the hall echoed with music and shouting and laughter and rueful chaos and merriment.

Of course almost every graduating student had family in for the weekend, so a few brothers and sisters and even a dad or two joined the party, the graduating students trying to ooze up the new girls, and then graduates from other halls who heard the roar from our hall wandered over, and soon it was midnight and the party was throbbing and even the shyest graduating students were dancing and giggling and shouting. It was a really great party.

At about one in the morning I noticed that the dad of a friend of mine was in the corner drinking hard and telling funny stories. He got drunker and drunker until at about three in the morning he started shouting and cursing and some glass smashed and finally he fell down.

Seeing a dad huddled in a moist heap on our linoleum floor was a great shock. I had never seen a drunken dad before. My dad liked to tell of the three times he had been drunk in his whole life: one time in the war, one time with the neighbors and one time in the city, but my brothers and I thought he was probably exaggerating a little to prove that he was like other dads, which he wasn't.

At the party that night my friend picked up his dad and held him in his arms like a fireman holding a child and then he slid along the wall to the door and popped the door open with his foot and carried his dad outside into the sea of the grass. I watched him do this but I didn't do anything to help. I just stood there. Not the first time and not the last that I will stand useless and frozen, merely a witness.

Over the next 30 years I never said a word about that night and neither did my friend.

Here and there he would leak a story about a moment when he was a kid and his dad would be carried home by the police, or about going downtown to get his dad out of the



drunk tank, or about the summer morning his mom changed the locks on the house, or about how his sister went to live with their dad but came home sobbing a day later, or about how one of the brothers died in a car crash and the father didn't make the funeral, or about how when the dad died finally they put his ashes in a whiskey bottle, but I never said anything about that night.

But all the rest of my life I'll remember my friend's face as he carried his dad in his arms that night. I'll never forget that. You think we have words for this sort of thing but we do not. All we can do is witness and report and hope that somehow stories turn into prayers.

All we can do is drape words on experience, and hope the words give some hint of the shape of the moment, and pray that our attentiveness matters in a way we will never know. I believe that, with all my heart. What do you believe?

## Pictures of Stalin

POETRY

*James Waller*

*'By the end of the 21st century, icons of Joseph Stalin will be in every Orthodox Church' — Sergei Malinkovich, Communist Party Leader.*

*Published in [telegraph.co.uk](http://telegraph.co.uk), 23 July 2008*

Magisterial wings of endurance. Seismic waves of the radiant sun;  
Burst in the hour of horrible hope, blaze into soft-fired sequins  
Of blood-lit language, each letter aflame with the burning tips of a crimson brush.  
Mine the fury which drills into veins of thinning gold, syntactical treasures  
Asleep in the light of the frozen stars that flow from the base  
Of an Orthodox wall: a mysterious tableaux of breathless splendour,  
A casement of blue and furious fire, charged with a mass of shuddering shadows  
That tremble from the guttering wicks of candles, blessed by hands wrinkled and old.  
Lips touch the rims of the ancient icons, a-flood with centuries of sorrowful sound,  
Blisters of paint cracked in the heat of relentless wars, black-budded flowers  
Of endless Full Stops which raged in silence from era to era, a chain  
Of exits, of limitless files of murdered dots, of shaved heads written  
Into book after book of horror-stricken, blameless, powdered punctuation.  
Kneel, knees of godless strength, gaze into the mirror of the suffering muse  
Recite the stanzas of the world's soft Stalins, paint the icons of your murderous fathers.

## What Frank did

### EULOGY

*Frank Brennan*



*Frank Costigan, 14 January 1931 – 12 April 2009*

I was privileged to read at the Melbourne Bar. I recall my first meeting with the Chairman, Francis Xavier Costigan QC. I wanted to do my reading during university vacation time while pursuing my theological studies.

Entering Frank's chambers, I was greeted by one who was completely at home at the Bar. I had entered his intellectual warren, the sanctuary of his conscience. He considered my request while casually drawing on his cigarette. For a moment I had a sense that my future was in the same balance as the spent ash on the precarious end of the cigarette.

He smiled gently and, with that characteristic glint in the eye, surmised that the problem, though unique, was not insuperable. He seemed to take some delight in paving the way for a Jesuit to come to the Bar, though briefly.

Some time later, I asked my friend Colin McDonald if I could squat in his chambers. Colin approached the Chairman who expressed gratitude for receiving notification from such junior counsel. Frank said, 'I had heard that you and the Reverend Brennan were thinking of co-habiting. Though it is not the usual practice, in fact a sinful practice usually frowned upon, I would be required to act only on receipt of a complaint. I can't imagine any member of the Bar lodging a complaint in such circumstances.'

He was a Chairman who knew, respected and always lived by the rules and mores of the Bar, while maintaining the common touch, common sense, and a wise perspective on the purpose and limits of rules and law — and always with a deft touch of humour.

Some years later Colin, who had moved to Darwin, was attending a legal conference in Bali. Frank was there too. Over a drink, Colin reflected that he was exhausted and broke after some years working in Aboriginal legal aid. Frank, having just completed his royal commission, drew on his cigarette and said, 'I know exactly how you feel, though mind you I am not broke'.

They circumnavigated Bali philosophising about the social utility of the law. This was the first of many overseas escapades by Frank in his post-commission days.

