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Contents

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The enemy in my kitchen

CREATIVE

Brian Matthews

 Michael arrives on the dot of seven. He prides himself on punctuality, among other things, though he will patiently explain if necessary that he's not obsessive about it - he just sees it as common courtesy.

He's come to prune some thick foliage overshadowing our back lawn, limbs that are higher up than I am prepared to venture these days, and to tidy up with his whipper-snipper and pull out weeds and other intruders among the vegetables and shrubs.

As usual, I feel self-conscious about this. As a sedentary worker professionally, I have always prided myself on my capacity to do some heavy labouring in my spare time - from rural fencing, ploughing, building sheds and shearing pens in the past to, these days, more genteel gardening, digging and cultivation. But a serious back injury put a stop to most of that and now, like the Ancient Mariner buttonholing the Wedding Guest to explain himself, I feel obliged to tell people like Michael that I would normally be doing these jobs myself if it weren't for … Ah vanity, vanity, all is vanity.

Michael doesn't mind though. He is no youth, mid to late forties, but hard as nails and seemingly neither surprised nor deterred by even the most daunting tasks. Fortunately, however, to be callous about it, he has also had back trouble and so is understanding rather than judgemental or, worse, scornful.

As we make the mandatory tour of the tasks ahead, he looks up at the sky, where an early morning blush is giving way to scudding wispy clouds, and sniffs the air.

'Smells good,' he says. 'Looks like spring might be making a move at last.'

'I reckon so.' I wave an arm at the fig tree with its famously gender-concealing leaves in full, bright green panoply.

'Funny how we dwell on spring,' Michael says, 'in a way we don't with other seasons. It's about renewal, I suppose, things getting started again - more so in the northern hemisphere, of course. You'll be wanting to get rid of this.' He stabs a battered Blundstone at a spreading outbreak of onion weed and bridal creeper.

'I read just the other day,' he says, 'that a lot of people in London after World War II wondered if spring would ever come again. Years of bombs and destruction and some really freezing winters made them think that the seasons had been thrown out of kilter. Want me to clean up round here too?'

This is awkward. He has stopped at our wood-fired pizza oven - a very large, heavy, cast iron structure so tightly wrapped in a special black, zipped-up rainproof cover from top to bottom, with only the flue protruding that it is unrecognisable. Michael's talking about the grass sprouting round its base, but I have another worry. Because it is wrongly positioned in the garden and too close to the fence, we haven't used it in two years. I'd been thinking of asking him for help to move it to a spot where we could safely fire it up. Two blokes with bung backs wouldn't be much use, but I thought he might be able to mobilise younger, stronger talent from his impressive network of contacts, helpers and 'old mates'. Somehow, I feel reluctant to ask him, and I'm relieved to be able to put it off under the guise of not wanting to interrupt.

'Of course,' he says, with a touch of irony, 'we're actually at war now, aren't we? according to Mr Abbott, anyway, and the only woman in cabinet is Minister of War, for now. I reckon it's bloody amazing that two women called Bishop are waging war on Muslims - one of 'em's trying to lock them out and the other's organising to bomb them. Strange world. Anyway, I'll get the gear from the ute and start work.'

But he can see I'm hesitating.

'What's the problem?'

I point at the pizza oven. 'Would there be any chance of your rounding up a few blokes, especially young strong ones, and supervising its removal just a few metres away across the lawn. It's heavy and awkward, but …'

He looks at it, stroking his stubbled chin and squinting a bit as if to size it up.

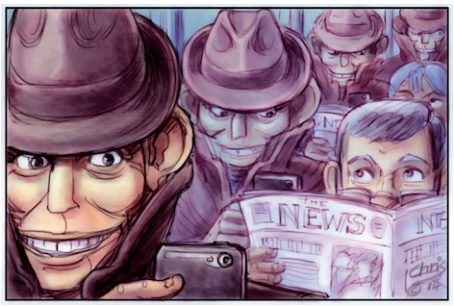
'Well, mate,' he says at last, 'it's dressed in black and it's totally masked and unidentifiable. It wouldn't be allowed into Parliament would it? Strictly speaking, I should report you to the Speaker, Bronwyn Bishop, and Senator Cory Bernardi. And probably to The Hon. Scott Morrison as well, for breaching on-lawn operational protocols. In the meantime, though, I'll get on to a couple of heavyweight blokes who owe me a favour and we'll shift the bugger for you - strictly on the quiet.'

Brian Matthews is honorary professor of English at Flinders University and an award winning columnist and biographer.

Australia's new secret police

ECONOMICS

Brian Toohey



When Greg James QC recently launched Frank Walker's book Maralinga on British nuclear tests in Australia, the former NSW Supreme Court judge said the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation was involved in an associated program to collect the bones of dead children without the parents' permission.

Jones later explained that he obtained this previously unpublished information, although not precise details, while representing military veterans exposed to radiation from the tests in 50s and 60s. However, the book provides a powerful reminder of the harm that can be done by using national security to conceal indefensible behaviour.

Walker sets out how 22,000 bones, mostly of babies and young children, were removed from corpses as part of a secret program to examine the effects of the radiation, which the tests spread across large parts of Australia. The program, that began in 1957 and lasted 21 years, was kept secret until 2001.

Walker says the grieving parents, in the overwhelming majority of cases, were not asked if the bodies of their children could be used for scientific studies relating to the development of nuclear weapons. The book also gives harrowing accounts of the experiences of servicemen and technicians who were exposed - in some cases deliberately- to dangerous levels of radiation without their permission. All were warned they would be severely punished if they said anything about what happened.

This is only one of many examples of the disturbing consequences of excessive secrecy in the name of national security. President Kennedy is a rare example of a politician who acknowledged that suppressing information can actually damage national security, as occurred in 1961.

