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## Alternatives to trash reality TV

CREATIVE

*Michael McVeigh*

Makeover and reality programs are popular these days. Whether they're about giving geeks a style upgrade, blitzing backyards, or pimping-out cars, the formula is the same. Something deemed 'unattractive' is taken away, polished up with the best available products and outfitted with the latest fashionable accessories. The results are revealed at the end of the program, highlighting to the audience how, with the right know-how, we can all become brighter and more appealing versions of ourselves.

But what if, instead of celebrating physical beauty, our makeover programs were about creating a deeper change in people? What kind of inner-makeover programs might there be?

In *Pimp my Soup Van*, contestants are asked to deck out a van with items that could be used to help people on the streets. They make soup and sandwiches, and gather clothing, toothbrushes and other items to hand out to those who might need them. They compile contact details for support services, and ensure there's space in the van for ferrying people to doctors or hospitals where needed. They are then sent out on the streets, with the task of helping and learning the stories of as many people as they can over the course of a night.

In *Imperfect Match*, contestants are given a bunch of roses. But instead of giving the roses to potential partners, they are sent to a women's shelter. In return for a rose, a woman at the shelter tells them the story of how she came to be there — the abuse she has been subjected to, and the fear she felt at the hands of her partner.

In *Please Marry My Boys*, the contestants sit down with the mothers of people in gay relationships. The mothers tell them the story of how their sons or daughters realised they were gay, how they reacted when their child first came out to them, and how they feel about their relationship today.

*The Refugee Factor* sits the contestants behind a desk similar to those used in talent shows, with a red button and a big 'X' on the front of it. Asylum seekers are invited to tell their stories, outlining each of the things they had to endure in their home country before they fled. The contestants are asked to imagine themselves in the shoes of the refugees, and press the red button at the point when they believe the persecution these refugees felt must have become unendurable, when they themselves could no longer see any option but to flee.

For *The Block: Indigenous Edition*, the contestants are taken to an abandoned and run-down building site. They help clear away all the rubble and debris, and

plant native vegetation in its place. While they work, local Indigenous elders tell them about the history of the land they are restoring, and something of the stories and traditions associated with it. The site, once restored, is given to the Indigenous people to use as they please.

In *Big Sister*, contestants are locked in a house together, with their only access to the outside world through their computers. They are asked to read as much as they can about world events — issues such as a lack of infrastructure that prevent development in the Third World, the natural disasters that are having an increasing impact on vulnerable communities, and the lack of employment that is destroying the dreams of young people in so many countries. Their tasks in the house involve coming up with initiatives to raise awareness and support.

A diary room is set up for the contestants to use in each of the shows. The room is away from the cameras and any prying eyes, and offers them some time alone to reflect on their experiences. They are asked to recall the faces of the people they encountered and to reflect privately on how they felt speaking with them. They are asked to think about the moments they were made to feel uncomfortable, and what that discomfort told them about their attitudes to the world.

How did hearing the stories of the people on the streets make them feel about their own lives? How did the stories from the women at the shelter and the mothers of gay couples affect their views on love and relationships? How did the stories of the asylum seekers make them feel about our place in the global community? Has their experience on the land changed the way they feel about our country, its native owners and our relationship to the environment? Did they believe the activities they conceived in the *Big Sister* house could ever have an impact on our world? What will they do once they have finished their makeover?

At the end of the program, the contestants, looking much the same as they looked when they went into the show, are interviewed about what they've learned from the experience. Their responses show people how, with the right know-how, we can all become brighter and more appealing versions of ourselves.

## Facebook personality disorder

MEDIA

*Ellena Savage*

Since leaving my hometown alone a month ago to knuckle down and work on some difficult writing projects, I noticed my social media habits increase.

Sure, I am in Asia right now and most of my friends are not, so the social contact helps with my solitude. But because of the nature of the work I am attempting here — looking inward, finding the vestiges of my culture in the ways I behave and see my world — I have started using social media in a more overtly self-imagining way, expressing what I think are funny or interesting visions of myself. As in, my Facebook profile has become a shrine to comic selfies. Part narcissism, part self-critique. At least that's what I tell myself.

In his poem 'The Leopard Muses on His Spots', Texan poet Paul Ruffin wrote in the voice of a leopard, 'We are given what we have/and left with what we've got.' This is a complex statement about identity: the leopard is talking about his spots, unchangeable, but in a sense produced by his human keepers.

It refers to markers of social identity, which are blindly produced within a culture, a time and place that is nearly invisible to us because it is impossible to remove ourselves from it. And then they are reproduced within our culture by the people around us in order to differentiate and relate. The leopard is produced by the fact of his spots and reproduced by his human keepers in order to interact with him based on his leopardhood.

This a roundabout way of approaching the nature of a personality, and what it means to behaviours in a social system we all belong to.

Social media requires us to produce 'profiles' of ourselves that represent our cultural aspirations; not only who we are, but who we imagine we would like to be, and how we comment on our conditions of being. This exercise is often liberating and creative. But as it is, the digital sphere is not as innocent as mere self-expression.

The first consideration is the extent to which ingratiating ourselves in mainstream digital cultures turns us not only into consumers, but commercial products. And the second consideration is what this continuous assertion of our individuated identity — defining our positions through taste, image, consumption habits — might do for our political cultures. As in, the more we believe that we are inherently self-made, essential beings, our capacity to recognise the cultural and economic forces greater than us suffers.

The Myers Briggs personality test is still a widely-used tool in the human resources sector for matching candidates to corporate positions. There are still certain parts of town where you can't go very far without being asked your 'sign'.

Personalities are powerful forces, but they do not exist in a vacuum. A simple focus on the individuated self — this is who I am, this is what I am made of (Lisa Simpson, Sagittarius, ENFP, emotional age 13) — which does not take into account the social and political conditions of a person's existence, is dangerous.

Even looking at the questions that comprise a Myers Briggs test shows how limited its assessment of personhood really is. Respondents are asked to respond to statements such as: 'You trust reason rather than feelings' (which is totally inane — how can you extract the two?); 'You feel at ease in a crowd' (what crowd? What situation, on what day?); 'You find it difficult to talk about your feelings' (In which register? There are so many levels of discourse people communicate through: absence, actions, speaking to, through or about).

These responses depend on how a person sees themselves, rather than how they might really behave in a situation. And how they see themselves is determined by their values, which are cultural and not at all static.

We are obsessed with the typology of people. There are scientific and pseudo-scientific and outright magical and commercial ways of viewing the typology of humans, but there is something worrying to me about the fixation on it, particularly the celebration of personality types. They are ways of saying you exist, and that you are essential. Not, that you are produced by a number of cultural and political factors that are beyond your control, which you will have to work hard to recognise, and even harder to escape.

Perhaps it is more useful to look to the conditions which require us to be individuated and essential in the first place: a market culture in which you are defined by your consumption habits, not your quirky journey towards self-knowledge. And then we can go back to asking ourselves the serious questions, such as which *Game of Thrones* character are you? (Daenerys Targaryen.)

## **Church plays part of Christmas villain**

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*

Christmas is a chameleon. It adapts itself to different cultures, different situations and seasons. But it wears sufficient ancient trappings to suggest that it has always been celebrated like this.

Many of the details of the traditional Australian celebration came into England only in the 19th century. Santa Claus in his present appearance came from the United States, Christmas trees were imported by Queen Victoria, the family Christmas popularised by Charles Dickens, carols by song collectors at the end of the 19th century, and the cash register invented in the United States.

The public celebration of Christmas has survived banning by the Puritans because it was not Christian enough; now it is subject to some restrictions because it is too Christian; in many Asian societies it has completely lost its associations with Christ's birth. It will surely continue to be popular, marked by continuous innovations that will promptly be declared traditional.

The Christian story of Christmas is also a chameleon. The Gospel stories of Jesus' infancy are a summary of the whole Gospel, and so adapted to all its tenses. Its details can refer to contemporary predicaments: the disruption of an inexplicable pregnancy, the joy of birth, the promise of good news, the impositions of taxation, the pain of homelessness, the rumours of angels, the brutalities of national security, the anxiety of those fleeing persecution, the growth of children and family stresses.

In some years the celebration of Christmas is free and unshadowed; in other years it echoes and judges what is happening in national life. In recent years, the story of Herod's pursuit of the nation's children in the name of the national interest has been echoed by the callous harrowing of people who seek protection in Australia. This year the conjunction of the feast with the hearings of the Royal Commission into child abuse these last weeks have created disconcerting echoes with what has been done in the Catholic Church.

Christmas tells the story of a God who entrusted Christ as a vulnerable baby safely to the care of Mary and Joseph in a markedly hostile secular environment. The stories told at the Royal Commission are of parents who entrusted their vulnerable children unsafely to the care of representatives of Christ's church. They met not Christ, but Herod. The face of Herod in our day is not that of a persecutor who threatens the freedom of the church in a secularist age. His face is that of a minister of the church who betrays and kills from within.

The strength of the chameleon lies in its capacity to adapt itself to its surroundings, to remain itself and to survive. The claim of the Christian Gospel, of course, extends beyond survival. It is that the reality of death and betrayal in their

deepest forms have been accepted and faced down. Ultimately the mask of Herod, whether worn by functionaries of state or of church, is only a mask. The hope for irrepressible life expressed in the vulnerable and unmasked baby is the authentic face of the world.

The Christmas tree, Santa, carols, shop illuminations and cash registers serve us well in times when we prosper and are confident. The Gospel stories of Christmas offer hope in times of betrayal as well as of decency.



## Abused kids meet with Grace

### REVIEWS

*Tim Kroenert*

***Short Term 12 (M)*. Director: Dustin Cretton. Starring: Brie Larson, John Gallagher Jr, Kaitlyn Dever, Rami Malek, Keith Stanfield. 93 minutes**

Those who know me know that, despite the earrings and stoic demeanour, I am a softie. Those people might roll their eyes if I told them that I spent three quarters of *Short Term 12* suppressing sobs. I challenge any one of them not to be moved by this heartbreaking glimpse of life in a (fictional) American foster care facility.

Writer-director Cretton has dubbed his central character Grace (Larson). This is apt, as Grace is both a character and a state of being. As the lead supervisor at the facility, she oversees her charges with a combination of firmness and friendship. She strictly enforces rules and protocols while remaining unerringly empathetic, easily glimpsing the pain and trauma that lies just beneath the hostile or eccentric facade. I used to volunteer at a remand centre for young offenders, and would be amazed at the way in which the best of the staff there could negotiate the line between being liked and being respected. Grace epitomises this.

Grace's empathy has its roots in past experience, but the film reveals this only gradually. We see glimpses of it in her relationship with colleague and boyfriend Mason (Gallagher). At work he is her jocular offsider, at home her sweet and intimate partner; but there is a promised intimacy here to which Grace never fully surrenders, despite Mason's unfaltering patience and care. When *Short Term 12* begins, Grace is at the height of her powers professionally, but personally she is showing signs of fraying. The secret from her past that gives her such a power of empathy is threatening to burst its seams and smother her.

The lines of what constitutes Grace are sketched out through her interactions with all the young residents of the facility, but in particular with Jayden (Dever), an adolescent girl with whom 20-something Grace shares a special affinity. Jayden is witty and defiant: when Grace is running her through the rules of the centre, Jayden supposes, sardonically, that she is not allowed to pin pictures of penises to her wall. 'Only if they're scientific,' Grace counter-quijs. Later, we see Jayden's wall is plastered with just such biological diagrams.

Grace bonds with Jayden over a shared love of drawing, and gradually over frank conversation. Eventually, and due in part to the other stresses that are plaguing Grace, there are dramatic consequences to their interactions. However, there is also a sense that this relationship is typical of the technique and substance of Grace's work. The relationships she forms challenge and enhance both parties. Grace is able to help these young people because she encounters them as human beings; and, in turn, Grace is touched and enriched by their

humanity.

*Short Term 12* is both authentic and low-key, but far from prosaic. The acting is naturalistic but resonates with deep feeling; as Grace, Larson's eyes are always sad, even when she's grinning. The dialogue is astutely observed and plump with subtext and implications: in introducing himself to the residents, new worker Nate (Malek) smilingly, stupidly declares that he has 'always wanted to work with underprivileged kids', a gaffe that not only has immediate dramatic consequences, it strongly suggests that Nate is unlikely to thrive in this role.

Appealingly, the script's high emotion is carried at times by various literary devices. When Jayden eventually opens up to Grace it is via a horrifying parable that she has written about an octopus and a shark. Tough teen Marcus (Stanfield) uses rap to offer a devastating insight into his own crushing family life. (Marcus' subplot turns out to be one of the film's most powerful.) The young people's artistic endeavours to lift the mood of a peer who has had a heartbreakingly bad birthday provides one of the most irresistible tearjerker moments.

This is a sad film, but every frame seems also alive with hope. Even hapless Nate gets his own kind of redemption, with a small act of rebellion that touches the life of a young boy who has been stifled by therapeutic niceties. This exchange happens without words; just a glance, a gesture and a smile. Around the larger picture of Grace's journey of self-recovery, *Short Term 12* is a veritable collage of these kinds of small stories, some funny, some heartbreaking, all human, and all with something to say about the state of grace.

## Stop the world, Scotland wants to get on

INTERNATIONAL

*Duncan MacLaren*

I came to Australia in 2007 for six months and am now leaving after six years. There is a nice symmetry to the advent and the departure. The first party I attended in 2007 in Sydney was on election night – la David Williamson and I leave soon after an election with a very different result (or not?) but one hardly greeted with unalloyed joy.

My fellow countrymen and women, deliberate Scots emigrÃ©s, think me mad in leaving a permanent position, sun, beauty, fireworks, koalas, schooners and the chance of an Australian passport to return to wet, cold, possible penury, vitamin D tablets instead of actual sunshine, rain (slightly different from 'wet'), snow, midges and the *Sunday Post*, our sentimental Sunday weekly made famous by the phrase that 'Scotland would never be free until the last Presbyterian minister had been strangled with the last copy of the *Sunday Post*'.

Yet I am going home.

David Malouf, in *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*, describes home for his Irish protagonist, Adair, whose only memory of Dublin was of 'cats' piss on coal', as 'not four walls and a roof, with a fire and a chair before it, but the place of one's earliest affection, where that handful of men and women may be found who, alone in all the world know a little of your wants, your habits, the affairs that come nearest your heart, and who care for them'. That comes near to my reasoning for returning but there is also above all the matter of the referendum.

There has been little interest in Australia about the referendum to be held on 18 September 2014. It will ask Scots 'Should Scotland become an independent country?'. There is nothing surprising about it. Ever since I was a teenager in the 1960s, Scottish political debate has been dominated by the question of Scottish sovereignty. The success of the main protagonist, the Scottish National Party (SNP – note 'National' not 'Nationalist', i.e. of a nation not an ideology) is the reason for the existence of a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

As the Scottish Government, the SNP, under First Minister Alex Salmond, has administered the country brilliantly, first as a minority government and now as a government with a substantial majority. British PM David Cameron, whose party has been reduced to one MP in the Westminster Parliament since Thatcher wreaked economic vandalism on Scotland, acknowledges that Salmond has the mandate to call a binding referendum to end the Union and begin life anew as a modern, social democratic state.

And that is what many of us intend to usher in. In the post-war era, the Scots, with their distinct legal system requiring separate legislation and now domestic parliament, have not been represented by most UK governments, which is not

exactly democracy. Within 25 miles of Scotland's largest population centre lurks the Trident nuclear deterrent — refused by Norway and Denmark but accepted by the UK and put in a 'remote' area.

While a pro-EU social democratic party is in power in Scotland, our neighbours are opting for the UK Independence Party (UKIP) which wants to haul the UK out of the EU and has forced Cameron to hold a referendum on EU membership in 2016. The UKIP package includes curbs on immigration (Scotland needs refugees), vouchers for education so that you can choose private schools — which are as scarce as a Tory in less class-ridden Scotland, scrapping investment in renewable energy (Scotland is on track as being one of the world's greenest countries) and reducing the powers of the Scotland Act if the Scots get too uppity.