Last Thursday evening, I dined with Frank's family — Ruth and the children. Recalling Frank's favourite wines and dishes, we painted a picture of a man who was at home with his family and close friends, at the Bar, and in his Church (or at least the human face of that Church in its service of the poor and marginalised).

Back in the '70s as a senior barrister, Frank would tell his juniors how important it was to have empathy with the client for whom court was a novel, confronting experience. In the evenings, he would meet the parade of his children's new friends entering the family home. He once opined, 'I should get a mantle piece'. From the mantle piece, he thought he would be better positioned to quiz his children's new boyfriends and girlfriends.

He was one of those fathers who related easily to his children's friends, while finding it more difficult to express his love to his own children. His adult children are now agreed, 'We would create the vulnerability in him'. In later years they appreciated his capacity to convey unconditional love without ever saying it.

Some of the most important things in life are not in the brief, and are thus more difficult for the barrister to express. Frank's love for his children was infectious. Just ask his grandchildren about the love they receive from their own parents.

His commitment to social justice was a daily aspect of his life, especially once the Berlin Wall fell and he met Ruth — all on the one day. He once opined that he had a robust intelligence, as distinct from a fine one. He would have enjoyed the irony that it requires a fine intelligence to draw such a distinction.

Last week I was at a training day for the staff of Jesuit Social Services. Frank had served on the board for years. Chief Executive Julie Edwards told the staff that Frank was a man of such moral authority that you would not even need to speak to him. You need only ask yourself, 'What would Frank do?'

He was never judgmental; he could see all sides of any issue.

When Frank was being wheeled in for surgery on his brain tumour, he completed reading the morning papers and then waved to his own children, 'See ya!' He wanted everyone to be protected from his illness and to get on with their own lives.

In his memory, let's go committed afresh to family, friendship, the rule of law, and justice, especially for those on the margins. Let's carry the eternal image of Frank's smile, the glint in the eye, together with that precarious ash on the end of the cigarette. May he rest in peace, taken up in the hope and peace of resurrection.

## Gallipoli Diggers and the 'forgotten' holocaust

### HISTORY

*Nicholas Toscano*

Anzac Day is a day history has immortalised. We know 25 April 1915 was when the 'digger' — one of Australia's most identifiable and beloved icons — dug the first trench into the rocky canyon at Gallipoli that would soon be his grave. Albeit a military disaster, many recognise the battle as a defining moment, one that forged a nation.



That same day, the same place and the same battle also mark a nation's destruction. The battle at Gallipoli was the first stage in an effort to systematically exterminate the Armenian race. Denied by Turkey, and unrecognised by the United States, the Armenian Genocide — dubbed 'The Forgotten Holocaust' — has slipped from the memory of a world that has grown accustomed to atrocity.

But it happened. Everyone knows it did. It's the reason 1.5 million Armenians remain unaccounted for, and why their skulls and bones are still embedded in the clay of the north-Syrian river banks. It's the reason modern Armenia's borders lie far away from its historic home.

Just as two decades later Hitler deported Jews to concentration camps in Poland, the Pashas — the Ottoman rulers — expelled the Armenians from their homeland.

Due to nothing more than a fear of Armenians siding with the Russians, and a desire to create a uniformly ethnic pan-Turkic state from Anatolia to central Asia (hindered only by Armenia), the Turkish nationalists embarked on the most horrific crime against humanity the world had seen.

At the Gallipoli landing, the Turks conscripted hundreds of Armenians in the momentous battle for nothing more than cannon fodder. As they ran unarmed into our troops' firing line, it was mass-execution.

The Ottoman government executed 600 of the Armenian educated-elite in Istanbul on 24 April, the very day before the Gallipoli landing, and, immediately afterwards pursued the rest in the Anatolian highlands.

From 1915, tens of thousands of Armenian families crossed a desert the locals called Der-el-Zor, but which the survivors would later name the Desert of Death. They marched for weeks at a time, snaking across the desert, not daring to fall behind in the heat. They faced death by starvation or execution.

Survivors tell of seeing women taken from the rows of prisoners into the fields, hearing

screches, gunfire and, after a time, seeing the soldiers returning alone. Thousands were marched into underground caves in what were the world's first gas chambers.

Mamikon came from a village near the border of Azerbaijan. His parents hid him from the government so he would not be conscripted to be killed at the Dardanelles or forced to join a labour camp at far-away places like Baghdad. Mamikon was a 16-year-old boy.

At his village, they were starved of water. In desperation his mother would cut her fingers and feed her blood to her son so he would not die of thirst.

Children like him from villages all across Armenia were hidden from the government, often in the homes of sympathetic Turkish neighbours. And they watched the Armenians of their villages rounded up and marched off, never to return.

From behind the dark windows of their refuge, they would hear soldiers descend on defenceless Armenian women and elders, killing them with guns or with scythes. After the last cry was stilled, only the lucky ones were left there in a silent village.

'Who now remembers the Armenians?' joked Adolf Hitler as he embarked on a holocaust of his own. While he was mistaken in thinking that his genocide of European Jewry would be similarly overlooked, his words ring sadly true. Turkey denies the claims of an Armenian genocide and manipulates history to conceal anything that suggests otherwise.

In fact, the Turkish government does not even acknowledge that Armenians ever lived in those areas from which they were deported and killed: not even by the banks of the vast and glimmering Lake Van, the ancient capital where Armenian nationality was forged among the Nairi tribes over 2000 years ago; or on the white-capped Mount Ararat that soars into the clouds above it, the very symbol of Armenia, the centrepiece of its national flag.