New York Times reporters subsequently revealed that Kennedy intervened to get the paper to withhold sensitive details from a report about the imminent invasion of Cuba by CIA sponsored exiles in April 1961. The invasion was a disastrous failure that contributed to Cuba's willingness to host Soviet nuclear-armed missiles, culminating in an extraordinarily dangerous nuclear stand-off with the US in 1962. *Times* executives said Kennedy later told them, 'If you had printed more about the [CIA] operation, you would have saved us from a colossal mistake.'

Numerous official inquiries and media reports have shown that highly secretive bodies will abuse their powers in the absence of strong checks and balances. Undeterred, the Coalition and Labor parties have backed a new law that imposes 5-10 year jail sentences on anyone who reveals anything about what ASIO designates a Special Intelligence Operation. This prohibition covers exposing murder, endemic incompetence or dangerous bungling. The loosely worded law covers ASIO officials, agents and 'affiliates'. The latter could include other Australian and overseas intelligence agencies, police forces and

special military squads.

The law removes the long-standing defence that publication in the public interest can be legally justified. The US does not have an equivalent law. These days the mere utterance of the words 'national security' seems to mesmerise mainstream Australian politicians, such as the Attorney General George Brandis, who normally see themselves as resolute opponents of the unconstrained expansion of state power.

In this case, journalists and others who report on stuff-ups and abuses of power can't even know whether they are committing a crime - ASIO will not say whether a Special Intelligence Operation exists. Bank robbers at least know they are breaking the law.

Australian media reporting has never resulted in the death of any intelligence operatives or undercover police. In contrast, far more people have been killed as a result of intelligence operations being kept secret. This is not a fanciful concern when the Australia's overseas intelligence partners assassinate people. If the CIA wants to kill someone in Spain, for example, it could ask ASIO to use its coercive questioning powers to force an innocent relative in Australia to reveal the target's location.

Intelligence information is often wrong. Identities can be confused, intercepts misconstrued and informants give false information about rivals. This is one reason police are not allowed to assassinate people suspected of committing a crime.

If it were a crime at the time to report on ASIS operations, the media could not have informed the public about the 1983 folly in which masked ASIS trainees ran around the Melbourne Sheraton, armed with silenced machines guns, sledge hammers and hypodermic syringes, recklessly indifferent to public safety. Likewise, the new law could be used to suppress future media reports about a similar injustice to one where a NSW Supreme Court Judge Michael Adams said in 2007 that two ASIO officers 'committed the criminal offences of false imprisonment and kidnapping at common law'. No one in ASIO was subsequently charged.

Originally, ASIO was purely an information gathering body with no power to detain people or compel answers to questions. It now has these powers, without the safeguards that apply to police investigations of serious crimes where they must identify themselves can't compel answers. As others note, Israel's security service does not have these ASIO powers. In this context, one former ASIO officer privately told this writer that he feared the changes 'would turn ASIO into a secret police agency'.

Walkley award winning journalist Brian Toohey is a columnist with the Australian Financial Review*.*

Gone Girl promotes conversations about misogyny

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Gone Girl (MA). Director: David Fincher. Starring: Ben Affleck, Rosamund Pike. 149 minutes

[Review contains spoilers.]

'If we strapped a bunch of Men's Rights Advocates to beds and downloaded their nightmares, I don't think we'd come up with stuff half as ridiculous as this plot.' So claimed media and pop culture blogger interrogatingmedia back in 2012, in a compelling and persuasive critique of American author Gillian Flynn's (for the most part) highly acclaimed marriage-and-murder thriller *Gone Girl*.

The novel, now adapted for the big screen by Flynn and director David Fincher, documents the extreme, even violent, outcomes of a marriage that has decayed in the clammy clutches of a mutual narcissism that borders on psychopathy. It has decayed to the extent that smug, philandering out-of-work writer Nick (Affleck) finds himself suspected of murdering his self-centred yet enigmatic wife, Amy (Pike), after she mysteriously disappears.

His life quickly turns into a media circus. There are several references in the film to reality television, including the throwaway suggestion by one character that Nick and Amy's story would make for great TV. This is a satirical dig by Flynn and Fincher because, of course, the sordid details of Amy's possible murder by the flawed but basically likeable Nick have by that stage already become fodder of the most sensational kind for a ravenous news media.

But did Nick actually do it? The answer to that question is only a small part of the mystery. Flynn's narrative (which, in the novel, unfolds via alternating chapters written from the perspectives of her unreliable narrators, Nick and Amy) is captivating and full of twists. It has been given a fine and stylish cinematic treatment by Fincher, who utilises both humour and suspense en route to unpacking *Gone Girl*'s many secrets.

But enjoyable as it may be, *Gone Girl* has its problems. Among its revelations is the fact that Amy is far from the innocent victim she appears to be. Dogged by charges of misogyny since the novel's release, Flynn maintains her right to create interesting, complicated female villains. Yet there is something uncomfortable in the way *Gone Girl* chooses to characterise Amy's 'villainy'. It's at this point that some critics, including interrogatingmedia, baulked.

'The specific ways in which Amy is evil (lying about rape, using pregnancy as a manipulative device) feel so entangled with misogynist caricatures created by anti-women and antifeminists that it really sinks the entire novel,' wrote interrogatingmedia. In the reams of commentary on the subject, this resonates most closely with my gut

responses to an otherwise thoroughly enjoyable film.

In fact these perceived problems of the novel are arguably exacerbated by Fincher's cinematic treatment. Amy's legendary monologue about 'cool girls' - the keystone to any claim the novel might make to a feminist agenda, in which Amy elucidates a relationship dynamic that sees a woman play 'the cool girl' in order to attract and keep a man - gets a bit buried as the film charges through the first of its major plot twists.