The referendum is essentially a contest between this insular, Little Englander nightmare and a place in the world as a sovereign state, following a Nordic model of social democracy and adding the Scottish ingredients of a communitarian society, an anti-nuclear future and economic decisions that take people, not just ideologies, into account. It's a case of 'Stop the world. Scotland wants to get on!' That's worth leaving Australia for!

## Christmas puns, fun intended

CREATIVE

*Barry Breen*

If sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, then punning must have a reputation almost as undesirable. A joke that can be greeted only with a groan or, better still, complete silence, can hardly be a real joke now, can it?

*Santa walks into a bar and the barman says: Sorry, we're cloused.*

But punning has a rich history. It dates back to prehistoric times, graces the pages of the greatest of writers (think Chaucer, Shakespeare, Joyce), delights the hearts of newspaper headline writers throughout the world and is more or less essential to cryptic crossword setters.

*'Are you pudding in an appearance at the Christmas break-up?'*  
*'Will my presents be welcome?'*

*'Yes, and Yule enjoy it.'*

*'I Noel I will, holly.'*

*'Anyway, Merry Chrysanthemum.'*

*'And a Happy Nude Ear to you.'*

And on and on it can go, a game of sheer, infuriating wits played by two or more geniuses. Repartee at its very best ... or worst, depending on your point of view.

When it comes to puns, subeditors responsible for article headings believe themselves to be a race apart. Without needing to resort to 'best-ofs' it's not hard to find current examples.

Certainly not in the class of the Scottish *Sun's* response to Celtic being beaten 1–3 by lower-ranked Caledonian, 'SUPER CALLEY GO BALLISTIC CELTIC ARE ATROCIOUS'.

But Australian newspapers don't do a bad job either. Just one day of *The Age* (Melbourne) gives us: 'Chinese set to tee off on Albert Park development' (re Albert Park golf course), 'Pub sounds death knell over noise complaint', 'Richmond rep sings Swan song for home of theatre' (in Swan Street, of course), 'Rough Trott' (on English cricketer Jonathan Trott having to leave the Ashes tour) and 'You've got to expect fire during the Ashes.'

Pick up any paper and you'll find plenty of other examples.

As for literature, where do you start? As far as I can make out, the whole of *Finnegan's Wake* is one long pun, while Chaucer offers delights to the diligent reader, and Shakespeare was wedded to word play.

James Joyce, in fact, took punning to extremes in *Finnegan's Wake*, having already honed his skills on *Ulysses*. *Finnegan's Wake* can only be (partly?) understood if read aloud in an Irish accent. Try it.

Character names can be a sort of pun. Shakespeare had Crab, Pistol and Sir Toby Belch, among many. The Restoration comedy writers had a ball with double meaning, punning names, like Horner, the rake, and Lady Flippant, while Dickens was also a master, with a cast list of evocative names much longer than your arm — Charles (Master) Bates heads a fine crew, and don't forget Pumblechook, who looks as if he has 'just been nearly choked', and Bob Cratchit having to scratch out a living.

Cryptic crosswords rely on puns almost as much as they do on anagrams. Three examples:

'*Sounds like the sea on the horse's neck.*' (4)  
'*Two girls on my knee.*' (7)

'*Laying up for Christmas night?*' (8)

The answers to the above are mane, patella and, of course, stocking.

Perhaps the first pun I ever noticed was Pope Gregory the First's *Non Angli, sed Angeli* which the Christian Brothers who taught me seemed to think was so clever — when later I wondered why these staunch Irishmen would think of the English as Angels. Never mind, perhaps they just liked a good pun.

Probably though, this was predated by my older brother Gavan's punning, including a type of acted pun — Mum would say: 'Put on the kettle please, Gav' and he would appear seconds later with the kettle on his head and the question: 'Anything else you want me to do?'

I suppose that I grew up on puns, deliberate over-literalism, ambiguities and twists of meaning, which must have totally bewildered non lateral thinkers, who have already long since stopped reading this article, or probably never even started.

Finally, don't forget that another expression for 'pun' is 'word play' and another term for 'word play' is 'enjoyment'. Oh, and I almost forgot another favourite form of punning — the knock knock joke:

*Knock, knock.*

*Who's there?*

*Irish.*

*Irish who?*

*Irish you a Merry Christmas.*

And I do.

## **Is the pope a Marxist?**

### RELIGION

*Neil Ormerod*

From his pre-conclave speech to his recent apostolic exhortation [\*Evangelii Gaudium\*](#) it is clear that Pope Francis is a man on a mission. He has a vision of the Church going out to the margins, to the most vulnerable, to the poorest of the poor.

The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only in the geographical sense but also to go to the existential peripheries: those of the mysteries of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and of religious indifference, of thought, of all misery.

This vision is now joined to a stinging critique of our globalised economy which promotes a 'new tyranny' of unfettered capitalism and an attack on the 'idolatry of money'. While such language has not been uncommon, buried in the riches of Catholic social teaching, this pope has made it up front and centre stage of his message.

This prominence is not going unnoticed. Conservative commentators are starting to speak out against Pope Francis. The shock-jock broadcaster Rush Limbaugh, in a show entitled 'It's Sad How Wrong Pope Francis Is (Unless It's a Deliberate Mistranslation By Leftists)' has labelled the pope's recent exhortation pure Marxism:

This is just pure Marxism coming out of the mouth of the pope. Unfettered capitalism? That doesn't exist anywhere. Unfettered capitalism is a liberal socialist phrase to describe the United States.

More recently an editor of Fox News website, Adam Shaw, who doubled as a movie reviewer for the Catholic News Service (CNS), was sacked from CNS after vociferous criticism of Francis, identifying him as the 'Catholic Obama'.

While American Catholic neoconservatives, such as Michael Novak and George Weigel, felt more comfortable with John Paul II's role in the collapse of communism and his acceptance of a positive role for the free market, and with Benedict's shift away from social justice issues to return to an earlier piety, Francis' renewed emphasis on the place of social justice in the life of the Church, and his criticisms of the free market are causing concern. However Francis' vision is driven by his experience of poverty in the barrios of Buenos Aires and the failure of the 'free market' to lift the poor out of their poverty in Argentina.

This disquiet from the neoconservatives will be even greater given the role of the Vatican in the recent World Trade Organisation [WTO] trade negotiations in Bali. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, made an intervention which one seasoned observer described as

unprecedented in the specificity of its claims. Highlighting the gap between rich and poor, the intervention [noted](#) :

This imbalance is the result of ideologies that defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and of financial speculation. Consequently, there is an outright rejection of the right of States, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. An even worse development is that such policies are sometimes locked in through trade rules negotiated at the WTO or in bilateral or regional FTAs [free trade agreements].

Reflecting the Pope's growing concern for the natural environment, the intervention highlighted the fragility of the environment in the face of the rapacious drive for profits:

The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.

The intervention was particularly critical of attempts to subvert an international, multilateral agreement on trade through a strategy of regional or bilateral trade agreement.

Certainly, the enlargement of regional trade agreements is a step towards further trade liberalisation but we have to bear in mind that these agreements inevitably threaten the desirability to reach an agreement on a truly multilateral basis. In fact, by entering a regional trade agreement a country reduces the incentives to extend its efforts on trade liberalization at a multilateral level. Most importantly, we know that only the multilateral system is a clear, equitable system that provides effective guarantees for small and poor countries that tend to be penalized in a Regional Trade Agreement where it is asymmetric.

Markets need to be not just 'free' but fair in their impact upon the poor. This is a significant criticism of the American policy pushing for a Pacific free-trade region and the current Australian approach of establishing bilateral agreements such as that currently being negotiated with South Korea.

Of course many of these concerns have their basis in the long history of Catholic social teaching, but Francis is giving them a new emphasis and impetus in the global arena. For Francis social justice is not just an optional extra to Catholic identity, but is a core dimension of the task of evangelisation.

The *National Catholic Reporter* is carrying a piece [quoting](#) an official at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Fr Michael Czerny, confirming that Pope Francis is planning an encyclical on the environment. 'That's an area perhaps where there's been less church teaching than there has on poverty and



development.’ This will not be well received by the neoconservatives. They may soon find that we have a pope who is not only ‘Marxist’ but also a deep shade of green.

## **Corroboree in the sky**

CREATIVE

*Michael Sharkey*

STYLE, OR, LOVE POEM

A slow malagueña in some silent movie  
where horsemen dismount at a white hacienda  
and, doffing hats, kiss ladies' hands: young when  
I saw this, how could I know that those practiced routines—

a debonair glance or a knowing, raised eyebrow—  
were purely façade? Glamorous people long dead  
in framed portraits, and actors who played them:  
older, I knew this was counterfeit style we call charm.

You and I know make-believe when we see love  
as script, and both partners concerned with effect  
they produce on each other. Who'd say 'I kiss your hands'

now and not make people laugh? Better the first time  
it hung in the air from the mouth of an actor now dead.  
Better, in fact, I should take your hand now and be dumb.

DAWN

It's clear you dream. The stillness is profound.  
Your eyelids lock down, keeping secret what you see.  
Your body's curled around what I will never know,  
but we are close. I hear my heartbeat fill the room now,  
and your breathing. What serenity's beyond this?

Even trees are undisturbed, the birds unmoving  
till their young become insistent. Traffic's silent.  
We are cocooned for this moment,  
from the tragedies of others and ourselves.

This could be anywhere — the past, beyond  
the stasis of a picture that does not breathe,  
time-stopped motion of a statue that can not break  
into life as you and I can into what the morning holds —

and this is how it is between us  
in the silence of our worlds that hold us back  
before the shadow of the dawn.

#### A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

How could resist you:  
love forsworn, the transformations,  
gods repeating, 'If you look on me, you die',  
a rose that haemorrhages,  
a bullet that will never miss its mark,  
the shepherds, clowns reciting poetry,  
protesting that a fire will consume them;  
forests tuned to deserts,  
deserts turned to gardens, woods.  
Your sorcery can make the world  
seem possible to live in,  
and it is, for those brief hours  
until we return once more into the dark.

## POET TO CRITIC

As Paul to Corinthians, mother to child,  
as Lenin to Trotsky, as Laurel to Hardy,

I write to you now saying where is the cash  
that you borrowed? Don't fob me off

with irrelevant tales of your mother's  
bad heart, your goanna's flat notes,

that your car wouldn't start or your ship's  
coming in: but where are the rupiah, rubles,

the quids, the pesetas, the kuai  
and the bucks? Time's little fidget wheels

racket along, and the digital world's going bung.  
I'm only human (excuse my poor shape)

and the bottle-shop's open, the barman's awake  
to my game. By all means possess all my furniture,

books, and my wife and my car and my clothes  
but in passing send back what I gave you,

and prove that you're liberal. Yours humbly.

P.S. I'll tell all the world that your prose is sublime.

## HEADWATER

The town sits on the waterway  
that rolls its eyes aloft, preferring sky.

Turtles wearing islands on their shells  
glide in its head, and fibrils swirl

as eels carve runnels  
in the talc-fine mud of shallows,

breaking surface, flicking  
oil slick into prisms.

Carp hunt fingerlings in puddles,  
and the creek recalls the tone

of men and women leaping in,  
the slippery touch of children's skin,

a mouse's splash,  
a kookaburra's plummeting

to seize a frog,  
the black snake's supper

on the shoal, a gecko's  
footstep in the rushes

where a dragonfly's life ends

in snap of beaks,

kingfisher's flash  
and sky that settles once again.

### CURRAWONG'S SONG

The bird that has no feather  
Mocks my language  
Runs and flaps its wings at me  
But cannot fly,  
Throws land-things at me

I fly all sides round the land-bird  
Call to cousins over earth  
'Look at the land bird  
that can't fly'.

We laugh  
Like water,  
Make corroboree  
In sky

## The Christmas story's whisper from the edges

AUSTRALIA

*John Falzon*

In Bendigo, at a St Vincent de Paul Society forum for Anti-Poverty Week this year, Vicki Clark, Mutti Mutti Woman and Coordinator of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria, shared the red earth from her mother's Country, inviting all of us to cradle it in our hands. It was beautiful to hold the red earth from Mutti Mutti Country in our hands.

Adam is the name in the ancient Hebrew writings for the first human. His name comes from *adamah*, the word for earth or dust. This word is also related to the word for blood and the word for the colour red. It was beautiful to hold the red earth from Mutti Mutti Country in our hands because it reminded me of the meaning of dirt and of blood and of being human. In calling us to hold the red earth in our hands Vicki was inviting us into a sacramental encounter. The God of the bible is unequivocally on the side of all who are oppressed and dispossessed.

In the play *Bran Nue Dae* there is a memorable scene where a boy says he is ashamed to approach the girl he loves because he is dirty. The older and wiser Uncle Tadpole responds with laughter and the famous exclamation that 'We're all dirty!' This is a beautiful evocation of the common ground from which all of us, as human beings, come and which, rather than ever allowing for a social order built on inequality, should be the solid basis for an organisation of society and the economy that is both equitable and respectful.

The people of God are not an ethnic group or even a religious group. They are the scattered and crushed. They are the ones who are treated like dirt, who are humbled and humiliated by the historical structures of inequality, inequality that is built especially on class, gender and race. They are the colonised and the exploited, the despised and the ignored.

As that magnificent group of poets known as Isaiah exclaim: 'What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?'

I remember some years back driving out to Ryleston with my family to meet some friends. On the way we saw some stunningly beautiful country but we couldn't help feeling a sense of unease that we couldn't quite explain. This unsettling feeling remained with us the whole time. When we got home we consulted our battered copy of Bruce Elder's *Blood on the Wattle*, an extremely accessible introduction to the hidden history of some of the massacres of the First Peoples across Australia, which should be compulsory reading for high school students.

The country we had driven through was indeed beautiful but it was soaked with the blood of men, women and children who had been driven off cliffs and hunted down in an effort to clear the rich Wiradjuri land of the Wiradjuri People. Without

realising it we could hear the sound of our sister's and brother's blood crying out to us from the land: 'Listen to the sound of your brother's blood crying out to me from the ground.'

The incarnational heart of the Christmas story is a reinforcement of this identification that we find throughout the Hebrew scriptures that God is humanity hurt, which is why the child born on the fringes of society inevitably ends up executed as a dangerous outcast, an object of derision for the powers that be.

But this God is also a creator and he who is torn down is also he who is raised up.

The First Peoples were pushed from their Country. Dispossession and historical disadvantage are the toxic fruits of colonisation. Throughout history and across the globe, people are pushed from land that is held in common. The commons are transformed into vehicles of profit instead of sustenance for the people. The excluded, however, do not disappear. They rise from the dead. And inasmuch as they rise from the dead we rise from the dead with them.

This is the creative power of the oppressed. It is the power to create a new kind of society in which oppression is no longer the rule and dispossession is no longer the basis for the economic order.

One of the capitalist system's achievements is to have concealed the notion of capitalism itself.

So much so, that when you read the words 'capitalist' and 'capitalism' you might immediately assume that the piece of writing in which they occur is somehow 'radical' or 'militant'!

It is not generally considered normal or even necessary to refer to capitalism by name, even when the naming is not accompanied by a critique. We have come to expect the only references to capitalism (outside academic or theoretical texts) will likely come from those who hate it or those who hate those who hate it.

To name the capitalist system is to acknowledge that it is a system. It was not always thus. It came about because of a number of significant changes in the way people produced especially in the area of technology, causing the previous economic system (feudalism) to be outgrown, as it were, to actually fetter and inhibit the creative potential, particularly of the incipient entrepreneurial class.

To name the capitalist system is to therefore acknowledge its historicity. It did not come down from the sky. It is not natural. It is however 'natural' to feel like it is the best of all possible systems for those within it as a system. It is also 'natural' to find it hard to imagine that it could ever possibly end. But then it was just as 'natural' for a peasant (or a noble) to find it unthinkable that there would ever be a time when Feudalism ceased to be.