In 2007, tens of thousands of Armenians and Turks gathered in Istanbul to commemorate the life of Hrant Dink, a decorated writer who demanded recognition of this genocide and spent his life's work striving to bridge the rift between the two nations.

'Hepimiz Hrant'iz! Hepimiz Ermeni'yiz!' read the banners that stretched across the wide streets of Istanbul on 19 January: 'We are all Armenian. We are all Hrant Dink.'

The last to leave the office building of the local Armenian newspaper, *The Agos*, Dink was confronted by two assassins who appeared from the shadows. They were young boys, ultra-nationalists. Pulling their pistols, they fired two bullets to his head and two to his chest.

He was not starved, gassed, his wife and daughters were not raped and his children were not burned alive, but, in the words of the decorated British journalist, Robert Fisk, Dink was the 1,500,001st victim of the genocide. 'At least the world will not forget him so easily.'

His death stands as an example of the continuing hatred and intolerance that initially wrought this crime against humanity over 90 years ago.



## Howard asylum seeker policy must remain history

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*



Despite Labor's best efforts, the political debate over asylum seekers is set to reignite. The increase in the number of boat arrivals has been reported out of context, and some Liberal politicians made unwarranted assertions following Thursday's tragic explosion on board an asylum seeker vessel off the coast of Western Australia.

*The Australian* newspaper has added to the disquiet by [publishing](#) Howard Government immigration minister Philip Ruddock's contention that boat people are often advised by people smugglers to sabotage their own craft. It then went on to quote Ruddock's successor Kevin Andrews' opinion that the Rudd Government reforms have 'opened the door' to people smugglers.

Foreign Minister Stephen Smith recently attributed the spike to an increase in 'push factors' that have led to more people wanting to leave countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The military misadventures of the US and other Western nations including Australia have contributed greatly to the motivation of asylum seekers. The spike in the number of asylum seekers attempting to enter Australia is in fact no greater than that of other destinations.

On Friday, *Eureka Street* [published](#) an analysis of the increase by immigration lawyer Kerry Murphy. Murphy highlights increased tensions in these countries, and also mentions the internal conflict in Sri Lanka.

In addition, he cites the increasing sophistication in the operations of people smugglers, which adds up to more arrivals.

Most significantly, he speaks of the decriminalisation of asylum seekers under Labor, which embraces a mindset that moves beyond a focus on border control to a recognition of Australia's responsibilities as a 'good international citizen'.

He writes: 'On one hand the Coalition were sending troops to deal with conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet when people came from those countries seeking protection they were treated as if they had been involved in criminal activity and sent to isolated places such as Nauru with little recognition that they were in need of protection. Now we can see a shift in the language which reflects a more reasoned approach to the issue.'

There is no doubt that Australia has become more humane in its treatment of asylum seekers under the Rudd administration. We were horrified and chastened to [read](#) the findings of the Edmund Rice Centre researchers led by Phil Glendenning. About 400 Afghans detained on Nauru were sent back to Afghanistan after having their asylum claims rejected. The

researchers established that at least 11 of these are known to have been killed by the Taliban following their return.

We live with the consequences of the Howard Government immigration policy. But the policy itself is history, and needs to remain so.

## An outsider's guide to the Tamil crisis

### HUMAN RIGHTS

*Natalie Francis*

I have always spent Easter Sunday with family sitting in my comfortable suburban home, enjoying a lamb roast. This year I found myself sitting with 700 or so members of the Australian Tamil community outside Kirribilli House. It was a protest against the Sri Lankan government's ongoing attacks on Tamil civilians in northern Sri Lanka.



I was attending a [conference](#) in Sydney when the word went out that the Sri Lankan government had commenced an attack on the so called civilian 'safety zones' in Sri Lanka — areas that the government has designated as safe for civilians, refugees in their own country.

Despite the complexities of the Sri Lankan crisis, I could empathise with innocent civilians being attacked in their own land. So I headed down to Kirribilli House in solidarity with the Tamil people.

Sitting in the crowd, I witnessed whole families, groups of teenagers and single women and men all pleading for the same outcome, as they chanted 'Australia save the Tamils'. Not wanting to wake nearby sleeping Sydney-siders the protesters kept their voices down. But the message was clear: 'We want freedom'.

Tensions between the Sri Lankan Sinhalese government and the minority Tamil people are not new. According to Dr Brian Senewiratne, a physician from the Sinhalese ethnic majority and activist for Tamil rights, policies have been implemented for decades that make it more difficult for Tamils to access education, jobs and other essentials of existence.

Dr Senewiratne, speaking at the protest, referred to the Tamil people as 'my people', reflecting a common humanity that defies ethnic and religious origins.

In recent months the crisis has escalated to a catastrophic level. According to Amnesty International statistics, 200,000 people are trapped in the midst of heavy fighting, resulting in hundreds if not thousands of civilian deaths.

The Sri Lankan government state they are fighting against the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or Tamil Tigers), which they consider a terrorist unit. They believe their cause is worth the countless civilian casualties, whom they consider collateral damage.

To some the Tamil Tigers are the people's only defence against a brutal and genocidal regime. To others they are a terrorist organisation in the vein of Al Qaeda.