In fact, *Slate*'s David Haglund has argued that Fincher's treatment of this definitive monologue skews it away from its intended target of the men whose social power and expectations have forged the 'cool girl' myth, to the women who choose to propagate the myth by the way they behave. Haglund found this suspicion vindicated when a colleague inferred that Amy seemed to have 'contempt for the women in passing cars'.

Furthermore, the (perhaps necessary) decision to tell the story mostly from Nick's perspective has the dual effect of increasing sympathy for him despite his numerous faults, and distancing the audience from Amy. This serves to obfuscate Amy's motives (though it is possible that she is simply a sociopath), and to amplify her personification of those anti-women myths that are rightly derided by interrogatingmedia and others.

But unlike interrogatingmedia, I don't think any of this 'sinks' *Gone Girl*. It remains a stellar piece of filmmaking, and an entertaining thriller. It is a compelling rumination on the impossibility of knowing the mind of another, even within that ostensibly most intimate of relationships, marriage. And, at the very least, it is a conversation starter about the various shapes and implications of domestic violence and misogyny. It's a conversation worth having.

Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street.

A pope of blurred boundaries

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Pope Francis is a leader out of his time. Generally the style and vision of governance in the Catholic Church correspond to those current in the broader society. He is out of sync. That has inevitably led many to ask whether his vision and style of governance will endure in the Catholic Church. Some indications may be found during the current Synod on the family.

In Western society the times are sombre and fearful. In governance there is a strong emphasis on control, on security and on strong leadership. It reflects a desire for clear boundaries marking who is in and who is out. We see a recurrent rush to military adventures, sharp divisions made between citizens and asylum seekers, between the advantaged and disadvantaged, and between Christians and Muslims. The executive seeks total control and the avoidance of risk.

In more confident times governance has been characterised by an emphasis on freedom, on local initiative, on crossing and blurring boundaries, on layered rather than on narrow identity. This is reflected in the desire for effective consultation, for strengthening the rule of law and ensuring due process, for paying more attention to the needs of the disadvantaged and to ethnic and religious minorities.

The vision and governance of the Catholic Church have generally corresponded to the times. In fearful times they have emphasised Papal authority and stressed the boundaries between clerical and lay, men and women, Catholic and non-Catholic, faith and secular, orthodox and heretical. They have privileged central control over local initiative.

The oddity of Pope Francis is that at a time when national governments have become increasingly authoritarian and have emphasised narrowly defined national identity and interests and strong boundaries, he has advocated local initiative and constantly blurred boundaries in his action and his speech. He sees the identity of the Catholic Church to lie in its going out to the margins.

The question arises then is whether the Pope's vision of mission and governance will shape the Catholic future, or whether his image of church leaders coming back from the badlands smelling like lost sheep will give way to sheep waiting in line in the designated paddock where their shepherds can feed them on sheeply food and protect them from danger. Sociologically, you would have to bet on the latter. But it is never a done deal.

The current church Synod on the Family will be illuminating. It will show how far Pope Francis' open and inclusive style can be reflected in the processes of the Synod which have become instruments of control. More subtly, because the family is a microcosm and an image of society and of church, the way the family is imagined at the Synod will also reveal what vision of the church is operative.

In sombre times we would expect the Synod to focus on an idealised, true Christian family consisting of a husband and wife of faith duly married, living prayerful lives and blessed with children. The threats to this ideal would be identified and ways of sustaining it named. This would find expression in a high theology of Christian marriage and family life.

Outside the boundaries of the authentically Christian family lie same sex parents with children, couples practising contraception, divorced and remarried people with children, families with serial parents or with children artificially conceived and unmarried couples with children. They would not be the object of the care or the curiosity of the Synod but rather outsiders to be recalled to the true ideal of family. Given the large number of baptised Catholics who live outside the boundary, such a Synod would live on only in the archives.

That is one possibility. But Pope Francis' recent celebration of marriages for a typical group of Catholics in varying relationships and his introductory homily suggest another possibility. He may encourage the Synod to reach out to the people whose family arrangements lie outside the boundaries, to reflect on their dreams and struggles, and to ask what makes the family life they desire difficult. The same openness was commended by Sydney married couple, Ron and Mavis Pirola, in their presentation to the Synod.

This approach will lead to reflection on the emphasis in society on the economically productive individual, the absence of a living wage and the punitive approach to people who are disadvantaged and the lack of support for family groupings in which there is no tradition of parenting. Families at the margins will then be placed at the centre: families without income and other support, the families of prisoners, the separation of children from parents who seek protection.

Discussion of the Synod has focused on allowing divorced and remarried Catholics to receive communion. That is mostly a problem for the devout, often resolved by pastoral commonsense. But it points to the larger reality: that at Mass, the place where Catholics mostly meet, a strict application of church rules would exclude most baptised Catholics from full participation. That underlines the importance of the question Pope Francis has posed: how can people, on the borders of the Catholic Church or beyond, find from Catholics encouragement and support in their messy lives? In asking that question so insistently he is a man for all times.

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Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street*.*

Pope Francis image by Shutterstock.

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Black is the new black

CREATIVE

Isabella Fels

Black. It is my all time favourite colour. You can never go wrong with it. It is the coolest colour out. Moreover I don't stand out, and this I like. I can be safe, secretive and surreptitious along with the rest of the crowd which moves along slowly like a trail of ants also dressed in black. It is as if we have all sprung up from underground and have come alive. How we like to come together all in a mass all in black - a long black procession to a distant funeral.