But I need to introduce a caveat on what I've just said. See, you probably don't



feel like capitalism is the best of all possible systems if you are dehumanised by it. If you are left out of the prosperity in a prosperous country or you are trapped in the informal economy in one of the worlds growing number of growing slums, you are well and truly unlikely to feel like capitalism is working out.

The point out of this reflection is very simple. It is easily divided into two distinct but deeply related parts:

1. That the economic system we live in can be named, described and understood.
2. That the limitations of the system are most strongly revealed in the condition of the excluded and exploited.

These two points provide us with a choice.

Either the system by which wealth is generated and distributed is accepted as a given and the people who fail to benefit from the system are ignored or made to change their behaviour, which is construed as being the cause of their exclusion.

Or the people who are left out and pushed out join together to tell their collective story of exclusion and dispossession and joined by others who choose to take their side, call into question the effectiveness of the system and work towards changing it.

As the 1975 Henderson Inquiry into poverty found: 'If poverty is seen as a result of structural inequality within society, any serious attempt to eliminate poverty must seek to change those conditions which produce it.'

And as the groundbreaking 1996 Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement argued: 'In the main, people are poor not because they are lazy or lacking in ability or because they are unlucky. They are poor because of the way society, including its economic system, is organised.'

This much is clear: when it comes to the experience of exclusion and exploitation, if people do not tell their stories there will always be those who, in fidelity to the first option, will tell their stories for them, thereby radically altering the truth.

Recently, we have seen Francis, Bishop of Rome, choose this very subject as the focus of his apostolic exhortation, [\*Evangeliu Gaudium\*](#) :

Just as the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say 'thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion.

Francis also blasted the so-called trickle-down economic theories:

Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that

economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.

The Christmas story is a whisper from the edges that another kind of world is possible.

There are those for whom this message is unwelcome, those for whom it will be scorned as being naïve at best and dangerous at worst, those for whom it will be regarded with warmth and those for whom it is an urgent enkindling of hope in the face of degradation and despair.

## High Court leaves same sex marriage door ajar

AUSTRALIA

*Frank Brennan*

The advocates for marriage equality and their allies in the ACT Legislative Assembly have scored one of the great own goals with the High Court of Australia ruling unanimously that 'the whole of the Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013 (ACT) is inconsistent with the Marriage Act 1961 (Cth)' and that 'the whole of the Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013 (ACT) is of no effect'.

The advocates for same sex marriage did themselves no favour in terms of public credibility by putting their support behind a dog's breakfast of ACT legislation which even if valid and effective would not have provided marriage equality. The High Court noted that the ACT Act provided 'for the automatic dissolution of the marriage if a party marries another under a law of the Commonwealth, or under a law of another jurisdiction that substantially corresponds to the ACT Act'.

How could advocates for 'marriage equality' credibly support a 'marriage' terminable without court order, without agreement, without prior notice to the other party — an arrangement able to be dissolved at the whim of one of the parties walking out the door having found another marriage partner, whether straight or gay?

Whatever such an arrangement might be, it is not a marriage. These advocates and the merry band of ACT legislators were happy to legislate for marriage inequality as a stop on the route to Commonwealth marriage equality. This was a stupid political strategy given the unlikelihood that Prime Minister Tony Abbott would be swayed or moved more quickly to action by the referral of such a legal hodge-podge to the High Court. This was not a stop on the route; it was a detour down what could be a cul-de-sac. And it was never a close run thing.

The litigation has served one useful purpose. Until now, there was some academic legal doubt whether the Commonwealth Parliament's constitutional power to make laws with respect to marriage would be broad enough to include laws with respect to same sex marriage. In this case, the seventh judge Justice Gageler could not sit because he had previously given legal advice on the matter at hand. The High Court has put this matter beyond doubt with all six sitting judges affirming that 'marriage' for the purposes of defining the constitutional power of the Commonwealth Parliament could not be confined to marriage in the traditional Christian sense.

The Court has said that for constitutional purposes:

'marriage' is to be understood ... as referring to a consensual union formed between natural persons in accordance with legally prescribed requirements which is not only a union the law recognises as intended to endure and be terminable

only in accordance with law but also a union to which the law accords a status affecting and defining mutual rights and obligations.

Under the Australian Constitution, 'marriage' is a term which includes a marriage between persons of the same sex.

So the court has put beyond doubt two issues. First, neither the states nor the territories now have power to go it alone on same sex marriage. New South Wales and Tasmania can put their legislative plans to rest. NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell was right when he said that only the national Parliament could deliver marriage equality and that he did not want 'to see a return to the patchwork quilt of marriage laws that existed in the 1950s'.

Second, the Commonwealth Parliament does have power to legislate for same sex marriage. There is no need for a constitutional referendum. From here, the law is simple.

The politics and political morality of change are still not so simple. There is only one way forward. This is a matter for the Commonwealth Parliament. Just as all sides allowed a conscience vote on the original 1961 Marriage Act, so too all sides should allow a conscience vote on any amendment of the Marriage Act which would permit same sex couples to marry on the same terms as opposite sex couples.

Our elected politicians voting according to conscience are best suited to determine if and when the Australian community is ready to embrace an extension of marriage as a social institution to include same sex couples.

Unlike me, neither side of this debate favours civil unions as a distinct status for same sex couples conferring all the attributes of marriage, while maintaining a commitment to the best interests of children available for adoption, and restricting state authorisation of assisted reproduction so that every child has a biological father and a biological mother. In these circumstances, I accept that ultimately our Parliament will legislate for same sex marriage. I will not lose any sleep when it comes, and I will be happy for those couples who will be helped by such social endorsement to live in a faithful, loving relationship.

But in light of this own goal, I can't see it coming in this parliamentary term. The advocates for marriage equality who were prepared to go via the route of ACT marriage inequality have not done their cause any good.

## Without jobs we're Scrooged

AUSTRALIA

*Michael Mullins*

In both the United States and Australia, General Motors has been portrayed by cynical [commentators](#) as a government-sponsored employment agency and not a proper business. They miss the point that subsidised companies and their government patrons are investors in human capital, and that it's human capital — rather than money — that makes a society work.

Human capital is the combination of competencies and creativity that enable a person to perform a task that produces both personal fulfilment and economic value. The idea is that the subsidies will contribute to both the wellbeing of the workers and financial profits of the company in a manner that brings mutual benefit without exploitation on either side. In the case of car manufacturing around the world, the alternative is workers without jobs and companies without profits.

Pope Francis [says](#) that workers without jobs adds up to workers without dignity. 'Work means dignity, work means taking food home, work means loving!' A society where 'money is in command' inevitably lays waste its workers, and the young and old people who depend upon them. 'We must say: "We don't want this globalised economic system which does us so much harm!"'

A successful nation doesn't need a car industry, but it must have its working age citizens employed, or they and their families will suffer the depression and economic hardship that are characteristic of a society where money comes before love. If a government kills a car industry by withdrawing subsidies, it must have in place a secure plan that will ensure those who lose their jobs retain their dignity. The best way to do this is to make sure they have jobs to go to. The government is effectively an employment agency, with employment so fundamental to the wellbeing of the citizens that make up the nation.

Because a government must avoid taking its workers for granted, decisions that have consequences for employment are among the most serious it needs to take. The reporting of the current government's actions with regard to Holden suggest it may have been cavalier in the way it dealt with the parent company General Motors when so much human capital was at stake. Moreover it has no obvious plan for dealing with the total fallout for employment, including the likely flow on for Toyota workers.

The loss of jobs in the automotive industry has occurred against a background of rising unemployment, according to figures [announced](#) on Thursday. But the trend is even bleaker, with NSW treasurer Mike Baird gloomily [predicting](#) an extra 20,000 unemployed workers in the next financial year. He says 'this is not the time to be complacent'.

While it seems he might be playing the role of Scrooge at Christmas time, Baird has the right attitude and a lesson for his Federal Liberal colleagues. In the end, peace on earth and goodwill to all men and women will not be a reality for those out of work.

## Catherine Deveny's happy diversions

### REVIEWS

Barry Gittins and Jen Vuk

**The Happiness Show, by Catherine Deveny. Penguin, 2012. [Website](#)**

#### Jen

Unconventional, controversial and caustic, Catherine Deveny has also garnered a few names not fit to print. You can rely on the writer and comedian to shoot first and ask questions later, a quirk of nature she's paid for dearly on numerous occasions, most notably her infamous sacking as columnist from *The Age* after a series of bad-taste tweets including one about the then 11-year-old Bindi Irwin.

In *The Happiness Show* (which was initially released in 2012 and is released as a reprint this month) Deveny tries her hand at something much safer — fiction — turning her comic timing and irascible eye to that 21st century preoccupation of ours: happiness.

The novel introduces us to 38-year-old Lizzie Quealy, a comedian, writer and mother of two living a close to bona fide bohemian life in inner-city Melbourne.

With a loving and supportive partner, great job and smart-talking bestie, it seems, to all intents and purposes, that Lizzie has this happiness thing pegged. That is until a business deal takes her to London, her former stomping ground, and a chance meeting puts her in contact with Tom, an old flame from her 20s.

It soon becomes apparent to Lizzie that it wouldn't take much to reawaken that 'spark' the two shared more than a decade ago. Tom's her 'what could have been', and, once back in Melbourne, Lizzie begins a dangerous game of long-distance flirtation.

Deveny and Lizzy seem to share many characteristics (both are comedians, live in Melbourne, are curvy, and adroit at the witty put-down); so many in fact, that at some stage I gave up thinking of Lizzie as a separate character. Thanks to an overly generous sprinkling of sex scenes, this quickly went from mildly disconcerting to downright awkward. I'm not sure if Deveny is simply writing to the 'chick lit' brief, but for me it was a case of way too much information.

Deveny also lays on the colloquialism a bit thick. During the scenes in London, it's as if Lizzy has caught a bad case of the 'Strewths'. Seriously, who, aside from *Home and Away's* Alf Stewart, exclaims: 'Fair suck of the sav?'

I enjoyed, and could relate to, the book's central premise: that trying to pin down the bubble of happiness is as absurd as it is counter-productive. But what I admired about Deveny's columns, and what I find lacking here, is a candid, pared back, take-me-as-I-am honesty. It's her first novel, and she's still finding her feet, but unless you're an unabashed fan, Deveny's overly colloquial and, at times,

abrasive voice might well grate.

What's your take, Barry?

**Barry**

Of the 12 books we've discussed this year, *The Happiness Show* is easily the most self-indulgent.

Emerging sporadically between tacky love motifs, tragic grace notes and the tenuous links between plot plausibility and authorial wish fulfillment, Deveny's Lizzie does have her likeable and resonating moments. And Deveny her apt Richard Curtis references, which she renders with something akin to understatement.

As for the novel's booty-calling — a sliding scale from disconcerting to awkward? You said it, Jen. Take the ballad of Lizzie and Tom's emailed hanky panky; not so much erotica as e-nausea: 'I dreamt the other night that we were in this place ... You pulled me into this empty room and we started kissing. Just kissing. I woke up and I had come ... I lay you back on your pillow ... breathing in the earthy, sexy muskiness ...'

And Deveny's cultural exaggerations? Well, yes again, Jen. There are some solid (albeit Ockerised) depictions of who Australians purport to be, but the local lexicon as captured by her seems to be solidly stuck in a nostalgic setting, circa 1983.

There are, though, some genuine efforts on Deveny's part to wrestle with that old moral chestnut: is there harm in gettin' some lovin' on the side if no-one's the wiser? Is it only fear and the damage done during and after affairs that prompts inaction?

The author puts the prosecution's case (describing a minor character's blues) in the voice of Felicity, Lizzie's long lost love Tom's stalwart missus: 'They had the perfect life. All he had to do was keep it in his pants and they would have lived happily ever after. Why would you risk it?'

For Lizzie, however, 'settling' and moderation do not equate with happiness.

I'm a lover of satirical marauders, and Deveny has made a career out of bungee jumping between the chasms of good taste, good writing and good sense. She's never been content to accept societal hypocrisy, and that's an occasional strength herein.

There is also an understandable, laudable rejection of judgment that strikes a blow for the pent lovers of every nation and age: 'Lizzie wasn't thinking about her kids, about Jim, about anything. This was involuntary. It was not negotiable. It was something she had to do ... there seemed to be no past and no present. Just them. Just now.'



I know and recognise the half-formed caricatures that are Lizzie's freeze-dried brothers and her passive co-parent, Jim. If Deveny had blended the milk of human kindness with the liqueur of passion, however, she may have come closer to the curdled human reality that comes from wrangling the best of both worlds.

Perhaps Jen, authorial misdirection and indulgence are what best pass for honesty.

## US gun lobbyists miss the logic of feeling

INTERNATIONAL

*Fatima Measham*

I woke up to the news on a Saturday morning. One year ago tomorrow, as we slept on this side of the world, a man walked into the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and opened fire.

Staff in the main office heard glass breaking in the front lobby at approximately 9.35am. The gunman, later identified as Adam Lanza, shot himself in the head with a pistol around 9.40am. In the fragment between these two times, 20 first-grade students and six adults lost their lives.

I remember feeling winded in the days and weeks that followed. I stared and stared at my son, then nearly five years old. I took to cuddling him as he slept.

In the dark, holding his slender frame, I pondered the dimensions of the ammunition. Diameter 5.56mm, length 45mm. A propellant load and rifle barrel that could render bullet speeds of as much as 975m per second. In Classrooms 8 and 10, where 24 of the victims fell, a total of 130 expended casings were found.

These are the facts — the small, bloody, innocent facts — of that winter morning in Newtown, less than a fortnight from Christmas Day. While the rest of the country, and indeed the world, reeled from horror, pro-gun lobbies led by the NRA were bracing themselves for war.

The aftermath of the shootings at Sandy Hook were to follow the familiar pattern of frantic gun sales, insistent deflection toward mental illness and pop culture violence, and propagation of the theory that if someone — a 'good guy' — had had a gun at the scene, the 'bad guy' could have been easily taken down.

The shootings were a potential catalyst for gun reform. The Second Amendment absolutists, who had taken over the NRA in 1977, knew it. The right-wing commentariat, in close ranks with the NRA and the Tea Party, worked to detach policy implications from the incident. They seethed with high indignation that President Barack Obama was politicising a tragedy.

It is a peculiar way to frame the debate. For one thing, it invalidates the experience of grieving families — as if their truth mattered least or that it somehow exists in a vacuum where civilian access to military-grade weapons is irrelevant. Deaths such as those at Sandy Hook need no annotation from politicians. The policy questions present themselves against the backdrop of previous, comparable tragedies.

Moreover, the charge of politicisation never comes from the victims. In fact, the families of those murdered in Newtown, along with their supporters, launched the Sandy Hook Promise a month after losing their loved ones. It is an advocacy group that pursues common sense solutions for gun safety. They came close to helping

pass the Manchin-Toomey Bill in April, which would have closed the internet and gunshow loopholes in pre-sale background checks. The shortfall was six votes.

Setting aside the ramifications of this defeat, individuals with no political experience had taken it upon themselves to engage in the legislative process. It is no more than an expression of citizenship in a western democracy, one with a modern history of mass shootings and assassinations in peacetime.

Yet the subtext to the claim of politicisation is that people are being emotionally manipulated, that they have abandoned sober judgement. This is hypocritical, of course, given that the gun lobby routinely stokes outrage and fear, holding up gun ownership as a patriotic marker and sacrosanct right. Such feelings are deemed a more legitimate guide for policy than any feelings evoked by tragedies wrought by a wayward semiautomatic.

The truth is that the high emotion that accompanies tragedies like Sandy Hook actually sharpens the facts. It places the death of innocents in its proper perspective: as evil and repugnant. If something can be done to minimise the risk of such deaths from arms, then it must be done. That is the logic of feeling.

But the idea of mitigating risk gets lost in the debate, muddied by pro-gun assertions of what works and what won't work. The self-serving view of the most voluble minority is that any limits on their access to certain types, size and volume of munitions would not work.