In the current world climate, the existence of alleged terrorist organisations or governments

has been the impetus or the excuse required to start wars, invade countries and kill countless innocent human lives. The Australian Government has thrown its backing behind these wars, supporting the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As justification for its involvement, the Australian Government points to the suffering of the people in these countries. Why then has the suffering of the Tamil people been met with a deafening 'no comment'? As hundreds of Tamils braced the night outside Kirribilli House, and three men undertook a hunger strike in a plea to be heard by Kevin Rudd, no acknowledgement of the suffering of these people was forthcoming.

With journalists prohibited from Sri Lanka and aid agencies expelled, the truth of what is occurring can seem intangible. What is clear is that aid, medicine and food are not available to refugees. Also, that Sri Lanka's lucrative port access to the Indian Ocean is an issue influencing how countries such as India address the crisis.

Christian churches, Hindu kovils and Muslim mosques are routinely targeted. Dr Mayuran Suthersan, a member of the Australian Tamil Youth and a doctor practicing in Sydney, said at the protest, 'we receive word that our brother, sister or mother has died and these words come too often ... the Tamil people are being annihilated'.

'Please listen to us', he pleaded. 'If you don't listen to us our people back at home won't be there to talk.'

Earlier in the day I had heard of an orphanage that had been bombed under the pretence that the children living there were potential terrorists. Sitting in the crowd I met a teenage boy the same age of some of those now dead children. I asked him if he had family in Sri Lanka. His answer, 'not directly', seemed to encapsulate the feeling of the crowd, that the people suffering in Sri Lanka were family whether they were related or not.

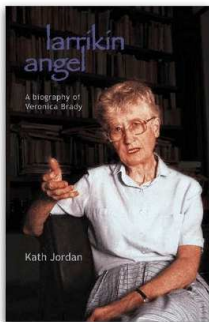
It was a fitting sentiment on the day when Christians in Australia were sitting in their living rooms reflecting on the suffering of their leader, who had stood up for the oppressed and marginalised, and for whom all people were as family.

## Portrait of the nun as a larrikin activist

### BOOKS

*Andrena Jamieson*

***Larrikin Angel: A biography of Veronica Brady*, by Kath Jordan. [Round House Press](#), South Fremantle, 2009. ISBN 9780980610802**



I have only known Veronica Brady through her public appearances. But she has always intrigued me. A slight woman who took on the ABC, the Howard Government over its treatment of Indigenous Australians, the Pope and Australian Church leaders over their treatment of women, and Australian society over its materialism, she belongs to the long tradition of Australian stirrers.

What is unusual is that she is a woman and a Roman Catholic religious sister who teaches in a university. So when I picked up *Larrikin Angel*, written by Kath Jordan, her colleague at the University of Western Australia, I hoped to find illumination on how these disparate commitments come together in a remarkable woman.

The biography is engaging. It offers a chronicle of her life from a happy Catholic childhood to her university days and to her decision to join the Loreto Sisters — a decision that surprised many of her friends.

The biography follows her time teaching in schools, post-graduate study in Toronto and her appointment to the English Department at the University of Western Australia. With her colleagues there she promoted the study of Australian literature, and began her contacts with Indigenous Australians.

She spoke at demonstrations against the Federal and State Governments, particularly on Indigenous issues. She spent some years on the Board of the ABC, characteristically in opposition to the directions in which the organisation was being led. She was in demand as a speaker, and found time to write the official biography of Judith Wright.

Kath Jordan describes these commitments in detail. Their breadth seems to derive in part from Brady's generosity in accepting invitations. It led her to march, to speak, to be on boards and to write.

From the autobiography I hoped to learn how this unusual woman gave order to such diverse commitments, and to know the centre that unified them. In particular, as an outsider, I hoped to understand how her religious faith and membership of her religious congregation nourished or stood in tension with her public activities, and how she reconciled scholarly attention to texts with the broad brush rhetoric of political agitation.

It may have been unreasonable to hope for such illumination from the biography of someone still living. As Jordan remarks more than once, Brady is a private person and does not speak readily of her personal life. So the biographer could rely only on a few poems, a paragraph or two from talks and some precious reminiscences of childhood. The reflective personal correspondence biographers usually draw on to locate the centre of their characters is lacking.

But the opacity of this subject may also owe something to Jordan's slight lack of ease when speaking of religious faith and religious congregations. She is an outsider and seems a little overawed by this world. She speaks collectively of Brady's fellow religious as supportive, conservative or elderly. But we do not learn how the commitments and practices of the convent may have contributed to her public life.

Although the reticence about personal lives is commendable, nevertheless in the biography of any person in public life it is helpful to describe sensitively the structure of their home life and the places where they find energy. These things point to the centre of their lives.

The life of a religious community may be mysterious to us outsiders, but it presumably has an order of time, shared meals, changing preoccupations, prayer times, and perhaps even ways of praying distinctive to the congregation. How someone negotiates these things may take us close to their centre. In *Larrikin Angel* we see this negotiation only in the most general terms.

I would also have liked to understand the way in which the intellectual and activist life are joined in Veronica Brady. In her activism she uses large generalisations and striking statements. No problem with that. The difficulty is to reconcile this expressionist use of language with the fastidious attention to words that is the gift of people who focus on texts.

Perhaps this was looking for too much, and indeed that the notion of a personal centre is not helpful. At all events, this biography offers an attractive picture of a courageous woman who responds passionately to the issues of the day.