However wearing black is definitely not our funeral. We can radiate and celebrate in black. There is no disputing the fact that black is trendy, not to mention tactile. It can make men drool as I watch the pools of their eyes deepen as I am dressed in skin tight black clothes almost like sexy Michelle Pfeiffer in Catwoman. I simply couldn't get away with it in any other colour. I do find black to be a general people magnet not just for the boys and my little black book only. People seem to gravitate towards me. It is as though we have something powerful in common. I feel people won't talk badly about me behind my back dressed in black. I also feel I wouldn't leave other women green with envy particularly in a streaming long white wedding dress.

Black. Even just for myself I love to get dressed up in black. I often feel like a perfect ten wearing black. It covers up all my bad features. Indeed the majority of my clothes are black. I have at least fifteen black skirts and dresses, a dozen or so black tops and mountains of opaque black tights not to mention countless smart black socks, shoes and boots so I can hide away yet play on a miserable grey day and never ever go against the tide.

How I love to glide along the street dressed top to bottom in black still searching for more black items. Some shops mainly sell black clothes. How I love seeing black clothes from back to back all on the racks. As I buy a stack of them I feel on track again. How I love black's elegance yet starkness.

Black, it often suits my mood particularly in my long black hooded coat and suit so I can

pander to the hard corporate world which I never really feel a part of. It even makes me feel old grand and worldly especially with my long traditional black umbrella on a cold rainy day.

Black. No other colour does the same. I once bought a horrific bright pink coat and hated the glare of attention I got on the street. I felt myself sickening in the heaviness of its material and no longer felt steady. I literally had a pink fit for not wearing black. It was dangerous for my mental and even physical health. I would rather spend all my wealth on soothing black items. It is like a sound investment even when it comes down to my last black vest.

Black. There is so much I can do with black. I can even dare to go all black from my black mascara down to my shiny black shoes not to mention little black dress and seductive black bra.

Black. It also makes me feel as light as a kite. No argument - black is slimming. I feel like a clumsy cow when I wear any other pale colour especially cow like bright white or pale milky pink.

Overall black is so nice and trimming and neat. I go down the street with a special beat. I feel accepted and treated well by everyone and feel I am not the only one. I literally am at one with everyone. We all love being safe in black as it governs our shops and our lives and our universe. There is a sense of finality. Black is at all cross sections of the community. Black is totally universal. There is equality once and for all. We are almost like a school of exotic black fish moving around in unison.

All in all black keeps me winning. It certainly keeps me grinning as I keep going down the street getting lots of wolf whistles. Now all I need is a big black Rolls Royce and the cosmos will be complete.

Isabella Fels is a Melbourne poet and writer.

Keeping company with misery

CREATIVE

Kristy Chambers

At fifteen years of age, I had an epiphany. It wasn't the sort of thunderbolt where I decided I wanted to pursue a career as a veterinarian or that my sexual orientation was other than straight; it was that suicide would be the best way to immediately deal with the acute unhappiness and distress I was feeling. Like a tattoo of your ex-boyfriend's name, a permanent solution can seem like a good idea at the time…

In retrospect, my problem-solving may have been a *little* overreaching, like fixing the flat tyre on your car by pushing the whole thing off a cliff, or cutting your leg off because your shoes are giving you terrible blisters. I certainly had second thoughts about the wisdom of my epiphany when I ended up in hospital with a stomach full of tablets and spent the next few hours crying and throwing up into a plastic bowl in the Emergency department. Suicide was actually a rubbish idea, as it turned out.

When a child and adolescent psychiatrist came to see me the next morning, I learned that the way I had been feeling had a name - clinical depression. Its sudden presence in my life may have been linked to the serious bout of glandular fever I had recently experienced, the doctor said, or perhaps I was going to be the latest instalment in a story of mental illness that spanned generations of my family. There was no way of knowing, and even if there were, it wouldn't have made a dent in the way I felt. Only time, and television, would help. I spent months at home, recovering in solitude and becoming embarrassingly addicted to *Days of Our Lives.'*

The saying 'Misery loves company' couldn't be further from the truth of my experience with depression. Misery loves isolation, sleep and lethargy, sure, but company was something I could absolutely do without.

For the next six years, I attempted to manage my mental health with good intentions, stern self-talk, guilt and cigarettes. Finally, exasperated and desperate, I started taking an anti-depressant medication, and when it actually *worked,* I was stunned to feel happy.

Like any new relationship, the honeymoon period is brilliant… and temporary. My love affair with medication was euphoric for the first few months, and soon became boringly familiar. In the blink of an eye, I took my newfound mental stability for granted and barely noticed that I could now work for six months in a row without breaking into tears for no reason around the three-month mark. Once upon a time, such physical and mental endurance would have been unimaginable, and now I was simply underwhelmed. I wasn't depressed anymore, but I wasn't sure I was happy either.

In my experience, when you get the thing you always wanted, you start to notice the other things that you don't have and want them instead. Something is always out of reach. For the longest time I had just wanted to stop feeling depressed, to arrest despair before it swallowed me whole, and now that it had finally happened, it seemed I wanted the whole world, or at least to see extremely large hunks of it.

For much of my life, I thought that happiness could be found somewhere other than where I was; that it was a place that existed outside of my head, like Iceland or Tasmania, and if I just kept looking, I'd eventually stumble across my peace of mind in a faraway place. Of the many delusions that I have entertained in my life, such as the idea that there is a weight at which I will be satisfied or a gym membership that I'll use for more than two weeks, the belief that the grass is greener elsewhere has always been the most entrenched (although there is a town called Hell in Norway and I expect that the grass there is probably scorched, if not dead).