They do not see that that the extent of access creates the very conditions in which such shootings become likely. Of course this is the group that does not regard the estimated 88 private guns per 100 people as problematic. Nor are they particularly disturbed that the number of licensed dealers is almost five times the number of McDonald's franchises in the US. That is the status quo that they can live with.

It goes to show that the ones who complain about the politicisation of tragedy tend to be the ones who do not want to do anything about it.

## Who killed the car industry?

AUSTRALIA

*Ray Cassin*

Who killed the car industry? For the end of motor-vehicle manufacturing in Australia is now virtually certain after this week's announcement by General Motors that its Holden subsidiary will cease making cars in this country in 2017. With Holden's longtime rival Ford already set to depart in October the year before, it is extremely unlikely that the remaining car maker, Toyota, and the crucially important components makers can survive.

Without the big two the components companies will not have a sufficiently large market to justify production, and their demise will force Toyota out, too. An industry that directly employs more than 45,000 people and indirectly employs nearly 200,000 will soon disappear, ripping a \$21.5 billion hole in the economy and quite possibly triggering a recession in the manufacturing states of Victoria and South Australia.

That would have flow-on consequences in other states, generating, among other things, a welfare bill that dwarfs the \$400 million a year now paid in 'co-investment' — i.e. public subsidies — to the car industry. Even the economic rationalists, to whom all subsidies and trade barriers are an abomination, and who for decades have cheered on the demise of the car industry, are registering faint signs of alarm about that prospect: their holy grail, the balanced budget, would become more elusive than ever.

So then, who dunnit? The immediate responsibility for this looming economic disaster rests with the Abbott Government, and not merely because of its extraordinary use of a bullying speech in Parliament by the Treasurer, Joe Hockey, to goad Holden into announcing a decision that its masters in Detroit had probably already taken.

The Government had decided to cut the \$400 million co-investment payments to \$200 million a year, with no guarantee of public assistance in the longer term. For the carmakers, who like all manufacturers have struggled to compete with overseas rivals because Australia's overvalued dollar makes domestic products too expensive, the Government's refusal of support was a death sentence.

In the longer term, however, this should be seen as a bipartisan disaster. What happened this week was the culmination of a process that began under the Hawke Government, which floated the dollar and began the withdrawal of protective tariffs and subsidies from local industries. Labor introduced economic-rationalist assumptions to policymaking in Australia, and the chimera of the free market continues to dominate most economic debate in the federal and state parliaments and in the mainstream media.

When the history of these times is written Australia will be seen as an oddity in

this respect, for only here and in New Zealand has the pure doctrine of neoliberalism, to give economic rationalism its international label, been embraced so wholeheartedly.

It is true that most countries pay lip service to the ideal of a free market when participating in international trade negotiations. But then they do what is in their national interest anyway.

Compare the Obama administration's bailout of General Motors during the global financial crisis with the attitude that successive Australian governments have taken to the car industry. GM was offered massive public subsidies to stave off collapse — but in return the administration demanded, and was given, the right to appoint the president of the corporation, and membership of the corporate board was broadened to include a representative of the United Auto Workers of America. In effect, President Obama nationalised GM for the duration of the crisis.

The executive government of the United States, the nation that is the ideological and financial centre of global capitalism, did not shrink from treating a corporation that is an icon of global capitalism in this way. But imagine the howls of protest from neoliberal commentators if the Australian government attempted a similar hands-on intervention in the car industry or any other form of manufacturing.

Because neoliberalism is such a narrow ideological frame through which to view economic activity, much commentary on public subsidy of the carmakers reduces the issue to a question of whether there is any point in continuing to pour taxpayers' dollars into a loss-making industry. Among other things, this evades the question, not commonly asked, of why we continue to subsidise other industries whose profitability would suggest that they do not need assistance.

Mining, for example, receives a \$3 billion a year diesel-fuel rebate that makes \$400 million a year for the car industry look measly. And it is measly in international terms: Australia's per capita contribution to the car industry is \$US18, compared with \$90 per capita in Germany, \$96 per capita in the US and \$334 per capita in Sweden. Apart from Australia, every country that has a car industry accepts that it will not survive without public subsidy.

The narrow frame of the debate also ignores what the industry returns to the wider economy. In the past 12 years Holden received an average of \$150 million from the public purse but in that time it generated \$2.7 billion in economic activity, mostly through contracts with the now threatened components makers.

In terms of income-tax revenue alone, the industry was hardly a drag on the national economy. Yet comparatively few media commentators — former *Age* economics editor Tim Colebatch, *The Guardian Australia's* Mark Skulley and industry analyst Ian Porter are honourable exceptions — have explained this broader context.

Most important of all, the car industry has been the chief skills repository of Australian manufacturing, and without new sources of employment for the bearers of those skills they will eventually be lost to the economy. The cost of losing these jobs, in human as well as financial terms, will be immense. We are living in a time when governments can contemplate economic catastrophe with apparent equanimity.

## Standing on Mandela's shoulders

INTERNATIONAL

*Catherine Marshall*

The stands at Ellis Park are empty and rain-flecked, the placards lie discarded, the eulogies have evaporated into Johannesburg's leaden skies. As world leaders board their private jets or slide into their first class suites and head home to their own restless constituents, what lessons will they take with them from the life of the man they had criss-crossed the world to mourn?

Not those one would have expected to have been absorbed at a gathering as unprecedented as this.

As Barack Obama rose to deliver his eulogy, few would have missed the similitude between him and the man he called a 'giant of history': the hope that each man had brought to the lives of the oppressed, their shared African roots, their equivalence in charm, physical stature and oratory skill. The anointing of Obama as Mandela's godson was manifested in the roars of approval directed at him by the gathered crowd.

People respond well to heroes, especially those people who have had their rights subjugated by others. But Obama, with his swagger and rhetoric, was basking in the reflected glow of Mandela's hard-won glory. His address fulfilled the collective expectation that the almost-saint Mandela be eulogised by a man of comparable stature, but it also afforded him a global platform on which to polish his own ego, to reinforce his importance on the world stage.

But words of praise for a great man's ability to forgive, to compromise, to see humanity in the enemy, are hollow indeed when the person uttering them fails to follow the example.

As Obama spoke, drones fell and prisoners slept through another night of confinement at Guantanamo Bay. As Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott reflected sorrowfully on Mandela's humanity, three asylum seekers lay freshly dead having tried to reach Australia, and still others prepared for permanent exile from the safety of the Australian soil they had tried so desperately to reach. As Indian President Pranab Mukherjee lauded Mandela's quest for equality, untouchables in his own country suffered the consequences of a crippling tradition of prejudice.

Only the much-maligned South African president Jacob Zuma, vulnerable on home ground, invoked the ire of his people who appreciated the true irony of his tributes.

The jollity of the occasion — the back-slapping of presidents and former presidents, the taking of selfies, the basking in admiration that had been aimed at Mandela — undermined the very legacy they were here to celebrate. It suggested

that eminent leaders had used this solemn occasion to cement and celebrate their own place alongside Mandela in the global political hierarchy. As they stood on the shoulders of this giant, they should have been reflecting instead on how far they would have to go before they could match his exceptional accomplishments.



## Human rights walking tall

INTERNATIONAL

*Andrew Hamilton*

[Universal Human Rights Day](#) , celebrated this week, always has a sharp edge. It celebrates a journey travelled and points to landmines on the way ahead. The day itself commemorates the acceptance by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This document has set a benchmark for the protection of the dignity of human beings over the last 70 years.

The landmines are laid by governments that respect only such rights as they deem to be in the national interest. Last week, for example, Immigration Minister Scott Morrison introduced a permanent cap on protection visas which had the effect of leaving 33,000 people on bridging visas without work rights. A ministerial note stated that 'a Human Rights Statement of Compatibility is not required'.

The agreement by so many nations to agree to the principles enunciated in the United Nations universal declaration of human rights, and later codified in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, seems even more remarkable today because it took place at a time of deep hostility and fear between the Western and Eastern bloc of nations. It shows how deeply the devastation and suffering caused by the Second World War had convinced people that respect for human rights was essential for peace.

To uphold this respect, however, we need to do more than assert a list of rights. These are always vulnerable to the cynical dismissal canonised in Jeremy Bentham's immortal phrase about the many declarations on human rights arising from the French Revolution: 'Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense — nonsense upon stilts.'

Governments are at heart Benthamite. Unless the commitment to humanity goes deeper than asserting an arbitrary set of rights, they will be dishonoured when expedient. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights is illustrative in this respect. The rights do not come out of thin air but amplify the implications of the affirmation in the United Nations Charter of the 'dignity and worth of the human person'.

Human rights then are rooted and linked through the concept of human dignity, understood as the conditions under which human beings can flourish. These conditions can be spelled out roughly in terms of the human need for food and shelter, for security, for love and nurture, for education, for freedom of movement, speech, religion and association, for protection by the rule of law, for raising a family, for work and contributing to society.

This spelling out of the conditions necessary for human flourishing shows why it is inadequate to defend rights without an understanding of what human dignity requires. Simply to focus on rights will sell humanity short.

Western societies strongly emphasise the freedom of the individual to choose, and so canonise individual rights. They place less emphasis on social rights to education, to work, to associate freely and so on. But these are critical to human flourishing because human beings are social. Disregard for social rights lies at the heart of the human destruction involved in Australian treatment of asylum seekers.

If we think of rights as a disconnected and ungrounded list, too, we are likely to reduce rights first to what can be legislated and then to what actually is legislated. If rights arise through legislation they can be removed by legislation, and are no longer universal. They rest on the whim of the state.

If human rights are reduced to those that can be prescribed in legislation, too, they will neglect essential conditions of human flourishing. If a child is to grow into a flourishing adult, for example, she ordinarily must be loved and supported in stable relationships. Although it would be impossible to legislate for this kind of love, children still have a right to be loved.

Human Rights Day defends rights. It also assumes a rich understanding of human dignity. We celebrate the fact that the rights it enunciated are universal. We can also celebrate the local Australian support for it, embodied in William Hodgson who helped helped draft the declaration.

The Declaration of Human Rights exists as a standard by which we can judge our national life and priorities. By these criteria Australian public life displays grounds for concern. In the case of unpopular groups like asylum seekers, prisoners and bikies, governments spend more effort on seeking to evade the claims of human rights than to uphold them.

In the 'nonsense on stilts' stakes the unfettered appeal to national interest walks far taller than advocacy of human rights.

## Coalition stirs the ghost of Jimmie Blacksmith

AUSTRALIA

*Tim Kroenert*

In Thomas Keneally's 1972 post-colonial novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, two white clerks bicker about impending Federation. One, an Englishman, suggests that 'there's no such thing as an Australian', other than in the 'imagination of some poets and at the editorial desk of *The Bulletin*'. 'The only true Australians are ... the Aborigines.' 'Jacko', his zealous young companion retorts, is 'an honest bastard, but he's nearly extinct ...| It's sad, but he had to go.'

The young clerk seems to be of the view, reflected by others elsewhere in the novel, that Federation represents atonement, or at least a chance to draw a line through a history of colonial hardship and Aboriginal slaughter. The novel evokes a treacherous national identity crisis; this is reflected in the person of its half-caste antihero Jimmie, who is so infected by it and so oppressed by the latent racism that it elicits, that he eventually explodes in murderous rage.

More than a century after Federation, Australia has yet to resolve this tension between a romantic notion of what 'Australia' is, and the depravities that were undertaken to attain it. It may be couched in more polite terms, but it rears its head in ham-fisted and fundamentally disrespectful approaches to Indigenous policy, such as recent moves by the Coalition Government that threaten to undercut the spirit of Native Title legislation.

Senior Aboriginal leaders and advocates for Aboriginal rights have raised concerns about a strategy employed by Indigenous Affairs Minister, Country Liberal Party Senator Nigel Scullion. During what Frank Vincent QC describes as a fly-in, fly-out mission, Scullion obtained memorandums of understanding from members of Gunbalanya and Yirrkala townships to negotiate 99-year leases.

East Arnhem elder Dr Djiniyini Gondarra describes this as being part of a 'blitz' designed to encourage other communities around the country hastily to sign similar deals, ostensibly for their own betterment. Gondarra expressed fury about the manoeuvre in *The Australian*: 'We ...| do not want further controls put over our society,' he said. 'We want the shameful march of colonisation to end.'

Vincent, former prime minister Malcolm Fraser, Alastair Nicholson QC and Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, outspoken elder from Utopia, NT, picked up this theme during a forum in Melbourne recently. It is 'technically correct', said Nicholson, that the 99-year leases don't negate Aboriginal ownership. But they do pit a particularly 'western' notion of ownership against the traditional Aboriginal concept of custodianship, which is at the heart of Native Title law. Taking away that custodianship for the span of four generations is as good as an acquisition.

This is not a partisan issue. As Fraser pointed out, it continues a tendency

towards government interventions (such as the Intervention and its euphemistically dubbed offspring, Stronger Futures) from successive governments of both sides, that eschew consultation in favour of paternalism. This is inherently disempowering and marginalising. And the fly-in, fly-out approach negates the possibility of genuine informed consent by the signatories.

Fraser suggested that one alternative approach may be for Aboriginal communities to preempt the government interventions, enlist the support of sympathetic developers and lawyers and take development into their own hands, in a way that remains respectful of the traditional values and practices of custodianship. Even this may be easier said than done: Kunoth-Monks intimated that her own attempts to follow such a course had been stifled at (then Labor) government level by a Minister who she sensed preferred paternalism to empowerment.

What is the way forward? Gondarra calls on the Government 'in the spirit of partnership' to 'declare their interests openly and tell us why they think 99-year leases are good things, not start with the premise they are best for us and then try to persuade us. They should allow a process of option creation as our people come to the government with our own ideas. Finally with free, prior and informed consent, our people and the government can make mutual agreements that will progress Indigenous interests, not only government interests.'

In 2013 we are well past the point of lolling back on cushiony words like Reconciliation and the fading memory of the National Apology. 'We no longer want compassion,' says Kunoth-Monks, gravely. 'We want our rightful place in this land of ours.' It's time to do the hard work. An open and transparent exchange based in mutually respectful conversation, such as that proposed by Gondarra, would surely go a long way towards achieving this, and might put the ghost of Jimmie Blacksmith to bed once and for all.

## Greek and American barbarians

INTERNATIONAL

*Gillian Bouras*

Life lurches on in Greece. Moody's has lifted the country's credit rating marginally, but this will make no difference to your average Spiro and Maria, who face yet another hard winter. Troubles with the powers that be in Europe continue, unemployment rates remain high, young people are leaving the country in droves, and doctors and hospital staff are all set for another strike. Fascist Golden Dawn is still popular, and in the provinces the olive harvest, such a vital part of the rural economy and individual psychological wellbeing, has been disappointing.

So it is cheering to have a little relief, along with a reminder that today's Greeks, like their forefathers, have a sense of rightness and proportion: 2013 has been declared the year of poet Konstantine Kavafis (anglicised as Constantine Cavafy). Like Shakespeare's, Kavafis' span displayed an unnatural symmetry, in that he died on his birthday. This year marks the 150th anniversary of his birth, and the 80th anniversary of his death.

I knew nothing about Kavafis until I came to Greece, but his presence in my mental and literary life is one of the many presents migration has given me. He was part of the cultivated Greek diaspora in Alexandria, where he spent most of his life working at his day jobs: those of journalist and civil servant. But in his creativity and spare time he was a relentless perfectionist who polished and reworked his 154 poems, which were read initially only by his friends: his fame came posthumously, and continues to increase.

Poets do not see it as their business to instruct, yet inevitably readers learn from them. When reading Kavafis' 'Voices', I learned once again about loss. 'Candles' teaches the reader about time and old age, 'Ithaka' about life's journey, and 'The City' about the patterns in living we seem doomed to repeat: no matter where we travel, we will return to the same metaphorical city and ruin our lives in exactly the same way we did at first.