## Aged Lothario's terror and redemption

### FILMS

*Sarah Kanowski*

***Elegy*: 113 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Isabel Coixet. Starring: Ben Kingsley, Penelope Cruz, Dennis Hopper, Patricia Clarkson, Peter Sarsgaard, Deborah Harry**

Readers tend to love or loathe Philip Roth, and I am firmly in the former camp. But even I was not enamoured with his 2001 novella, *The Dying Animal*.

It is the third of Roth's books featuring David Kepesh as narrator: a New York literature professor and highbrow celebrity who is self-indulgent, narcissistic, and driven by the urge to sexually conquer (I choose the verb deliberately) as many women as possible. To help you get the picture, in his first fictional incarnation Kepesh metamorphosed into a giant breast.



There are those critics who think these qualities are universal to Roth's men. Not so. His favourite alter-ego, Nathan Zuckerman, is preoccupied by sex, yes, but by much else also, notably a raging grief for his own lost family and childhood. Kepesh in contrast has shucked off everything but his own desire.

For this reason I was a little cautious about seeing the new film, *Elegy*, based on *The Dying Animal*. Particularly given how disfigured one of Roth's great novels, *The Human Stain*, was in its translation to screen. However this is one of those rare instances where the film is more successful than the book.

*The Dying Animal* relates the story of the ageing Kepesh's sexual obsession with a young Cuban student, Consuela Castillo. Well, not so much with Consuela as with her 'magnificent breasts'. The book is told in first-person, so all that we see and hear is mediated by Kepesh. And given Kepesh's self-obsession, we get a very clear portrait of him while everyone else, particularly Consuela, remains a cipher.

The nature of film makes such telescoping impossible. All the characters are three-dimensional, and Consuela is up there on screen in her own right, not merely as the fantasy of Kepesh. Given she is played by an actor as gorgeous and dignified as Penelope Cruz is in this film makes that distinctive reality all the more convincing.

Film also demands a different emotional register. The abrasive cynicism which characterises Roth's novel would not have transferred well into the emotional intensity of cinema, and *Elegy's* director, Isabel Coixet (and it can't have hurt that she is a woman), wisely chose to make her story redemptive rather than ironic.

In *The Dying Animal* the damage done is to Kepesh's sexual ego. A man who has spent a life dedicated to sexual freedom finds himself ensnared by desire for a woman he is convinced will leave him for the kind of young man he once was. Kepesh rants about the ongoing significance of the Great American Sexual Liberation while denouncing his own stupidity for falling, at age 62, into the oldest trap there is: the trap of 'attachment'.

It requires careful reading to detect the fear behind Kepesh's bravado, but in the film his terror is plain to see. Ben Kingsley, bald and muscular, fits the image of an ageing Lothario, and his rhetoric on independence mimics his novelistic twin's. But the rigidity with which he holds himself, and the panic in his eyes, makes clear that carnality has not given him what he needs.

The suffering attendant on age and loss is not Kepesh's personal drama in the film, but returned to its rightful place as a universal human predicament. Consuela does finally leave Kepesh after he fails to attend her graduation party (and publicly acknowledge their relationship), but on New Year's Eve 1999 she pays him an unexpected visit. Now terribly ill with breast cancer, she wants her former lover to photograph her before she undergoes a mastectomy.

The scene bombs in the book (as Linda Grant wrote in *The Guardian*, 'Every woman I have told this to bursts out laughing'), but in the film Cruz and Kingsley invest it with a tender poignancy. The tears Consuela cries are for her illness, yes, but they evoke the loss of youth and beauty which we all, no exception, undergo. Time takes every man and woman hostage, whether we extol freedom or seek companionship.

Perhaps the differences between book and film are made clearest in the change of title from *The Dying Animal* to *Elegy*. Roth's materialist log of masculine decline has been humanised into a mournful lament for the dead, that is, for us all.

Neither work shares in the hope for joyful rebirth which Christians have just celebrated at Easter, but Coixet's film bears testament to the beauty that can nevertheless be found in exploring sickness, old age, and death as a human tragedy.

## The ethical cost of gardens

### ENVIRONMENT

*Roger Trowbridge*



I am a modest fellow. Friends — true friends — will agree. They will confirm that I am not given to vulgar exaggeration of my achievements, few as those may be.

This I say for no reason other than to give weight to the claim that our garden is, without question, the most picturesque in this garden-conscious neighbourhood of ours. In fact I must go further: our garden causes passers-by to turn their heads and point in admiration.

Just what do these passers-by, admiring, see when they pause their evening summer stroll to enjoy our garden's splendour? They see a solid, red brick bungalow of modest proportions, with front steps and a porch. Across the woven wire fence they will not ignore a blazing bougainvillea, and round about a cottage garden ornamentangle of lavender and stock, a purple sage, geranium and pendulous wisteria.

We work together in this garden, man and wife, to make a splendid place. It is central to our sense of identity and to where we live our lives. It is a place in which we labour when there is work to be done, and where we sit, and where children play and friends may laugh with us.

\*\*\*\*\*

The garden takes our time, as is the way of spring. And we labour in the dry heat of summer, while flowers bloom and tendrils curl with growth for the coming season.

On occasion, neighbours gather in our garden with their drinks to pass the time. Conversation leads to a future under threat of the warming of the earth and the inevitable changes to lifestyle this will mean. There are as many views as those who speak.