Unreasonable expectations are sort of my forte, so when I bought a backpack and headed to London on a 'working holidaymaker' visa, aged 23, I expected life to meet me more than halfway. In fact, I expected it to meet me at Heathrow's arrivals area with a bunch of flowers, a box of chocolates and an open-mouthed kiss. For someone with a history of depression (still managed to this day by medication) I have a surprisingly strong optimistic bias, constantly underestimating how long any given task will take to be performed, or how much preparation time I will require in order to depart the house in a semi-presentable state. I applied this same deluded notion to travel, convinced that the act of depositing my body on British soil would dispel any residual melancholy I had accumulated in Australia and that the direction of my life would unfurl before me like a silk ribbon flapping in the breeze as soon as my feet hit the tarmac.

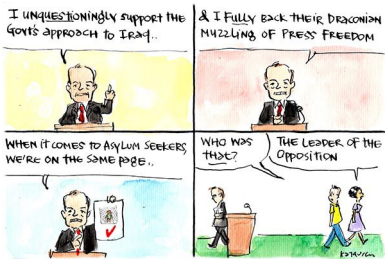
When two years in Europe didn't deliver on the promise I had envisaged, I returned to Australia and studied to become a nurse. A meaningful job was something that had been missing in my life until then, but even its arrival didn't dispel the restlessness. It was still there, simmering quietly underneath, calling me to Vietnam and Cambodia and Iceland and Mexico, calling me home, wherever that is…

Kristy Chambers is an Adelaide born nurse turned writer who now lives in New York City. Her latest book It's Not You, Geography, It's Me *was published last month, and follows her 2012 memoir* Get Well Soon! My (Un)Brilliant Career as a Nurse. *The image is from the cover of* It's Not You.

Shorten to the point

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas




Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda, The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

The asphalt ribbon hauling us home

CREATIVE

Angela O'Rourke and Will Day

Calder Highway Normally tempers fray behind the tempered safety glass, but not today. The city dwindles as late-in-the-day sun slants, Late-Romantic, across clouds, a mountain. Cresting the hill our breath suspends in unison. We are laughing, eye-spying. You, the one not driving, spy it first: a Jeff Koons puppy, backlit, riding a wave. Cloud-smitten, our son and daughter conjure horse and monkey rider - pale Chinese zodiac aloft. Enchanted, you catch my eye. Do you hoard them up, the clouds, the games, the sprockets meshing; steel-bound shape of us, this version - mother, father, son and daughter - banked for consolation later? *as if we were clouds all along as if we were our best idea of us sweet creatures scudding the range luminous* The asphalt ribbon hauling us home. - *Angela O'Rourke*

Orange Song - *Autumn 2014* Day One. I walk twenty yards down Williamsons Rd. then back. Day Two I walk thirty yards down Williamsons Rd. then back. Day Three I walk forty yards down, to the old driveway and look in to where the house has been razed, the pool all gone, no sign. But there in the midst of a field of flattened dirt the orange tree stands green, heavily laden with late Autumn fruit. I pick six oranges and walk away up the hill. At home in the warm, simple kitchen we bring the fruit to the boil in an equal measure of water, sugar to hand, making marmalade. My Irish descended grandmother passed her recipe to my mother. Oranges, a lemon, sugar, water and a carrot makes, by traditional alchemy, nectar. My mother is arthritic, making her way with the tap of a stick she sings. Marmalade is too much work for her now. The fruit simmers gently for hours filling the house with childhood. We sit quietly, my mother reading, me writing, waiting for the moment when the jam drop falls from the spoon to crystallise on contact with the saucer. - *Will Day*

Angela O'Rourke lives in the Macedon Ranges where she teaches English and Art at a local secondary school. In 2011 she was the winner of the inaugural Castlemaine Poetry Prize.

Will Day's work has previously appeared in Meanjin *and* Cordite Poetry Review*.*

Catholic press struggles to earn trust

RELIGION

Tim Wallace


THE RECORD
HISTORICAL EDITION 02/10/13
IN THE BEGINNING
Historians recount the remarkable story of how the Catholic Church in Western Australia pulled itself up by the bootstraps in the most isolated city in the world despite internal dissension, erratic personalities and continual problems with poverty and sectarian discrimination...

Last month Australia's longest-running weekly newspaper, *The Record,* won a design excellence award. It was, however, somewhat belated recognition for the Perth Catholic newspaper, established in 1874, from its peers in the Australasian Catholic Press Association. The last edition of the paper rolled off the presses in July.

The decision to close down the 140-year-old weekly apparently came after a five-month review and many years of significant losses as the newspaper's subscriber base, and advertising, dwindled. That it survived as long as it did was perhaps testament both to the previous archbishop's preparedness to subsidise it to the tune of several hundred thousand dollars a year, the dedication of its overworked staff, and the devotion of its ageing readership, many of whom I suspect, like my parents, bought it out as much out of a sense of religious duty than interest in its content, which was of variable quality.

There had in the preceding decade been other reviews and plans hatched to check the newspaper's decline, including one ambitious idea to turn the paper into a freebie and emulate the business model of suburban press. What the newspaper never really had was a coherent strategy to transition online, leveraging its established brand, content and capabilities to connect with a wider audience. A monthly magazine available in print and 'a user-friendly, engaging and interactive online format' is apparently what the archdiocese now plans in its stead.

That the newspaper itself could not manage the transition into the 21st century is a matter of some personal regret. In 2011 I accepted a 12-month contract that included an understanding a major focus of my role would be improving its online capability. Some inroads were made, including a revamped website and entry into the social media space but, like many marginal print operations, the newspaper faced the quandary of insufficient resources to both serve its existing readership and chart a digital direction. Though its staff could take some pride that the newspaper punched above its weight, there was barely the capacity to make it from one week's deadline to the next to leave

any energy to think about, or execute, a bold online strategy. There were other, more fundamental problems too.