Then there's 'Waiting for the Barbarians', possibly Kavafis' most famous poem. In it, citizens are doing nothing: they are waiting. The Senators are waiting for the Barbarians to come and make the laws, and the Emperor is also ready for their arrival. He is dressed and bejewelled, as are the consuls and praetors: all are ready to dazzle the Barbarians. The renowned public speakers, the rhetoricians, however, are silent, because the coming Barbarians are bored by such practices.

But suddenly confusion and restlessness begin, and the streets and squares soon empty. The Barbarians have not come, and word from the border says they no longer exist. The concluding couplet drives the lesson home:

And now, what will happen without the Barbarians?

These people were a kind of solution.

I cannot claim to think about Kavafis' poetry every day, but sometimes it connects with events or comments. Such was the case recently, when I read an online interview with Noam Chomsky, who asserts that America is a terrified country, but that much fear is of 'the concocted enemy'. He maintains that there are all sorts of things concocted for Americans to be frightened about, and points out that 'the whole terror system' is making enemies faster than it is killing suspects: he deplores both happenings.

Chomsky maintains that there is much distracting and scaremongering talk in America about the deficit, but that most people prefer to discuss the lack of jobs. Inevitably, he also comments on immigration: 'If you're worried about immigration, let's take a look at why people are coming, and what our responsibility is, and what we can do about it.' Taking a look is not usually a Greek response, and other countries, Australia included, seem to wear a variety of blinkers, or else turn a blind eye to the complexity of the problem.

The comments on the interview were mostly sane and sensible. One person said: 'No nation can ever be perfectly safe, so there will always be those who exploit insecurity.' Politicians mostly, it seems to me. Everywhere.

And there are those who will always try to escape responsibility. Kavafis knew it was, and is, often easier to sit around and wait for the Barbarians. But waiting cannot last forever, so then what?

## **Farewell, Mandela**

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



## **Restorative justice beyond the Royal Commission**

### RELIGION

*Jane Anderson*

Last week I went to the Royal Commission and had a private session, which means, in short, that I am a victim of sexual abuse. That history spanned nearly three decades. My encounters with one perpetrator prepared me for more harrowing experiences during adolescence, and later in a marriage that turned violent. Those crimes have shaped my life, and telling my tale that spans nearly 50 years was an experience for which I am thankful.

I commend the Royal Commission for the way in which it was conducted; with attentiveness, sensitivity and professionalism, and with an ongoing concern for the wellbeing of the interviewee.

During the process, it was mentioned that after the Commission had finished its work, there might be the possibility of making this process available to those who might subsequently want to recount stories of sexual abuse. I think that could be a valuable option, but it set me thinking about the whole process of dealing with this crime, the wounds, and the tragedy.

First I want to say that we are very well served by a judicial system in our democracy which takes seriously the sexual crimes against the most vulnerable. This independent body, which is separate from executive and legislative bodies in our society, is fundamental to protecting the rights of individuals. This system is not available in the Catholic Church, with these three bodies being collapsed into the role of bishop. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the Church has had so much difficulty with dealing with this crime.

While I do not in any way want to undermine the judicial system, I would like to offer some alternative thinking. The judiciary is, in effect, a hierarchy. A victim can find comfort in that powerful system. Justice can be delivered for crimes committed. But at the end of the proceedings, the victim is still a victim. One's status has not changed. As for the perpetrator, that label will probably remain with them for the rest of their life, and even after death.

While those labels may well describe those involved, I am worried that at some point they become stereotypes. People are categorised by them in perpetuity. In this system, there is no closure for either the victim or the perpetrator. And what is further communicated is that sexual abuse is the sum total of a person's life.

Are there other ways? I think one possibility is that of restorative justice. This approach might be a way for some, not all, and it should not be looked upon as mitigating criminality. But restorative justice might provide an opportunity to recalibrate the experience of sexual abuse. With the facilitation of a skilled mediator, the victim and the perpetrator have the opportunity to evaluate the assault/s and its consequences. In this approach, the mere fact of the 'victim' no



longer being in a subordinate position to the 'perpetrator' reconfigures their relationship.

Further, both the 'victim' and the 'perpetrator' are compelled to find within themselves the motivation and ability to deal with what has happened. If this process is carried out skilfully and compassionately, and the two individuals are able and open to the challenge of this encounter, then this surely must contribute to personal development. Prior experiences including memories and images, feeling and thoughts, are reassessed. The previous understanding is now replaced with a new understanding of what has happened.

In effect, there is a possibility that the 'victim' can be re-empowered, which is certainly a contradiction to what happened during the assault/s. Likewise, the 'perpetrator' can reappropriate their crime, dependent on their ability to make some tough decisions. There are no guarantees, but restorative justice has the potential to change one's understanding of self and the meaning of life. For some, that may mean closure. One can move on with one's life, because an empowered (and courageous) individual is more than the sum of a crime.

There is another option that might also be considered, and that is ritual. Ritual, especially religious ritual can be a very powerful experience. Done well, it can touch areas where psychology and law cannot. Is there a ritual where people can be purified from this blot on their life? Can we enter into this liminal space, this wild and challenging place, and, then, transition anew? Ritual does this for so many of life's transitions, surely there are one or more rituals that might be made available.

There is much more thinking to be done on how we as a society might interrupt this crime of sexual abuse. For instance, the way we sexualise identity in religious and society has to be addressed. We are more than the sum of our biology and sexual physicality. We are made for intimate, mutual, wholesome and loving relationships. We are complex individuals. In addressing these crimes, surely it is a goal for which all could aspire, and one to which the Royal Commission brings us a little closer.

## A bad Christmas for refugees

AUSTRALIA

*Kerry Murphy*

Last week asylum seekers had a small win only to have it snatched away, and then were confronted by a more serious attack. Those working with asylum seekers have learned to expect abuse and derision from governments directed against asylum seekers and those helping them. Labor is only moderately better than the Coalition, but at least they occasionally made positive decisions. However these recent events have reached a new nadir.

On the evening of 2 December, the Senate disallowed the unfair and inhumane Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) regulations. This meant that those already granted a TPV were stuck with it. The debate was short, only three senators spoke, but WA Senator Michaelia Cash managed to insult all those working in the area, including department officers and officials from the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) when she set out the underlying policy:

For those who arrived before 19 July and are subject to offshore processing (i.e. boat arrivals), under a Coalition Government they will not get permanent residence in Australia ... They will not be given family reunion ... They will not be allowed to leave Australia and then return and they will be required to satisfy mutual obligation requirements in return for welfare payments. They will face a much tougher assessment process, not the tick-and-flick approach that was adopted by the former government, and they will do all of this without the largesse of taxpayer funded lawyers to run their multiple appeals.

Case officers, interpreters, lawyers and migration agents spend hours on these cases. To describe this difficult work as a 'tick-and-flick' approach is degrading and insulting.

That same day, Immigration Minister Scott Morrison capped the number of protection visas under s85 to be issued in the 2013/14 year at [1650](#) . That number has already been met. In the 2012/13 year, there were 7504 visas issued, including 2555 to those who had not arrived on boats. This power limits the number of decisions that can be made and is not disallowable in the Senate. It means that it would take three years just to deal with the same number of visa grants as in 2012/13. It has never previously been used for protection visas.

Tony Abbott [stated](#) : 'This government will never allow people who come here illegally by boat to gain permanent residency in Australia.' But arriving without a visa is not illegal and the use of illegal is a deliberate policy to demonise people seeking asylum. It is not the correct legal term, and has not been since September 1994.

1650 visas is a tiny number and means all visa applicants who meet the

protection criteria will have to wait much longer. Some are waiting for permission to work, others are supporting family offshore, often in perilous circumstances. The inhumanity of this decision is manifest, and deliberate. As a [comparison](#), the planning level for visas for partners in 2013/14 is 42,425 — more than three times the reduced total refugee program.

Not to be outdone, Morrison then [introduced](#) the ominously titled Migration Amendment (Regaining Control Over Australia's Protection Obligation) Bill on 4 December. This bill abolishes the only major positive legislative reform for asylum seekers in over 20 years — the introduction of Complementary Protection in March 2012.

Complementary Protection was introduced under Labor to achieve several important aims. Firstly, it provided a domestic mechanism for people to access the non-refoulement obligations under the Convention Against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and several other key international human rights provisions. Previously, an applicant who could not meet the strict Refugee Convention provisions, but still faced serious harm or torture in their home country, had to go through a cumbersome three step process to have such a case considered. You could only access the personal powers of the minister under s417 after a decision at the RRT.

The process was not transparent, somewhat arbitrary and unreviewable. By making an assessment on Complementary Protection as the second part of the protection visa process, the law meant that these often complex cases could be considered at an earlier stage and avoid the costs and trauma of further processes. It also brought Australia in line with other developed countries such as Canada, the UK and European Union in terms of having such a process as part of the mainstream application, rather than some hidden personal intervention by the minister. Once again these basic human rights provisions are being sidelined.

Minister Morrison wants to be the only person to make such decisions. This is a retrograde step, as well as administratively and legally irrational. He stated that Complementary Protection was promoted by smugglers, yet only 57 positive decisions over the last year or so makes you wonder how much of a promotion for smugglers it really is. How the grant of 57 visas means losing control over Australia's protection obligations is a mystery.

Complementary Protection was a successful and positive reform. It meant that the complex case that did not quite fit the Refugee Convention could be argued on other grounds. While there were problems with the drafting, this could have been fixed if the suggestions of UNSW Professor McAdam had been adopted by the previous government. Morrison does not want to improve the system, he wants to control it. Already there have been strong [criticisms](#) of the bill and time will tell if the Senate passes it or not.

## **Four poems for Seamus Heaney**

CREATIVE

*Various*

### **Requiem for a poet**

*(‘... who has made the room — and kept going’)*

When you account, as you must, the courtship with the soil,  
It is a grand reckoning, croppies and trouble-makers, friends in toil,  
Old fermentations, and even family in the chain of ancient moil.  
We know you read the turf better, spadefall concision,  
Oh! Seamus, Seamus, you could cut with such love and precision,  
Make songs rise from the deep, give voices to buried vision.  
Noli or nolle timere, who cares?, for it doesn't matter at all,  
With the earthed and unearthed, you kept us all in thrall,  
Perfecting the geology of the spirit, earth knows how to speak in Donegal.  
You have been our host, high-held, so much giving, gravelly and gritty,  
Inviting us in — and how exhausting! — with the richness and ripeness of  
festivity,  
Glory be to the peat and to the bog, and to the light on The Strand in the city.  
And so now the ground opens for yet another honoured guest,  
You have made room and rhyme enough for us all to be blessed.

*Peter Gebhardt*

### **Getting it Right**

*In gratitude to Seamus Heaney*

i.

In our baronies of childhood  
we lived twenty miles apart,  
perhaps half an hour  
for the gales from the West  
that shook your father's trees  
to rock our copper-beech,

or no time at all  
for my fingers following  
our Six Mile Water  
to cross Lough Neagh's  
petrifying deeps  
and meet your Moyola  
in the River Bann  
famous with eels.

ii.

But we were not to be friends,  
not if you'd been our neighbour.  
A James? Perhaps, but not Seamus.  
I was brought up to become  
a Scottish Protestant boy  
in exile from the country  
that was my father's homeland.  
You grew up to be at home  
in your history and tongue;  
my father banned your accent,  
set me to Elocution, as if  
your speech was my speech-defect.  
Our history lay elsewhere,  
even as we were living it,

iii.

for I too was growing to know  
your horse-powered harvests, the *crex-crex*  
of corncrakes among the stooks,  
the stench of retting flax  
over crannog and souterrain,  
and The Twelfth of July's bullying

yammer of Lambeg drums.  
Years later then, transplanted  
to this far side of the world,  
when first I found your words  
I knew my childhood's landscape  
in your people, your place-names,  
and learned for the first time  
how we'd failed to make it our home.  
iv.

One image: when I was seven,  
we watched from an upstairs window  
the flax mill on fire in the village  
my father with authority  
pronounced to rhyme with 'dough':  
*Doagh*. But your voice tells me  
I need remember only  
the guttural that closes *loch* —  
one sound we Scots always knew  
'strangers found difficult to manage'.  
While this fire burns in my mind  
I'll speak it with your voice:  
*Doagh*. Getting this right at least.  
Never friends, I'll not be your stranger.

*Alan Roddick*

**Vale Seamus Heaney**

Shaken by a distant quake  
whose tremors travel underground  
to rattle cups and saucers on the kitchen bench:  
a colossus in his land,  
a granite-featured sage, has gone —

a farmer's son from County Derry,  
poet for his age, our own.  
Season after season he would work  
his earth, the deep, rich loam,  
trusting in the sureness of his hands.

*Jena Woodhouse*

**It Matters How We Go**

*for Barry Lopez*

*How important it must be  
to someone  
that I am alive, and walking,  
and that I have written  
these poems.*

*This morning the sun stood  
right at the top of the road  
and waited for me*

*—Ted Kooser 'How Important it Must Be'*

A siren goes by me now;

The day is over-ripe on the vine, and the wind is working hard  
To pull the whole thing to the ground. The dog  
Sleeps beside me — inside, out of it —

And my mind runs back to yesterday, when things stood still, and to the lighted woods.

It matters how we go and where, and how we lift our feet;

Each life seems to count among

The trees.

For acacia, and bracken fern, and ribbon gums were all over Hammock Hill again

In sun like a backburn barely in hand, and they were suffering

Grass parrots to come like children among them,

When I walked there after lunch, trailing my impossible life behind me. I

carried on

A shy conversation with you, Seamus Heaney, so soon  
Gone, and some I love who are living yet,

But not especially well. I worried; I drafted emails; I fashioned elegies and  
ripostes;

I wandered all over my head. Up and down the hill  
All the while, the dog tried, as if it were

Not an ancient trick,

The patience of every rabbit inside the undergrowth until there was no more  
Patience left anywhere to lose. A tree is sunlight stilled

And grown tall. A tree is water

Divined; rain born again and sluiced fast through vast dark fields, slung wide

And far in vatic flumes. A tree is spirit become matter,

Become spirit again. The canopy, a loose

And elevated encampment of song. Imagine your soul, then, as timber; your  
mind meta-

Morphosed to myrtle; your life a forest of thesis and chant. Walking here,

Among elders, makes a garden of me; I am curated,

Tended and conserved; walking

Is a prayer the trees seem disposed to answer sometimes: putting in the  
downtime

One never takes time to take; dancing out in perfect stillness the steps one falls  
out of,

Otherwise. And minding very quietly how one goes.

*Mark Tredinnick*



## Supermarket self-regulation is a joke

### ECONOMICS

*David James*

It is hard not to smile over Woolworths' and Coles' 'voluntary' adoption of a code of conduct. Wasting no time in gaining a public relations advantage, Woolworths chief executive Grant O'Brien joined Wesfarmers managing director Richard Goyder in urging Aldi, Costco and IGA to sign the landmark grocery code of conduct with suppliers. The code was the result of 14 months of negotiations with the Australian Food and Grocery Council. Now that the duopoly has decided to mend its ways, it seems it can occupy the moral high ground and preach to everyone else.

There is little reason for confidence. The practice of self-regulation arose because it was widely agreed that whenever governments interfere in markets it is bad for efficiency and probably counter productive. In the financial markets such a 'hands off' approach was the default position of regulators like Alan Greenspan, the former head of the US Federal Reserve, who assumed that if everyone acts in their own enlightened self interest then everything would be fine. It was not, as the GFC showed.

To see why codes of conduct do not address the problem, it is worth looking a little closer at what O'Brien said: 'All stakeholders should be well minded to keep what's best for customers at the forefront of their minds.' According to this, the ethical imperative is to serve customers' best interests. Everything else comes second.

At best, this is superficial, at worst misleading. There are many players involved in markets, not just customers. These include suppliers, employees of the companies (including O'Brien), shareholders and the general community (to the extent that it is affected by the behaviour of corporations). For the system to be robust and sustainable, which is the point of having a regulator, these different interests must be balanced.