Some, they tell us, have purchased storage tanks, piped via an elaborate pumping system to toilets, to all corners of the garden and to a high-pressure hose to wash the 4WD. Eileen is consumed with guilt. Even the watering can, when she applies it to a narrow band of rose stalks along her fence line, causes minor paroxysms.

Louise says: 'I won't flush my toilet with drinking water — I refuse.' Dianne stands in a succession of buckets under the shower. I'm not sure of the family round the corner. Behind their high wall is a lush garden. They are not given to carrying bath water. I'm just not sure ...

Our gardens must survive. For this each has their moral way ...

\*\*\*\*\*

Me and my wife are positioned, ethically and in terms of commitment to sustainable practice, somewhere near the middle. Asked if we are scrupulous we must answer, somewhat evasively, 'to a point'. We teeter on the moral brink. We apply what could be termed a morality of everyday life; a form of situational ethics.

In this we are cognisant of the urgings of our leaders; and we are sensitive to the ethical norms that have emerged in our neighbourhood around the watering of gardens.

But also we may sleep a little late and water past our appointed hour, or run a quiet dripper while away from the house if a watering day is missed. Then we reassure one another that 'it's still the same water — no more, no less'.

Can I defend the stance that we have taken? Only inasmuch as it represents the level of behaviour that 'we all' will employ when told by our leaders what to do, then left by them to 'self-regulate'. It is a holding pattern, in anticipation of clearer guidelines and regulation.

Government must get to this, but it is not there yet. At present our leaders are the media. From there we learn 'the science', the vanquishing of skeptics, what others do, and the skirmish of political debate; and from this constellation of ideas we form our personal principles of urban sustainability.

\*\*\*\*\*

This garden must survive. It is of our soul.

So we will do what must be done, based on a shrewd judgment of what, to us, is reasonable. We are waiting for the definitive statement. We are waiting for stouter boundaries to be declared, for laws to be written which will eliminate righteous indignation and snivelling deception as the dominant forces at work in the suburbs. And while we wait the jungle law applies. We are lynch mobs to those whose practice we despise.

\*\*\*\*\*

Mea culpa. Mea culpa.

Elizabeth Farrelly (*Blubberland: the Dangers of Happiness*) is disarmingly frank in her treatise on the perils of happiness:

'I drive too much ... I buy too much ... I use too much water, energy, air and space ... For my own future, as well as my children's, I must change. And yet — this is what's weird — I can't. Cannot abandon comfort, convenience and pleasure ... Can't stop doing it ... My experience, in short costs the planet more than it can afford.

That's us! We know what we should do; but can't; but don't; but won't.

There is a cycle to this life. Slowly, fitfully, our quarter-acre has been transformed in ways that make us pleased across the little joys and melancholies of our lives. It is a part of us, our bodies, minds and souls, and of all our lives have come to mean.

And now, faced with the drying of the earth and threats to life, as it has come to be lived, we must bring new knowledges to bear. We must teach ourselves new lessons, painfully learned, of dwindling resources and the uncertainties of a future we have not lived before.

And when the rare rains fall in the night and send the smell of the earth, we lie in our bed and sigh with pleasure.

## Why St Mary's conflict had to happen

RELIGION

*Alan Austin*

*L'affaire* Peter Kennedy has made headlines in Europe. It has been depicted as a dispute over blessing gay couples and allowing women to preach. But at the heart of the story is the matter of church authority.



Some reports compare the saga with the 2005 case of Father Franz Sabo in Switzerland. From the pulpit and in the media the RÃ¶schenz parish priest condemned the Catholic Church for being out of touch on marriage and homosexuality. He described his superior, Bishop Kurt Koch of Basel, as 'heartless'. The bishop then felt obliged to sack him. In defiance of the hierarchy but with overwhelming parish support, Sabo stayed put.

Resolution was finally achieved last September after extensive private negotiations. Sabo retained his position, but has agreed to a form of words acknowledging the Church's authority.

Peter Kennedy's removal by Archbishop John Bathersby is set to take effect on 20 April, when the church keys are to be handed in. Kennedy's congregation plans to meet 'in exile' nearby. Most reportage abroad, as in Australia, interprets the events as embarrassing for the Catholic hierarchy and a setback for the wider church. More has been lost than one congregation's use of its buildings.

Two questions arise from the experiences in Basel and South Brisbane. Why do radical Christian ministries to the disadvantaged so frequently arouse the ire of conservatives for their departures from orthodoxy? And why do leaders of these ministries so often find themselves in bitter contention with their superiors?

It was so when Jesus attacked the scribes and pharisees for their insistence on orthodoxy and adherence to rules over freedom and love. It seems to have been so ever since.

Florence Nightingale was as passionate about her faith as she was about health policy. She fought the church just as ferociously for women's rights and a more liberal theology as she fought the government over hospital conditions.

France's most famous priest, AbbÃ© Pierre, is regarded as a saint for his tireless care for the poor. Continually at loggerheads with the church until his death in 2007, he openly opposed Vatican teaching on contraception, male-only priests and celibacy. He condemned Pope John Paul II for his lavish lifestyle and urged him to retire at 75. He once told his bishop of his duty to him of *l'insolence mesurÃ©e* — measured insolence.



In Australia the local churches engaging most visibly with social outcasts have been radical protestants like [God's Squad](#) motorcycle club in Melbourne or the [Urban Neighbours of Hope](#) communities in Brisbane and elsewhere. All these have adopted alternative approaches to worship, church practice and leadership, including fresh expressions of theological truth.