With the demise of *The Record*, the competition for the claim of Australia's best Catholic weekly newspaper has narrowed to a field of two, Brisbane's *Catholic Leader* and Sydney's *Catholic Weekly*. Only time will tell if those two publications can avoid the fate of the rest of their fellow diocesan press operations, but in maintaining viability they face more than just navigating the harsh winds of technological and demographic change.

At the heart of press operations funded by the institutional church are some problematic contradictions about the differing needs of stakeholders. All media operations deal with internal antagonisms, of course. In the secular press it is jokingly known as the division between church and state - between the journalistic pursuit of news without fear or favour and the pressure to skew content toward advertising markets in general or certain advertisers in particular. No man can serve two masters, according of the good book, but any media operation dependent on both reader subscriptions and advertising revenue must do exactly that.

The antagonisms facing the Catholic press are more complex, reflecting the nature of the institution it serves. Though to outsiders the Church can seem monolithic, with a power structure rooted in medieval aristocracy, in practice its politics are more byzantine. Obviously there is the ecclesiastical authority of bishops, each a prince of his own fiefdom, with control over the purse strings and the power to make or break career prospects. There are the professional bureaucracies administering the Church's sizeable operations in, for example, education and healthcare, with the natural bureaucratic preference for reportage that blandly replicates the press release. There are the idiosyncratic sensitivities of parish priests, who can wield an iron grip over a newspaper's distribution and promotion in their own territory because, say, they are deeply offended it does not capitalise every word associated with religion.

Appeasing both clerical and bureaucratic interests poses a considerable hurdle to producing an interesting, relevant newspaper. Add to the negotiation the raw differences between progressive and conservative tendencies within clergy and laity, with what one camp esteems as editorial heroism being reviled by the other. It is possible to produce journalism that satisfies both groups - take, for example the work of John Allen, the long-time Vatican correspondent of the National Catholic Reporter, a US title regarded as theologically liberal, whose reportage was also held in high regard by conservatives. But what distinguished Allen's work was the epitome of good journalism - a rigorous adherence to accuracy, fairness and balance along with a deep understanding of his subject - with a scope unencumbered by the pettier considerations of institutional politics.

Doing the same within diocesan-owned press, where the bishop is the publisher, is harder. Along with all the above tensions are existential questions over the proper function of a Catholic newspaper. Does it exist to report news or proclaim the good news, acting primarily as instrument of evangelisation? Should it seek to provide a perspective on the the big issues, covering global and national news, or devote itself to reflecting the life of the local community, covering parish fetes, ordinations, official appointments, obituaries and the like?

Certain compromises have been glaringly evident. It would be difficult to cite one official Church publication in Australia that has, for example, done more than a perfunctory job in covering the issue of clerical sex abuse. Generally the issue has been politely avoided, aside from endorsement of the official line. For ordinary church-goers the deep disconnect between the coverage of the issue between their own religious and the secular media must be bewildering, feeding the very feelings of embattlement and persecution that Cardinal George Pell conceded to the royal commission had contributed to the Church's institutional failure to face up to the problem.

Given the general acknowledgement of the effect the sex-abuse crisis has had on mass attendance and collection-plate contributions, it would be hard to conclude there has not

also been a hit on the credibility of the Catholic press. Maintaining relevance in the light of experiences that show trust must be earned rather than assumed will take more than technical capability, slick headlines or social media sharing buttons.

Tim Wallace is a Melbourne-based journalist who is a former associate editor of The Record*.*

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The unfolding logic of euthanasia

AUSTRALIA

Zac Alstin

A Belgian court recently granted permission for a psychiatrically ill prisoner to be euthanised. The prisoner, 50 year old Frank Van Den Bleeken, is serving a life sentence for rape and murder and has requested euthanasia due to his 'unbearable psychological anguish'.

The psychological anguish component is nothing new: in 2013 a Belgian man was euthanised due to the psychological burden of a failed sex-change operation, while earlier that same year deaf identical-twin brothers were euthanised for reasons of psychological suffering when they discovered they were losing their eyesight.

This is, however, the first time a prisoner has been granted permission to be euthanised, and with at least nine and as many as 15 other cases set to follow, a whole new set of ethical issues and problems must now be carefully considered and painstakingly scrutinised before further action is taken.

But Belgium has achieved its own momentum in such matters and as the co-chair of the Belgian euthanasia commission, Wim Distelmans, explained in regard to the sex-change case:

'The case of Nathan Verhelst, for instance, who met all the conditions of the law, we didn't discuss about the case for one minute. It was just passed like that…We already have a tradition of 10 years. Should Nathan's case have been 10 years ago, maybe we would have discussed some time about the case. Now, it's like [just] another one.'

Euthanasia advocates tend not to speak about tradition in relation to their cause. There's usually plenty of talk of safeguards and the most difficult medical cases that naturally elicit our compassion, but no one seems to imagine, despite bountiful evidence from Belgium and the Netherlands, that euthanasia could take on a momentum of its own. The weight of tradition is, naturally, not something we associate with euthanasia in this country where, despite persistent efforts, the practice has never become established.

Having worked in bioethics, it's hard to avoid a morbid fascination with the gradual unfurling of euthanasia in nations where it has had a chance to become firmly established. While members of the public are usually shocked to hear of each new milestone, from an ethical perspective there are no real surprises in the unfolding logic of euthanasia. Euthanasia for children, euthanasia for those 'tired of life', euthanasia to stay out of a nursing home, double-euthanasia for loving couples wanting to end their lives together; once euthanasia is introduced the imperative to develop it to meet a broader range of public demand seems inevitable.