By arguing that the only interest that matters is that of the customers, O'Brien is showing why companies are incapable of overseeing the health of a whole system. Neither will customers be able to do that. Stand in a supermarket queue and you will quickly see how much customers care about the interests of other customers, let alone anyone else in the production chain, or the wider community.

Even if self-regulation is effective (and there are many instances when it has been a sop to cover up business as usual) it is invariably too simplistic. It can be roughly characterised as: 'Customers come first so that the company can be profitable, shareholders are looked after and I meet performance hurdles and do well in my career. Everyone else we can worry about later and let the public affairs department or human resources look after it.'

It is reasonable enough that executives of corporations behave this way. The Corporations Act stipulates that boards must act in the interests of the 'company'. This is usually interpreted to mean acting in the interests of shareholders. For executives, it is largely about achieving growth in revenue, market share and profitability.

Nowhere is there anything about the interests of suppliers, who are being most disadvantaged by allowing such a dominant supermarket duopoly. Worse, it is arguably in the interests of customers to treat suppliers appallingly. By O'Brien's definition, putting the squeeze on suppliers is ethically correct. Especially when neither Coles nor Woolworths, despite their market dominance, can find greater profitability from efficiencies.

Whenever the duopoly is put under the microscope, it is concluded that their market is 'competitive' because they have tight profit margins. It never seems to occur to anyone that another possibility is that they are poorly run.

There cannot be anything in a code of conduct about the overall health of the market, especially its diversity. Unsurprisingly, corporations want to have as few competitors as possible. No code will ever include stipulations like restricting one's own excessive market dominance, which is the only change that would make any difference. An actor from outside the market has to do it, and that invariably means government.

The Western world has been subject to a quarter of a century of propaganda about the virtues of deregulation and the evils of government. The very idea of governments governing is now regarded as inherently suspicious. A barrage of think tanks, mostly funded by corporations or free market lobbyists, have spewed circular arguments demonstrating why no other views can be countenanced. Critics are subjected to insults about 'socialism' (my personal favourite was when critics of 'economic rationalism' were accused of being 'irrational', a neat circularity).

In consumer markets there is at least an argument to be had for self-regulation (in the finance sector it is contradictory nonsense). A balance needs to be struck between business freedom and regulation.

That balance needs to go much further than Adam Smith's so called 'invisible hand', the idiotic proposition that if everyone is allowed to be selfish, there will be a collective altruism (which is of course a misrepresentation of Smith). According to such kindergarten thinking, just as governments governing is inherently counter productive, so any thinking about the interests of others is a self defeating delusion. Sigh.

Finding the right balance is difficult, so governments have often shirked the issue, especially when the big corporations are involved. Instead of undertaking the difficult task of identifying and monitoring the balance of interests in markets and taking measures to ensure the system is robust, they have all too often been

willing to hand it over to the participants. They have accepted that there are only two choices: bad government or no government. Good government is off the table.

Thus we are left with a code and a promise to do the right thing: self-regulation. No doubt Santa Claus will visit us, too, this year.

## **Mandela crosses the burning water**

INTERNATIONAL

*Catherine Marshall*

It's taken a long time for us to let you go, Madiba. For several years, even as your health faltered irreparably and rumours of your increasing fragility could no longer be denied, the world refused to release its hold. We said prayers, sent love and held vigils until we had brought our Madiba — a man who had lived longer than most — back to life. Such was our belief in the immortality of our hero that we were incapable of relinquishing you.

But now, despite our efforts, you are gone. I said my own private goodbye almost two years ago, when I visited Robben Island on a trip back to my homeland. As the ferry skated across Table Bay, a cold wind blew in through one of its hatches. A young man made everyone laugh when he said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, we will vote to have this door open or closed. This is a free and fair election — you will only be allowed to vote once!'

I had left the country a decade earlier, and was touched by the benign, self-deprecating tone so many black South Africans now adopted when referencing the past. The country's social undertone had transformed so radically I felt I could pluck a chunk of it from the atmosphere and take it home with me.

'Race relations', as the stilted interaction between black, white, Indian, coloured and Asian South Africans had been peculiarly labelled during apartheid, were so natural now as to be invisible; the lack of tension was tangible, the normalisation apparent to all of us who had grown up in the dystopia that preceded democracy.

Two decades after those first free elections, it was your warmth and forgiveness, Madiba, that was now being emulated by so many South Africans. That journey across Table Bay, towards the tiny green cell in which you lived for much of your 27-year incarceration, took me not so much to an outpost of apartheid as to the birthplace of democratic South Africa.

Robben Island and the icy, steel-grey ocean that swirls around it are metaphors for pain and loss and eventual triumph: 68 ships lie wrecked around here, mangled by an angry, unforgiving sea; the bones of the imprisoned Xhosa prophet Makhanda, who drowned while trying to escape to the mainland in 1820, have crumbled into the seabed; the graves of those who lived here across the centuries — lepers, slaves, convicts, whalers — lie suffocated beneath the island's maximum security prison, an edifice built over the old graveyard in 1962 in a vain attempt to stem the tide of political change.

A few tombstones escaped obliteration; they protrude from the long grass, ironic symbols of survival in a country once gone mad.

I found myself transported by that sad, windswept place to my teenage years in

the 1980s, when you were being held on Robben Island. You were an enigma to all of us then, a faceless terrorist to be feared and reviled. At school I studied a history which could accommodate only the heroics of the ruling party and those to the right of it; sensing injustice, I joined the Democratic Party — our only real link to South Africa's oppressed — and was banned with my youngest sister from recruiting party members on our state school campus.

I enrolled as a journalism student and was given a list of 200 books — most of them banned — and told to reeducate myself. I interviewed the radical ANC-supporting president of Wits University's Student Representative Council for a journalism assignment and made the black power salute with a friend in a nightclub filled with national servicemen and rightwing students.

At Johnny Clegg and Savuka concerts I swayed as Clegg sang hauntingly, 'Asimbonanga/ Asimbonang' umandela thina/ Laph'ekhona/ Laph'ehleli khona.' ('We have not seen him/We have not seen Mandela/In the place where he is/In the place where he is kept.') All this felt subversive but it was really just an easy way of assuaging a guilty conscience. Most of us would have to wait for your liberation before we could be released ourselves from the straightjackets into which our government had placed us.

On Robben Island our bus passed the limestone quarry where you and your comrades laboured, men I was privileged enough to meet and interview years later — Ahmed Kathrada, Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu. This was the pit where men's lungs and eyes were irreparably damaged; but it was also the place where, in a little cave at the back, you and your fellow inmates formed a parliament of sorts, from which you brought into being a future where blacks would be emancipated and whites released from the shackles of shame.

You are gone now, Madiba, as surely as those lepers and whalers and slaves who lie beneath the prison that once confined you. I recall a verse from 'Asimbonanga' in which Johnny Clegg evokes Robben Island, a place that both constricted you and inflamed your resolve: 'Oh the sea is cold and the sky is grey/ Look across the island into the bay/ We are all islands till comes the day/ We cross the burning water.'

You have crossed the burning water. It is time now for us to graciously let you go.

## **Don't cry for the flying kangaroo**

AUSTRALIA

*Michael Mullins*

Discussion of government assistance to Qantas is inevitably clouded by emotion, despite increasing [commentary](#) on management blunders. No patriotic Australian wants to see the 'flying kangaroo' go out of business, as Australia's other airline icon Ansett did a little more than a decade ago. But if Qantas is to properly serve the Australian people, it has to be on the basis of good business and not emotion.

There is a real possibility that the world's oldest continuously operating airline could fail, in a fast changing aviation marketplace that requires companies to have the ability to attract vast amounts of capital in order to survive. The bad news for Qantas is that the credit rating agency Standard and Poors has [downgraded](#) Qantas to junk status, which means it will lose comparatively easy access to the funds it needs to survive.

This follows the airline's advice to the Australian Stock Exchange on Thursday that it is in big trouble. It cited an underlying \$250-300 million loss before tax in the six months to 31 December. This is forcing the loss of another 1000 jobs, and the share price has plunged in recent days.

There is consequent pressure for a massive government cash injection to help Qantas return to profitability and put the brakes on its successful competitor Virgin by [halting](#) a \$350 million capital injection by its foreign shareholders.

However lessening competition means only one thing for the Australian people, and that is higher fares. This would mean a reversal of one of the great economic miracles of recent times that has proved capitalism can promote social inclusion. That is the explosion of competition in the global aviation marketplace and the low fares revolution this has produced.

As recently as two decades ago, low income citizens of western countries could not afford to fly. In the new age of competition and low fares, many people living close to the poverty line can fly interstate or even overseas to visit family or attend to their business and cultural needs. But if the Australian Government helped Qantas out of trouble by making it less attractive for foreign airline interests to invest in the Australian market, fares would rise significantly and flying would once again become the preserve of the wealthy.

The improvement in the access of ordinary people to the skies ranks alongside advances in health an education that have improved the lives of many. Pope Francis said as much in his recent apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* when he [suggested](#) 'we can only praise the steps being taken to improve people's welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications'. In the section headed 'No to an economy of exclusion', he insisted that 'those excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised — they are no

longer even a part of it’.

According to the pope’s critique, any government assistance to Qantas that thwarts competition will also thwart those on the margins of society who have been enabled to fly by the low fares that are the result of competition. If the flying kangaroo cannot compete, it should be put out of its misery, or at least change its management.

## **Ghost of weddings past, present and future**

AUSTRALIA

*Brian Matthews*

Is there a spirit of place, a kind of psychological imprint that endows a particular location ever after with a discernible atmosphere or mood? There are spots along the Coorong in South Australia where, as twilight deepens, you could swear that wraith-like, dark figures are moving through the dunes softly stirring the empty cockle shells and long since abandoned camp fire charcoal of the middens.

Perhaps the legendary William Buckley lives on in that way on Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula. Buckley, transported for life in April 1803 for receiving stolen goods, escaped in December of that same year and walked round Port Phillip Bay — in contemporary terms, from Sorrento to Point Lonsdale. Welcomed by members of the Wataurong Nation, who may have mistaken him for the reincarnation of their dead chief, he settled down for the next 32 years respected by the Wataurong and soon given up for dead by the authorities.

Buckley learned the language and customs of the tribe and was given a wife in a ceremony on the beach.

There is a version of this story on a plaque near the Point Lonsdale Lighthouse. To those for whom this is part of the daily walk, the view is familiar yet ever changing: dolphins arching through flashes of sun, or the red pilot boat bashing through the swell into Bass Strait, or a cargo ship stacked high with containers, stately in its unruffled glide into the expanses of the bay.

What was unusual in this familiar scene as we neared the Lighthouse along the cliff top a few days ago — a little drama William Buckley may have long ago prefigured in his Wataurong ceremony — was a dazzling white, thoroughly traditional bride with her bow-tied groom, celebrant and a handful of beautifully dressed guests.

They were on the beach near the jetty, cheerfully battling a stiff buffeting southerly. Hats askew or blowing away, the bride's snowy veil flowing horizontally out behind her like a jet stream, and words — possibly formal and seriously binding — lost as soon as uttered, flicked away by the booming wind or drowned in the surging surf.

We headed round to the back beach which, hammered by the gale and with froths of spray curling off the wave crests, was empty. Well, not quite. Down near the water, safely clear of the rhythmic rush and crash of the incoming tide, were a man and a woman. The young man was poised on one knee in front of his companion and looking up into her eyes. She, for her part, was bending slightly forward as she looked down at him. The wind lifted and furrowed her long chestnut hair.



Suddenly the young man stood up, waved and ran towards us.

'Hey,' he called. 'Hey.'

'What's the problem?' I said, rather inanely. After all, he wasn't drowning. He couldn't have just that minute run out of money and decided to cadge a loan. And it didn't look as if he was going to mug us.

'No problem,' he said, and I could see, now he was close up, that he was smiling broadly. 'I just proposed, and she said yes.' As we spoke, his new fiancée was walking jauntily towards us.

'Fair dinkum? You wouldn't be having us on?'

'Of course he's not,' my wife said and, turning to the young man, 'Congratulations, that's wonderful news. We wish you every happiness.' A woman can pick a successfully popped question from 40 paces even in a gale.

As if suddenly noticing that we were complete strangers, the young bloke became embarrassed. 'Just had to tell somebody. We saw a wedding back there on the front beach and it sort of decided me to take the plunge.'

'Like William Buckley,' I said.

He looked blank.

'An escaped convict. Early 19th century. Came down here and lived 30 years with the Aborigines — the Wataurong Nation. Married one of them somewhere along here. This is a marriage beach. You came to the right place.'

They laughed, said goodbye and set off rather awkwardly because walking on sand in a high wind with your arms around each other is tricky. Climbing the steps back to the lighthouse, we met another young couple coming down.

'See those two on the beach,' I said as we drew level. 'They've just this minute got engaged. When you catch up to them, give them a round of applause.'

They looked at me in amazement and laughed. 'We will,' said the young bloke. 'You won't believe this, but we're on our honeymoon. And there's a wedding back there on the beach. Weddings everywhere!'

'It's as if we've all escaped,' his wife said, 'or eloped and come to the same place.'

Was that a knowing sigh I heard back there in the inscrutable dunes — a spirit of this place — or just the dispassionate and immemorial whispering of the coastal spinifex?

## ASIO's economic espionage

INTERNATIONAL

*Justin Glyn*

The recent revelations that ASIO raided the offices of Timor Leste's lawyers and detained its star witness just before its case against Australia (alleging that it bugged Timor's cabinet office during the negotiations in the run-up to the signing of the CMATS deal over division of oil reserves) highlights, once again, the question of the linkage between national and commercial interests.

Attorney-General George Brandis will not say why ASIO raided the offices of Bernard Collaery and, indeed, the ASIO offices executing the warrant allegedly refused even to show it to those present in his offices at the time. Nevertheless, if the raids do relate to the upcoming arbitration, it would be hard to see how they come within the powers of ASIO, the functions of which, by s.17 of the ASIO Act are clearly restricted to security (i.e. [threats](#) to borders or from espionage, sabotage, political violence and the like).

In short, ASIO's governing statute does not permit it to engage in economic espionage. Unfortunately, however, the distinction between government and commercial interests is growing increasingly hard to draw — especially when there are no significant controls on people moving between government and corporate worlds. The Australian foreign minister who [signed](#) the deal with Timor which is currently in question, Alexander Downer, is now a lobbyist for Woodside petroleum — the company exploiting the oil reserves which are the subject of the CMATS.

The Snowden revelations published in the *Guardian* and elsewhere reveal that this is not an exclusively Australian problem: the US and its allies have also allegedly been [spying](#) on foreign competitors in Brazil while the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance is reported to have [spied](#) on G8 and G20 meetings. The Anglophone spies, in short, seem to have gone well beyond their remit of protecting national security — participating in activities which undermine the very ideals of free trade in an open market for which their countries claim to stand.

The problem of commercialisation lies not only with the spies' targets but with the spooks themselves. Traditionally, spy agencies were clearly arms of government with chains of command directly accountable to political leadership. While spies themselves may have had a variety of motivations for acting as they did, national agencies were the places where their information ultimately went and was acted on. While much of the discussions of the Snowden revelations has centred around national security and terrorism, the assumption that a national government is overseeing intelligence collection and can hold it accountable no longer holds.

Not only have politicians in the US and Britain been discovering how little they knew about their agencies' activities, with at least one senior US intelligence

official openly [admitting](#) that he lied to Congress, it is worth noting that Snowden was not, at the time of his revelations to the *Guardian*, a government employee at all but was employed by Booz Allen Hamilton, a private firm incorporated under the law of Delaware, USA.

In this capacity, he had access to a trove of secret documents from around the world including those of Australia's Defence Signals Directorate, Britain's Government Communications Headquarters, the United States' National Security Agency, New Zealand's Government Communications and Security Bureau and Canada's Communication Security Establishment. One is almost nostalgic for the days of the Cold War when at least you knew who was supposed to have access to secret information and who was trying to wrest it from them.