They appear to have found from experience that reaching out to addicts, sex workers, outlaw gangs and others outside straight society cannot succeed with traditional ecclesiastical models.

Many leaders of these programs, as with Peter Kennedy, Franz Sabo and Abbé Pierre, have encountered serious problems with church authority. Brisbane's House of Freedom in the 1970s and '80s was a classic example.

Founder of the House of Freedom and later the House of the Gentle Bunyip in Melbourne, Professor Athol Gill, was twice sacked by Baptist church authorities for departures from orthodoxy, first in Queensland in 1972 and then in Victoria in 1984. The latter decision was dramatically reversed after an enthralling heresy show trial.

Why this pattern of insolence towards hierarchies among workers with the disadvantaged? Is it because all powerful institutions — government, corporate and ecclesiastical — inevitably hurt poor people? Is it that those who identify with outcasts have seen that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely (to paraphrase Lord Acton — writing, incidentally, to a bishop)? And hence all institutions are inherently to be resisted?

Will anything good emerge from the saga of St Mary's? It is positive that the matters at the heart of the dispute, such as questions of the divinity of Christ, and of what is essential to being a Catholic, are being explored. Vigorous debates are underway on [this website](#) and elsewhere, with many contrasting views claiming legitimacy. These discussions may lead to acceptance of a greater diversity of views.

What happens next with Peter Kennedy — *le prêtre australien iconoclaste* — will be watched with fascination across the world. Freed from hierarchical control, will his church flourish and become an even greater refuge for the marginalised? Or, denied formal church status, will it wither? Will the Australian Catholic community be richer or poorer for his departure? Will other parishes that have modified unhelpful traditions now come under pressure to conform?

Finally, is there still time for a Basel-style compromise? Yes, there is time. But is there the inclination?

## The gardener's prodigal son

BY THE WAY

*Brian Matthews*



As soon as I saw him, I knew something was wrong. Joe's usually amiable, weathered, 40-something features were tight, his mouth drawn into a thin line. We exchanged our customary greetings, but there was none of the chatting, the footy talk, the give-and-take that usually preceded getting down to work.

Unwittingly I made things worse by saying, 'You're on your own?' A few weeks earlier, when I'd arranged for Joe to come over to do some heavy gardening, he'd proudly mentioned that his son would be joining him in the business. But today the son, Matt, was, as Joe muttered it, 'discussing some issues with his mother'.

We both felt awkward — Joe because of some domestic upheaval, and I because the work he was going to do for me I would have been doing myself if ... well, if everything wasn't connected to everything else in a mysterious and unfathomable pattern that we know as 'life' ...

Four or five months ago, I took my ute to be serviced, and I mentioned that the rear driver's side tyre had a very slow leak. I helpfully suggested to Ray, the head mechanic, that the Second Law of Thermodynamics — entropy increases in a closed system — would ensure the fault would get worse rather than just go away.

Ray made a note to check the tyre, muttering something that sounded like 'bullshit' but may have been a more technical term familiar to mechanics.

In short, although the item was ticked on the service sheet, the tyre was overlooked. It continued to deflate, more quickly each time, and I would pump it up at the service station. 'Bring it back,' Ray said, but with Christmas approaching I didn't find the time. Finally, on 23 December I capitulated and set about changing the wheel.

This was a familiar task, one I have accomplished many times in my life. I knew how to do it, I had the right equipment and I was soon ready to bolt on the spare. But these are heavy wheels, much weightier than those of a normal car. As I squatted and lifted the wheel into position, someone stuck a red hot iron into my back.

I had crushed a disk. Stints in hospital, orthopaedic encounters and stern injunctions not to bend, lift, look sideways, sit, stand or run ensured a jolly Christmas and a rollicking New Year.

By the beginning of March, with the garden disappearing under a thick patina of bore-water nourished weeds that were scarcely deterred by marauding kangaroos and galahs,

and with my wife back at her studies with no time to tackle rampaging nature, I called on Joe, only to find him badly out of sorts — which is where we came in.

Joe's plans to set up a horticultural business with his son had foundered on the latter's disinclination to get out of bed before 10.00 a.m. and his habit of staying up till all hours playing loud music with his mates who had no earlier call on their attention than school the next day, through which they could peacefully doze.

This sad story emerged before any work could be started. Joe was not used to 'spilling his guts', he explained to me, but it was obvious he needed to talk to someone, and he knew that my experience of teenage vagaries, though mercifully in the past, was nevertheless extensive.

'I'm a labouring man, Brian,' he said. 'When I was a young bloke, it was sport, parties and work. You get older, the parties fade out of the picture and your body can't hack the sport. You get married, have kids, and what's left is work. I enjoy my work. It's outdoors, it can be reasonably creative — but it's going to get harder and harder with the years. Like you, with your back: you get injuries, you're not bullet-proof any more.'

Joe's plans for a father-son horticultural business, which would have opened up for Matt qualifications and prospects his father had never known, fell apart and were never resurrected. But just getting it all off his chest helped and, as he left at the end of the day — to go home, as he put it, to a dinner of 'hot tongue and cold shoulder' — he was more like his old self.

'It's a funny life, mate,' he said. 'Buggered if I can work it out.'

I flexed my aching left knee to ease the 'referred pain' and glanced at my ute, standing innocently in the drive with its new rear tyre — replaced 'at no cost, it was our mistake'.