Why not allow euthanasia for prisoners? If they are suffering and their minds are made up, is their situation really so different from that of a person with a terminal illness? The Belgian death penalty may have been abolished in 1996, but that doesn't rule out

offering a 'death opportunity' for those who prefer it over hard time. Never mind that in the case of prisoner Van Den Bleeken his psychological distress may well be exacerbated by the State's failure to grant him psychiatric care for his violent sexual impulses in the 30 years of his imprisonment. With the European Court of Human Rights criticising Belgium's treatment of mentally ill prisoners as 'inadequate', Belgium is at least partially complicit in however many 'voluntary' requests for euthanasia ultimately emerge from its chronically overcrowded prison system.

Distelmans' comment about the 'tradition of 10 years' ought to give us pause. Issues like euthanasia are rarely presented in terms of what we will find acceptable a decade down the path, when the practice is firmly established and our values have shifted accordingly. The Belgians may have thought they could engage in euthanasia prudently if they took safeguards, restricting access on the basis of age, illness, prognosis, or mental capacity. But the motivating forces of the modern euthanasia movement are individual autonomy and compassion for suffering - two ultimately distinct principles that can potentially encompass a wide range of circumstances.

While the 'ideal' euthanasia case is that of a terminally ill person who is suffering terribly and wishes to die, if we assent to such a case we will soon find minor deviations from the ideal which are nonetheless almost as compelling. How could we say to someone that their chronic condition is less worthy simply because it is not terminal? How can we tell people that their psychological suffering is not as significant as physical pain? How can we deny euthanasia to anyone who firmly and passionately desires it for any reason they deem worthy?

Having a ten year 'tradition' of euthanasia means having ten years to consider and reconsider the most difficult scenarios, to become accustomed to the 'norms' and variances of the merely everyday cases, and to let that first line in the sand gradually fade away. Who would ever have thought ten years ago that Belgium would be offering euthanasia to mentally ill prisoners instead of providing psychiatric treatment? Even Distelmans, himself responsible for euthanising the deaf twins and the transsexual Nathan Verhelst, has expressed concern, stating: 'Surely, we are not going to carry out euthanasia because we can't offer an alternative?' Apparently they are.

Zac Alstin is a freelance writer and PhD student in Philosophy of Religion who lives in Adelaide. He blogs at zacalstin.com

A hostile government could be the ABC's best friend

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

With promised cuts to the ABC upon us, the Corporation's friends and enemies are out in force.

This week's bad news for the ABC was the Government's appointment to its Board of commercial media financial controller Peter Lewis, who conducted the recent efficiency review that is the precursor to the imminent cuts. That makes it more likely than ever that the forces of economic rationalism will control the destiny of one of Australia's most important creative and intellectual institutions.

The good news is that Essential polling has revealed that a majority of Australians is worried about cuts to the ABC. So if the government is more driven by polls than ideology, it will go easy on the public broadcaster. As Crikey pointed out on Thursday, there's not a lot a government can do about the ABC's popularity and the reality that cutting its revenue would be electoral poison.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the integrity of the ABC is that its management might be tempted to also go easy on the Government, in the hope that a relatively cosy relationship might work for both, minimising both electoral fallout for the government and cuts for the ABC.

There are already signs of this occurring, with ABC management compliant in foreshadowing cuts to programs it considers expensive and expendable, thereby shielding the minister from public criticism and from having to justify his government's blood-letting. Management appears, here, to be playing a politically partisan role which is certainly not in the national interest.

There is always a danger that ABC management will, wittingly or unwittingly, do the government's work for it in a number of ways, including some that appear to be in the best interest of all Australians. For example, there is the coming week's Mental As program blitz that is designed to promote mental health awareness.

It is all about healing individuals, overcoming stigma, and enhancing the well-being of all

Australians. Hardly anything we would want to discourage. But there is the sense that the ABC is doing what is properly the task of a government funded agency, rather than a broadcaster that usually aims to include in its programs a healthy dose of skepticism that is not compatible with such campaigns or focused messaging.

Of course an exception can and should be made for a cause such as mental health. However there's a good chance this will create a precedent, and the government might lean on the ABC to do something similar to push contentious causes such as the Anzac centenary next April. The revival and promotion of the Anzac myth began under former Prime Minister John Howard, and is criticised as a conservative ideological construct that is brainwashing the nation's children.

The ABC will always have a complicated relationship with the government. Perhaps Malcolm Turnbull is mistaken when he talks up the importance this relationship when he says 'a public broadcaster's revenues are a function of its lobbying skills'. The Corporation is at its best when it ignores the government and focuses on its purpose and the people who are its audiences. If the people love their ABC, it won't be necessary for its management to lobby poll-sensitive governments for funding.

 *Michael Mullins is editor of* Eureka Street.

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Hong Kong not in the mood for love