All of this conflation of the interests of business, their unelected shareholders and governments leads to worrying possibilities. The last word on these should probably go to Mussolini who famously said, 'Fascism is when you cannot slide a cigarette paper between corporations and government.'

## **A frank chat about mental illness**

AUSTRALIA

*Georgina Thompson*

It's a warm evening and I'm in an inner city beer garden with friends. There is talking and laughter. Someone offers to go to the bar, starts taking orders from the group. One asks for rum and coke.

'Ugh,' shudders an old friend sitting next to me. 'I hate rum.'

The conversation bubbles up around us, but I follow the undercurrent of his mood.

'Why?' I ask.

'My mum drank rum. She was an alcoholic.'

Laughter rattles through the softening air; someone's cracked a joke at the other end of the table. Suddenly, I feel very light.

I put a hand on his shoulder.

'Really?' I ask, smiling. 'So was mine.'

He looks at me. A split second of relieved recognition passes between us, each one thinking, *Maybe I'm not a solitary, incomprehensible person. Maybe someone gets this.*

When my turn comes, I order a gin and tonic. Everyone knows I don't drink beer. I tell them it's because I don't like it, not because it's what my father used to drink before, during, and after he beat my mother.

How do you tell people that in the course of normal conversation? Despite my friend's brave example, I still haven't found a way. So I lie.

What I can tell you, though, and with certainty, is that mental illness begets mental illness. One glance at the [reportage](#) on the Royal Commission into child sex abuse proves that. There are a number of events and campaigns in Australia that aim to raise awareness of mental illness, probably the most notable of which was celebrated last month during 'Movember', a campaign that is all about 'having fun, and doing it for a serious cause'.

Raising public awareness is essential, but if we are to bring mental health out of the closet in a meaningful way, we'll have to start talking more honestly. That means dropping the vernacular of the web's reprehensible [pop-psychology](#) pieces and positive thinking propaganda, going beyond fun/serious causes, and using our own hard-won, unedited and ultimately ugly words to tell the truth.

If [three million](#) Australians live just with depression or anxiety, all of us must be affected by mental illness at some time, in some way. Still the stigma around

issues as common as addiction and post-natal depression and domestic violence curbs our willingness to talk honestly either as sufferers, or people who are close to them.

We won't discuss loved ones' mental health because to do so feels like a betrayal. But we suffer, too. The ill person has us to lean on, but unless we talk, we suffer alone.

We won't talk about our own mental health because, like the great and, oh, occasionally suicidal [Stephen Fry](#) , we're too busy asking, 'What the fuck right do I have to be lonely, unhappy, or forlorn?'

The answer to that particular question is simple.

Ill health is not a right. Suffering is not indulgence. If you're telling yourself that, shut the hell up.

Then, start talking the truth — and asking for it.

## Sweet and sour in Pope's exhortation

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*

Evangelism and evangelisation are often turn-off words in church conversation. All churches commend the importance of sharing faith with others. But people often identify evangelism with proselytism or spin. And in the Catholic Church evangelisation can be associated with a high rhetoric designed to protect current forms of institutional relationships and practice.

That is a pity because evangelisation focuses on what lies outside, something churches need to do if they are to avoid becoming weary and staid. In his first extended document [\*Evangelii Gaudium\*](#) Pope Francis offers a welcome fresh take on sharing the Gospel as good news. The document offers no revision of Catholic doctrine and moral teaching; its style and major themes have become familiar in recent months. But its conversational style embodies the kind of change that needs to take place if the Church is effectively to commend the Gospel to others.

The changes commended by the Pope have mainly to do with the Catholic imagination. They involve seeing the heart of the church to lie in the relationships with those outside it. But if those relationships are to be fruitful the governance and priorities of the Church must also change.

For Francis the life of Christians asks them to go out of their comfort zone to communicate God's compassion to those who are on the edges of society and church. To do this they must have experienced God's compassion in their own lives and to have found in it a source of such deep joy that they want to share it with others.

Sharing faith must be characterised by compassion and respect. Its task is not to win a war against the secular world and its philosophies but to win people. So it must include people in conversation and focus on what matters most deeply — the love and compassion of God — and not on the details of faith and moral teaching.

In the Pope's view the highest priority of Church governance is not to preserve faith but to communicate it. So it should be inspired less by the desire to control than by boldness.

The Pope embodies this boldness in his rhetoric. Changes in the Church that were once not open for general discussion are now named bluntly as agenda items. Among them are the decentralisation of Church governance and so inevitable changes in the way the Pope is seen in the universal church.

Francis writes most passionately when he speaks of going out to the poor. They are the centre, although not the sum, of the Church's address. He cuts through tiresome debates about who the poor are: they are the people living in the favelas of Argentina and other cities, and others who share their indigence and

precariousness.

Because his interest is in people's concrete lives and relationships, he asks why people are poor. He focuses on the evils of an economic order that holds people in poverty.

The interest of *Evangelii Gaudium* lies less in a single argument than in the variety and sharpness of its perceptions. It is less like a Penny Bunger than a string of Tom Thumbs. So a few personal reflections.

First, Francis is not interested in radical institutional or doctrinal change but wants to help a dysfunctional Church work better at compassionately communicating God's love. He will remain within the framework of Church teaching on faith and morality he has inherited, including on the reservation of priestly ministry to men and respect for life before birth. But he wants less self-preoccupation in governance and in imagination.

Second, some notable firsts and omissions. To my knowledge this is the first church document that refers to 'sourpusses'. It must be the first lengthy papal document for some time, too, that refers to the Magisterium only twice in passing. Nor does Pope Francis refer explicitly to clerical sexual abuse, one of the greatest current obstacles in Western societies at least to sharing or hearing Catholic proclamation of the Gospel as good news.

Third, the section on the challenges posed by the modern world is a broad brush and earthy presentation of systems and ideologies discussed regularly in church documents — individualism, neoliberalism, consumerism, secularism and so on. I enjoyed especially his strong criticism of the deification of the market. But I wonder whether the easy naming of cultural trends will help the Church to go out to people as the Pope commends. It has led Catholics in the past to judge people who are different as embodiments of an ideology rather than simply as people with the same mixture of high and low desires, bright and dumb ideas, as ourselves.

But finally I was delighted by the way in which *Evangelii Gaudium* expressed so simply and directly a joy in faith, an insistence that the poor must be at the centre of the Church's imagination and governance, and an impatience at the various ways in which Catholics can engage faith and make it morose.

## Children of the revolution

### REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***After May (MA)*. Director: Olivier Assayas. Starring: Clément Millaud, Lola Craton, Felix Armand, Carole Combes, India Menuez. 122 minutes**

When released in the US the film was titled, rather innocuously, *Something in the Air*. Indeed its characters inhabit a world where, for better or worse, the very oxygen that they draw seems infected by the revolutionary fervour of the previous generation. As high school students in 1968 they are too young to have begun the cultural revolution. But they are trying to fan its flames and bring its ideals to bear. They clash violently with overzealous police during a protest, disseminate underground newspapers, and graffiti school property with posters and slogans.

This latter action brings them into violent altercation with security staff, the consequences of which prompt a core group to depart for Italy for the summer, to regroup, and to broaden their exposure to revolutionary ideas and counter-cultural lifestyles. As the characters navigate the whirlwind of divergent ideas and philosophies into which they have been swept, they buffet too against their own desires for personal achievement and fulfillment. In fact, strip *After May* to the bones and you just might find a fairly straightforward coming-of-age story.

The central character Gilles (Millaud) is an aspiring artist who is caught up in the revolutionary fray. To create, and to revolt, are not mutually exclusive desires, but career and lifestyle ambitions can take the fire out of fervour. This tension in Gilles is intensified by his love for the alluring but flaky artist Laure (Combes) and fiery activist Christine (Craton), who are both beset by their own doubts and insecurities. Their friend, Alain (Armand), is pursuing his own art as a kind of metaphysical imperative; he is first inspired, and later challenged, in this quest by free-spirited but increasingly weary American dancer Leslie (Menuez).

The characters' idealism is at times tested against the cynicism or jaded moral certitude of older revolutionaries. Gilles clashes with a filmmaker who is using bourgeois language to carry revolutionary ideals to the masses, which Gilles claims to be inherently contradictory, but which Christine sees in a more pragmatic light. Gilles is also chastised by one older revolutionary for entertaining legitimate doubts about the means employed by Mao Zedong as part of China's Cultural Revolution. There clearly is a gulf here between healthy skepticism and wilful blindness.

Assayas' film is exquisitely detailed, not just in its attention to recreating the physical worlds of 1968 France and Italy, but in the content of its dialogue, which as a whole becomes a kind of multifaceted interrogation of various ideas. It is frank and honest, and neither cogent nor arrogant enough to offer answers. It is



too cold and hazy to be considered a pure coming-of-age story, but it is highly accomplished, and its haziness is given aural substance by a soundtrack of 1960s psychedelia that reveals the film, primarily, as a piece of heady nostalgia.

## Thailand tensions must rouse traumatised Coalition

INTERNATIONAL

*Tony Kevin*

We are witnessing a serious opposition-led threat to democratic process and respect for election results in Thailand, one of Australia's oldest and most important ASEAN trading and political partners.

Yesterday, pro-government protesters died in street clashes in Bangkok. A former deputy prime minister Suthep Thaugsuban, of the main opposition Democratic Party, who is orchestrating the anti-government protest, [told](#) supporters it was necessary for them to break the law in order to try to oust the elected prime minister (who commands a comfortable majority of seats in the elected parliament) Yingluck Shinawatra, younger sister of the controversial exiled Thaksin Shinawatra.

Suthep made a crude public [ultimatum](#) when he met Yingluck today: he said this would be his last meeting with her and he demanded she resign within 48 hours.

The highly organised and well equipped Yellow Shirts protesters, several thousands in number, have concentrated on occupying government offices and police stations, mainly in Bangkok. Their aim is to disrupt normal government operations. They are claimed to have the sympathy of the urban middle class which objects to Yingluck's populism and her concern for the needs of people in poorer regions of Thailand. They want the money to stay in Bangkok.

This seems to be a minority middle-class revolt against a populist government. Many younger people in Bangkok would quietly favour the elected Yingluck. But their affluent parents in Bangkok seem not to — or at least, are sitting on the fence as thousands of Yellow Shirt protesters rampage through the streets in gas masks.

So far, the Red Shirt supporters of the government have mainly kept off the streets under advice from leaders not to give way to provocations. But how long can this go on?

The Democratic Party strategy is clear, and it has worked in the past: to create so much law and order breakdown as would panic the military and Crown advisers into declaring martial law and suspending democracy for some years. Thailand has had several such periods of enforced military rule precipitated in such ways by minority rightwing demonstrations. It is all sadly familiar.

The King's [birthday](#) is on this coming Thursday and it was probably planned that escalating demonstrations this week would increase pressure on the military and Crown advisers to declare martial law before Thursday's celebrations. It is all very clear what is happening.

There has been a strange silence from Thailand's regional friends. It is the ASEAN convention not to comment on internal affairs but that Convention has been broken in the past. One would think that democratic Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore had views on the street bullying taking place in Thailand now. If so, they have not made their views known to Thailand formally or informally (to judge by media reports).

Nor has Australia. Where was the Dorothy Dix question to Julie Bishop in Parliament? Surely DFAT could have come up with a well-phrased formulation of support for democratic values and due process in Thailand?

Certainly Gareth Evans in his years as Foreign Minister would not have been slow to comment on the present escalating threat to democracy in our friendly neighbour Thailand.

Possibly the Abbott Government is so traumatised as a result of its current tensions with Indonesia and China that it won't dare to open its mouth on Thailand. But this is a clear case where in my view, Australia should comment as a friend of Thailand and of its democratically elected government.

Meanwhile, travel agents continue to advertise holidays in Phuket as if nothing was happening ...

## Do sex offenders deserve dignity?

### RELIGION

*Peter Kirkwood*

In Australia, sexual abuse by clergy is the Church issue of the moment. The ongoing national Royal Commission, which is due to begin public hearings into the Catholic Church next week, and separate recent enquiries in Victoria and NSW, ensure the crisis has been, and will continue to be in the headlines.

The results of a survey of Mass-going Catholics released at the end of October by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference Pastoral Research Office [shows](#) anger and disillusionment among grassroots believers. The survey of about 2800 Catholics in over 200 parishes found 54 per cent agreed that 'the response of church authorities to these incidences (of sexual abuse) has been inadequate and shows a complete failure of responsibility'.

But how to diagnose accurately the complex issues underlying sexual abuse in the Church? How to deal fairly, justly and adequately both with victims/survivors and with offenders? Why such a dismal failure of leadership by Church hierarchy and how should it be practicing its responsibility? What is the way forward?

The man featured in this video is a prophetic voice in this fraught territory. What he says is informed and grounded through decades of experience. He speaks with clarity, insight and authority, and his words are deeply challenging.

Gerard Webster has spent all his working life as a psychologist dealing with victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse. He spent the first ten years in the Departments of Community Services and Juvenile Justice in the areas of child protection and juvenile offending.

In this context he received specialist training and supervision working with these clients and much of his work was with sexual abusers, victims and their families. This included juvenile offenders, and adults and children with intellectual disabilities who had been abused or were abusers.

After this, 20 years ago he set up a [private practice](#) and this coincided with victims of abuse in the Church first raising their voices. Since then many of his clients have been men abused in a church setting, and male clerics and religious who have committed crimes of abuse.

In the interview he explains how he balances the needs of victims and offenders by using a human rights approach to all his clients. This recognises the inherent dignity and worth of all. It leads to his somewhat controversial position of engaging with perpetrators and speaking out against demonising them. He argues this leads to a safer and more dignified environment for everyone.

He also has strong views on the causes of abuse in the Church, and believes there are structural problems that actually encourage abuse. As he states in the

interview, 'What is it about the structure [and] culture of the Church that has allowed this to happen, and, in fact, in some ways encourages it? Such as, the hierarchical system is one of domination and submission, and sexual abuse is about domination and submission.'

Of course this raises issues of major reform of Church governance that overturns centuries of tradition. With Pope Francis's call for decentralisation of authority in his recently released apostolic exhortation, [\*Evangelii Gaudium\*](#), perhaps such reforms might actually happen.

A few weeks ago Webster delivered an inspiring address to members of Catalyst for Renewal and the Aquinas Academy in Sydney entitled '[A Meditation on Human Rights: Responding to Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church](#)'. It outlines his position in more detail, and gives the theological and biblical underpinnings to his approach.

## **They call him backflipper, but Gonski's still sliding**

AUSTRALIA

*Ray Cassin*

According to conventional political wisdom, a new government should break a promise it doesn't intend to keep early in its term of office because by the time the next election arrives most voters will have forgotten about it. This assumption is usually paired with another: that voters shrug off politicians' deceitful conduct anyway, because they don't expect any better from them.

Is that what was happening last week, when Education Minister Christopher Pyne announced that the Abbott Government was reneging on its campaign 'unity ticket' support for Labor's Better Schools plan, aka the Gonski reforms to school funding? And was this week's reversal of last week's reversal prompted by a panicked reassessment of the conventional wisdom?

Did the chorus of commentators chanting that abandoning the campaign pledge was the Coalition's 'carbon tax moment' spur Prime Minister Tony Abbott and his Education Minister into reinstating the pledge, lest they have to endure three years of the 'liar, liar' accusations that buffeted Julia Gillard after she implemented a carbon price she had not promised not to introduce?

An implied 'yes' to this last question has become the established narrative on the nation's front pages: Gonski is back, but the series of backflips has undermined the Government's credibility and possibly Pyne's prospects, too. Expect him to be demoted in the first cabinet reshuffle, some pundits are already venturing to say.