'It's got me beaten too, Joe,' I said.

## Perhaps Aphrodite

POETRY

*William Rush*

### Perhaps Aphrodite

*Cult statue of a goddess, perhaps Aphrodite (425–400 BC),  
in the Getty Museum, Los Angeles*

Does a breeze ripple the limestone folds?  
One foot forward (some toes missing),  
she advances — hard to resist. The marble  
arm outstretched in mute fluorescence,  
must have held something once. A gold  
apple? Her face gives little away except  
there is a definite invitation to worship,  
which we do in our own way, circling,  
recircling the plinth, hearing in this hall  
built with unholy oil, whispers of war.

### Choosing a Life

Pretend I was born in Arezzo,  
know its streets like the back of my hand,  
speak like a native. Visiting Roma, I only  
have to open my mouth and they'll say:  
Aha! A Tuscan!  
Now picture me back in the Piazza Grande  
drinking coffee, a hundred pigeons  
scrabbling at my feet. They're hoping  
a few crumbs will fall onto the pavement's  
red and white geometry.

Another thought: in the square there's a stall  
with a sign GELATO perched on its roof.  
Can you see me, white-aproned, white-capped,  
scooping out smooth *limone, ananas, fragola*,  
— 2 euros a cone, 3 euros for tourists?  
Or else, think of me in the Duomo,  
escaping the August heat. After a nap  
I say a short prayer to Sant'Egidio,  
a one-time local, my pious mother claims  
can fix most things.  
Or, (how's this!) I'm a Professor of Fine Arts,  
reading my acclaimed monograph on  
Piero della Francesca. I'm at the Casa Vasari  
and the visiting audience, Friends of the Museum  
of Art (Philadelphia), are deeply impressed.  
Choose any of these, as I stroll off into the dusk,  
past blue, Etruscan-tall shadows.

## Joel's junkets

### POLITICS

*John Warhurst*

Junkets, that is gifts over and above normal professional entitlements, are a widespread practice in the community. They are not restricted to politicians but are also common among academics, journalists, the business community and the professions.



The undeclared acceptance by the Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon, while he was in Opposition, of two free trips to China that were paid for by his Chinese-Australian friend, Ms Helen Liu, has raised eyebrows. Critics firmly believe that there is no such thing as a free lunch and that anyone who accepts a junket, even publicly declared, remains in debt to the donor. Some claim that the donor always expects a return on their investment.

Fitzgibbon's controversial trips have had the unintended consequence of revealing how common such junkets are. The media has reported that 61 MPs, from all parties, have accepted such trips since the November 2007 federal election. The most common destinations predictably are China, Israel, Taiwan and the USA. There have been 109 occasions in all, with one MP having undertaken a remarkable 13 free trips.

Such trips undoubtedly bring considerable legitimate benefits. Junkets, like official parliamentary study tours, benefit the national interest as well as the individual by improving the quality of parliamentary deliberations.

We should all want parliamentary discussion to be as educated as possible. No one should want our affairs in the hands of parochial MPs who have scarcely set foot outside Australia. Better-informed MPs mean better debate in the parliament and in the respective party rooms. Those MPs, like Fitzgibbon, who later become ministers will also have benefitted from such prior education.

There are dangers in such free lunches, however. Public discussion often concentrates on the potential for corruption or even, in Fitzgibbon's case, security breaches, but outright corruption is extremely rare. Other issues should not be neglected.

The first of these is bias. The free trips are not spread around equally between destinations. They are largely offered by bigger, wealthier countries. To be balanced the destinations should also include poorer, countries that cannot afford to be sponsoring free trips for MPs. Junkets can contribute to lop-sided debates. Where is the sense in over half of the trips being to just four countries?

The second is CV-building among backbench MPs. CVs inflated by overseas trips can be



used both inside and outside politics. Inside parliament the overseas trips build the case for a promotion to the ministry by showing that the MP is a cosmopolitan, educated person who could handle a prized portfolio with an international dimension. The overseas trips also lead to connections that prove valuable after retirement from politics. The revolving-door syndrome from politics to the private sector is dangerous.

The third is that the generosity of the donor may be abused by an MP who treats the trip as no more than a holiday for themselves and, sometimes, for a partner too. Such trips are junkets in the worst sense of the word. Such tripping around not only doesn't benefit the national interest but actually short-changes their local electorate.

As Senator Nick Xenophon has suggested, it would be a good idea to increase the transparency of the whole system beyond the current requirements of the Register of Pecuniary Interests. A detailed report of the trip should, as Xenophon suggests, be placed on the parliamentary web site within 60 days. It is a pity that, like all such regulation, this will lead to increased paperwork for all concerned.

The best protection for the national interest, however, as also in the case of the regulation of lobbying and political donations, lies in personal integrity and intelligence. MPs must have not only high ethical standards but also the clear-minded sophistication to sniff out propaganda and to avoid being seduced by the blandishments offered.

Fitzgibbon's free trips don't worry me when taken in isolation. But wise politicians avoid multiple entanglements. Lobbying, political donations and junkets become dangerous when they accumulate. The notorious lobbyist Brian Burke often followed up his lobbying with political donations. Fitzgibbon has accepted from Ms Liu, his landLord in Canberra, not just junkets but also regular election donations.

Whether or not she also lobbies him, the whole package suggests that Fitzgibbon has been unwise.