Well, maybe. The decision to reinstate a plan that Pyne had publicly denounced as a shambles only a week earlier certainly suggests that he, Abbott or both of them realised that they had badly miscalculated the likely public reaction to ditching the reforms. And the series of policy reversals has fuelled perceptions of a wider ineptitude in this Government, whose ministers have been slow to grasp that they cannot speak and act with the freedom available to Opposition frontbenchers. When a minister utters what sounds like policy, there are consequences.

The established narrative ignores, however, that the reversals — or 'backflips', to use the term favoured by headline writers — weren't really reversals at all. An acrobat who performs a backflip ends up standing where she did in the first place. But the Abbott Government is not back where it started on education funding.

It has had four quite distinct positions: initial rejection of Gonski and adherence to the Howard Government's funding model; then the so-called 'unity ticket' declared during the campaign; last week's junking of the unity ticket; and now, apparent restoration of the Gonski funding, which is not where the Coalition wanted to be when Pyne, as Opposition education spokesman, was denouncing

## Gonski as 'Conski'.

To this must be added further qualifications. First, what has been 'restored' resembles Gonski only in that it involves handing a lot of money to the states. The Government has mysteriously discovered \$1.2 billion that apparently wasn't available last week, and with this has enticed Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, all of which had refused to sign up to Labor's plan, into the scheme.

Pyne has spun this as saving Gonski and achieving what Labor could not, but it is an achievement derived from surrendering oversight of how the money will be spent. Labor's plan provided increased funding in return for the states making their own contributions, specified in bilateral agreements. There is no longer such a requirement. The states can spend as they wish. In any case the money is offered over four years, not six as in Labor's scheme. That was also the case under the campaign 'unity ticket', of course, which was thus never a real unity ticket at all.

It should always have been obvious that the Coalition was not happy about Gonski, even in the diluted form of the review's original recommendations that Labor had packaged as the Better Schools plan. The 'unity ticket' promise was a ploy to shut education funding down as an election issue and it worked, because media coverage of the promise either ignored or glossed over the continuing differences between the Coalition's policy and Labor's.

Pyne's mistake was not to see that the kind of naivete — among journalists as well as the wider electorate — that allows election ploys to succeed can quickly turn to outrage. No one likes being conned, even if — perhaps especially if — they bear a measure of responsibility for their own state of deception.

So has the latest, big-spending non-backflip shut the issue down, avoiding a 'carbon tax moment' for the government? Gillard was never allowed to forget her broken pledge, but there are enough examples of politicians surviving and even prospering after blatantly breaking promises to suggest that the conventional wisdom still has something going for it. The real question is, what kind of breach of trust might voters forgive, or at least overlook?

The chief inequity in school funding that Gonski — the original review, that is — sought to redress was the decreasing proportion of public funds being spent on the public system. For a decade now, most of the increase in government education funding has gone to private schools.

Pyne might surmise that since increasing numbers of parents are sending their children to private schools they don't have a problem with the slicing of the pie, and that it will be safe to continue dismantling what remains of Gonski. And the fact that most media reporting of this week's announcement has portrayed it as a restoration of Gonski, despite the lack of oversight of how money will be spent, suggests that for the present he is getting away with it — however silly the

'backflips' make him look.

If public schools continue to be the losers in the battle for funds, however, the reversals of the past fortnight will be remembered as the start of a slow burn for the Abbott Government.



## **G-G Bryce breaks bold not bland**

AUSTRALIA

*John Warhurst*

The Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, addressed many issues in her [Boyer Lectures](#). The first three attracted only moderate attention but she burst onto the front pages when she signed off her final lecture by revealing her long term hope that Australia might become a nation where 'people are free to love and marry whom they choose. And where perhaps ... one day, one young girl or boy may even grow up to be our nation's first head of state.'

Her aspirations were reported as putting her at odds with her Prime Minister in supporting both gay marriage and a republic, though Tony Abbott publicly agreed that it was appropriate that Bryce should express her personal views in a graceful style as she came to the end of her term.

The controversy shows how careful a governor-general is expected to be. It should also open a conversation not only about how future governor-generals should act but also, if Bryce's aspiration comes true, about how a future Australian president should act.

The Boyer series is an important part of our cultural life. Recent lecturers have included Marcia Langton, Geraldine Brooks, Glyn Davis, Peter Cosgrove, Rupert Murdoch and Noel Pearson. The next governor-general may well come from among this group.

The lectures were always a potentially risky venture, one that no previous governor-general has attempted while in office. She could have accepted on condition that she spoke next year.

Governors-general give many talks and speeches but none of this standing and potential scope. Their impartial, non-partisan role normally encourages them to err on the side of being carefully bland rather than bold where major public issues are concerned. Bryce was brave and her decision may well come to be seen as a further step in the development of the role of governor-general.

Her topic was 'Back to the grassroots'. Her emphasis, drawing on her life as an academic, lawyer, feminist and community and human rights advocate as well as Governor-General, has been on building communities, courage in everyday life, the powerful role of women in Australia and across the world and the future of Australian citizenship.

She was not afraid to speak about themes with such clear policy implications that they carry with them danger signs. In the second of her lectures, for instance, she spoke about the international disgrace, shared in full measure by Australia, of violence against women.

She challenged Australians: 'Wherever I go around the country the rape crisis

centres and women's safe houses are full, resources are over-stretched, and countless more women are awaiting refuge from horrific circumstances.' Her voice was not just an expression of solidarity with the women who run such refuges, but also a call to the whole community to do more to remove this stain from Australian life.

Bryce's brief interventions on same sex marriage and the republic, though careful and aspirational, may submerge her earlier thoughts. She may come to regret not delaying them until after she leaves office. But more attention has been focused on the monarchy-republic issue when really the more instructive issue for the office of governor-general is the same sex marriage question.

Not only does the republic raise the distraction of whether a republican should become governor-general in the first place but also realistically it is not a first order issue for the next three years. Her vision has heartened republicans but is not an immediate threat to the status quo.

Same sex marriage, on the other hand, has reached several state parliaments and the High Court and the new Federal Government must soon decide whether or not to allow its MPs a conscience vote. It is likely to return to the Parliament in this term.

Should we know the views of our governor-general or future president on such a topic? I believe we should, when they are couched in such considered and graceful terms, but I understand that others like their governors-general to be blander. Since Sir William Deane we have alternated between different visions of the role.

This is a conversation both the Parliament and the community ought to have before the Abbott Government announces Bryce's successor. We should be much clearer about how we now expect the position to evolve.

## **Colonial garden party**

CREATIVE

*Various*

### **Pottage**

A sprig of wattle overhead,  
a hope of sleep `fore morning,  
ornery cattle sleep as stone,  
hours till the dawning.

The sound of battle now long past,  
an echo of forlorning  
a rattle; death's gurgled hail:  
27 families mourning,  
the ribald tattle of demise  
and truthsearch seems mere fawning.

The diggers' catchcry, liberty,  
saw fascism a'yawning,  
enfranchisement followed suit,  
with racism adorning  
its streamlined passions for the cause —  
White Australia Policy a'borning.

For a mess of pottage, we're  
at justice a'pawning.  
Eureka, we've found schadenfreude ...  
aliens, here's your warning.

*Barry Gittins*

### **Colonial garden party: two snapshots**

The vicar holds a steady pose,  
the children are distracted:  
the governess beside the boys  
pursues their gaze, diverted.

The doctor's wife looks out of frame;  
the housemaid's glance goes after.  
The children's small pet wallaroo  
jumps, shadow on emulsion.  
Cottage flowers spell out Hampshire  
planted halfway round the earth.  
Years will make the distance greater,  
bear nostalgia's fruit much later:  
an older son in time will preach,  
another write from Spion Kop.  
And she who made the photograph  
and kept it for memento ... ?

In another instant, time  
has rearranged the tableau —  
muslin frocks and sailor's bows,  
and father's careful creases.  
Even while the party scatters —  
children to pursue the `roo,  
parlour maid to bring out tea —  
father, mind on other matters,  
hears the vicar quizzically:  
— 'Faith, nowadays is voluntary.'  
— 'Better then, to imitate it  
than to countenance its lack?  
What faith justifies our actions  
and our presence in this spot?  
Talk of duty will not answer,  
nor the Empire, nor round shot.'  
See the corner, where the blur is,  
where the kangaroo took flight:

all eyes in the scene are on it,  
though the creature's out of sight.

*Michael Sharkey*

**North-west of here**

*(tune, 'Auld Lang Syne')*

If Steve and Ethel were clean forgotten,  
Tumbled clean out of my gaze,  
We'd find a way to bring them back  
With our old country days.  
For those old farming days, my dear,  
For those old grazing days,  
We'll drink another latte here  
For those old country days.  
Remember the local woolshed dance  
With New Orleans-type jazz  
Played by the local Dairy Six  
On that property Mum still has?  
And you must recall that goldrush pub  
With Gallipoli photos and all  
Where we'd linger over a pot too many  
Treading for a fall.  
But another autumn has tripped in now  
Like a lovely suntanned girl  
And, along the college hedges, blue  
Plumbago petals unfurl.  
For those old grazing days, my dear,  
These grandparental days  
We'll drink another latte here  
For those old country days.  
*Chris Wallace-Crabbe*

## Trott a hero for quitting the Ashes

AUSTRALIA

*Michael Mullins*

Beyond Blue chairman Jeff Kennett [criticised](#) some media coverage of England batsman Jonathan Trott's decision to withdraw from the Ashes due to stress that is related to his mental illness. 'If Jonathan Trott had broken his arm no one would have criticised him ... But because it's an illness that you can't see, people like to take cheap shots.'

But the media slurs against Trott were isolated and Kennett's message was also a positive one. 'We should be celebrating the fact that in this day and age, particularly a male, a high profile male, finds that he can declare that he has a stress-related illness and then seek help for it.'

In contrast to Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, the London *Daily Mail* had a break out box in its [coverage](#) paying tribute to sports stars 'who fought mental illness'. These include former England batsman Marcus Trescothick, who commented on the Trott departure.

'I think people who hold those views [that he's soft] have generally not experienced it in any form. If you experience depression, then you totally understand and sympathise. It's debilitating, non-stop. It takes into account nothing at all — what house you live in, what car you drive, how much you earn, what job you do.'

Trescothick's fight with depression ended his international career in 2008. He'd had to return home repeatedly from international cricket events including the 2006 Ashes tour. At the time euphemisms were used to sanitise the reality, such as a statement that he was 'suffering from a sensitive medical condition'. But he later [documented](#) his mental illness in his autobiography *Coming Back to Me*, which won a major sports book prize in 2008.

During the past week in Australia, National Mental Health Commission commissioner Alan Fels overlooked the slurs against Trott and [saw](#) the consensus of reaction to his return home to England as positive: 'At last it's just seen as a normal health problem.'

Fels was doing media interviews to promote the launch of the Commission's second annual [Report Card](#) on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. He sees the slowly changing attitude to mental illness as key to increasing the wellbeing of those who suffer as well as easing the burden of the illness on the community. To him it is nation building. 'We talk about nation building in terms of the physical infrastructure. What about the human infrastructure when so many people have a mental health problem.'

Although he cites improvements such as better data and the NDIS, in general

he [believes](#) 'mental health remains a weak point in our society, our health system and our economy'. Only 25 per cent of young people and 15 per cent of young males with mental health problems are being treated. Forty-four Australians, on average, take their own lives each week, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are two times more likely to die by suicide.

Perhaps our mental health is no better than that of populations in developing countries that are regarded as economic basket cases. Clearly Australia is a developing country in terms of mental health. The progress of our development will, says Fels, depend upon our ability to 'find a better way to support good mental health and recovery based on early intervention and investment in social supports and services across people's lives'.

This, in tandem with recognising sports people such as Trott as heroes for having the courage to quit and return home when they know that's what their illness demands of them.

## Pyne's Gonski shambles

### EDUCATION

*Dean Ashenden*

Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne is correct in saying that the Gonski scheme is a mess, but culpably wrong to use that fact to ditch the whole idea. The Gonski mess shows few of the actors concerned in a good light, and some, including Pyne himself, in a very poor one. It also reveals fundamental problems in the governance as well as the funding of Australian schooling.

Heading the list of those responsible for the mess is the person who also deserves most credit for coming up with the Gonski review in the first place, and for driving it to the brink of success: former education minister and prime minister Julia Gillard.

Gillard must surely regret her loss of faith midway through the process. Even though the review was her creation, and even though it came up with well-argued and widely-supported proposals, Gillard gave the report a lukewarm, even chilly reception. We'll have to see if the money is there, she said, before launching Gonski on the treacherous waters of 'further consultation', the extensive consultations already undertaken by the review notwithstanding.

Another six months on, Gillard changed tack again, declaring a national education 'crusade' with Gonski as its centrepiece, but by then it was too late. Gillard's mid-stream hesitation was fatal. The 'consultations' effectively eviscerated Gonski.

The first of several key components to go was a 'national school funding body'. As Gonski panel member Ken Boston pointed out recently, that concession to the states and non-government sectors meant that no agency or government was in a position to do the complicated arithmetic required by Gonski's 'needs-based sector-blind' funding model. Hence the technical mess that gives Pyne a spurious *causus belli*.

Pyne's contribution to this debacle was to act as spoiler from the day the Gonski report was released. In that role he has so far adopted no less than four positions: any Labor legislation of Gonski would be repealed by a Coalition government in favour of the existing funding system; an Abbott government would go with Gonski only if all states and territories signed up; the Coalition was on a 'unity ticket' with Labor and would implement Gonski even though some states and territories had not signed up; and now, after only ten weeks in government, Gonski is ditched.

This deviousness owes much to the then-Opposition's strategy of denying legitimacy to the Gillard Government. It arises also from a bedrock belief in subsidising 'choice' rather than reducing the need for it. And there's the money problem. Although the position is not yet clear, it seems likely that the Abbott



Government is proposing to spend less than both it and Labor promised before the election.

Pyne's fourth and current position on Gonski may not be his last. He has bought a serious fight with powerful adversaries. The New South Wales Government, a strong supporter of Gonski from the outset, is livid. Other states, both those who signed up for Gonski and those that didn't (WA, Queensland and NT) will want the money even if they don't want Gonski's needs-based way of distributing it. The Catholic system has been circumspect so far, but it will no doubt mobilise if need be. Tony Abbott's assurances of yesterday, following Pyne's provocations of the day before, suggest that the Prime Minister is more aware of the danger than is his minister

Behind the political and administrative debacle lie fundamental problems of the structure and governance. First is Australia's unique sector system, which sees three different sectors in receipt of government funding in three different mixes, and two of them charging fees while the third does not. It is an inherently divisive and unstable arrangement, and the source of political grief extending back well into the 19th century.

Second, these complications are compounded by the involvement of both federal and state/territory governments in all three sectors. The system is inherently wasteful and ineffectual as well as unstable and divisive.

Third, the drawn-out saga of Gonski has made clear that the machinery of federal-state cooperation through COAG set up by Labor to handle the first and second problems has failed. A different division of funding labour between governments now seems inevitable. One of several options would be to give the states the money for government schools while Canberra takes the non-government sectors.

Last, arguments used to justify school funding since the 1950s are in serious, perhaps terminal trouble. Treasury warnings last year that government spending was rising faster than government income are now echoed across the ideological spectrum. Whatever the upshot of the current political tussle we are headed for hard budgetary times. How will schooling justify its demand for more?

For more than 50 years the claim has been that more funding would allow smaller classes and a more professional teaching profession, and that would in turn bring better and more equal schooling. It has not worked out that way. Per student per year real-terms funding has multiplied at least two and a half times since the mid 1960s. The salaries and status of teachers are no better than they were half a century ago.

While much has improved in schooling there is no evidence to suggest better outcomes or more equality in key areas of learning, and certainly none commensurate with either funding increases or class size reductions.

Gonski encouraged attention to where and how the money is spent, but also maintained a long tradition by insisting that money would be better used only if there was more of it. The question now on the agenda for all concerned, including Gonski's legion of supporters, is whether more can in fact be done with the same, or less.