INTERNATIONAL

Antonio Castillo

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In 2012 I speculated that the election of Leung Chun-ying as chief executive on 25 March that year 'went down as the day Beijing put another nail in the democratic aspirations' of Hong Kong. Two years on, and in light of the current demonstrations in this city of 7.2 million people, it is very tempting to suggest that nail represented the end of democracy in Hong Kong.
Over the last 20 years, every time the people of Hong Kong have heard some 'menacing' messages from Beijing, they have responded and become politically active. The menacing message this time was the one I heard two years ago in the office of Leung Kwok-hung - better known as 'Long hair' - in the Legislative Council or Legco - not far from the epicentre of the protests.
'Beijing won't honour its pledge that would allow Hong Kong to elect in 2017 its political leaders, including the Chief Executive,' he told me then. And unfortunately he was correct. China won't allow the free and popular election in 2017 that the people of Hong Kong people were hoping for. This was the disturbing message that has sparked anger in this 'gentle society' - as described to me by veteran Hong Kong writer and journalist Nury Vittachi.
Leung Chun-ying, who was sworn in during July 2012, is the third chief executive of Hong Kong since the handover to China in 1997. Under the Beijing sword of Damocles, a minuscule election committee has elected all of them. Unwavering individuals loyal to the Communist Party. There is an old story that wonderfully illustrates Hong Kong's chief executive allegiance to Beijing.
For most of his life, Donald Tsang - the predecessor of Leung - was famously a pro-democracy politician. He was also very pro-British, and when the Queen offered him a knighthood, Sir Donald was very happy. But soon the 'Sir' quietly disappeared from his title. He wanted the top job in Hong Kong, and he needed Beijing's blessing.
The nonconforming 'Long hair' - founder of the League of Social Democrats and a member of the Legislative Council representing the New Territories East - told me two years ago that 'any leader who comes with the blessing of Beijing won't ever serve the people of Hong Kong.'
Two years on, and Leung has catastrophically failed to serve the people of Hong Kong. He is not a leader, but a technocrat who makes the subway trains run on time. But he can't reflect and respond to the political aspirations of the people. And it is not only about their democratic demands, but their economic and social aspirations.
Unaffordable housing resulting from a housing shortage, the horrendous wealth gap, and the ferocious property appetite of Mainland Chinese over Hong Kong some of other causes of the protests. Behind it all is Beijing's interference in Hong Kong affairs,

including the evident erosion of the semi-democratic structure embodied by the 'one country two systems'.

Despite his antics, Kwok-hung has had the political clarity to see Beijing's so-called democratic road map for Hong Kong - free and direct election of the next chief executive in 2017 - all along as a massive cock-up. A cock-up that has put Hong Kong 'on a collision course,' as Nury Vittachi told me in a café at the bunker-looking Hong Kong Polytechnic University. That was two years ago, and his gloomy assessment - in light of the current events in Hong Kong - resonates louder than ever.

Despite the massive protests, not everyone is convinced they will last longer. While the shout for full democracy is loud and genuine, Hong Kong is - as Professor Anthony Cheung Bing Leung told me - a 'practical and rational' place. As soon as the financial district - the heart of the current unrest - starts counting losses, the most likely result is that the sympathy for this youthful and laudable uprising will start to disappear. In this context, it is possible to speculate that the so-called 'umbrella revolution' - one of the many catchy media constructed identifiers of recent social uprisings - might slowly subside.

This is what Beijing is counting on. It has played down the whole affair. And while the Communist Party will keep on tightening its control over Hong Kong's limited liberties, curbing freedom of speech and introducing school history books with the Tiananmen massacre chapter ripped out, it won't send the tanks. Too much to lose - including face.

The 6000 strong People's Liberation Army (PLA) presence in Hong Kong has been lying low for many years. And while seeing the garrison with the red flag waving used to send shivers up my spine, the PLA will keep lying low.

On the other hand - and to make matters more complex - Beijing can't afford to ignore the fact that historically Hong Kong has been the cradle of some of the key events that have shaped the modern history of China. These include Dr Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary thoughts and plans for an uprising to oust the Qing Dynasty and to set up the Republic of China. Also it was Hong Kong's underground Communist activists who helped forge the People's Republic of China. The last thing China wants to see is Hong Kong give rise to a fully-fledged democracy within a one-party dictatorial system. Unthinkable.

Antonio Castillo, currently Director of Journalism at RMIT University Melbourne, taught at Hong Kong Baptist University 2010-12.

Photos by Sam Wong, a Melbourne freelance photographer who has just completed an internship at Magnum Photos in New York. More at his blog.

The case for remaining single

AUSTRALIA

Ellena Savage

When Amal Alamuddin and George Clooney tied the knot the other day, my social media feeds lit up with all kinds of celebratory yearning. *Her dress!* they said, *her impressive job!* But most resonantly, they seemed totalised by her husband. Her rich, handsome, famous husband.

A few days before the wedding, I went for a walk down the river with a mate. She's a new-ish friend, an artist, and we're still in the early stages of our friendship. While illegally picking flowers, she and I discussed the blocks we come up against in our work. Mine usually centre on not feeling like a strong enough writer, and worrying that readers will think I'm stupid or shallow. Her blocks, she said, often came back to a fear of not finding the right person to share her life with. Both of these inhibitors are about other people validating us, and both are silly in the sense that they are invented by feelings of inadequacy. But their affect is different.

Years ago, I remember going to a party directly after an ex-boyfriend and I had broken up. Once there, I didn't know what I was doing at this party, I was nervous and uncomfortable, and didn't really feel like having fun, so I told a friend what had happened. *What if that's the last person I connect with like that?* I asked her between deep sips of wine. *What if I never find someone like them again?*, and other such clichés. Because I felt sad and dejected, I was more terrified of being alone than I was being with someone I didn't get along with for a million reasons. She said, *well, maybe you won't. Who cares?*

She was callous, but right, and I didn't entirely understand that that until maybe a few years later. The couple occupies the most prominent space in our culture, and it's abnormal to not aspire to it. The couple is the location of progenation, new life, it's the institution that makes it possible to live in a capitalist economy by sanctioning the sharing of resources, and dramatically, it's the centre from which all tension is drawn. One troubling aspect of this cultural fixation on the heterosexual couple is that it is also

the most sanctioned place for women's private labour to make men's public work possible. Even if marriage were to expand, legally, to include same-sex unions, the institution would still reiterate the primacy (and privacy) of the home. While sometimes this is innocuous, the mythology around domesticity makes possible co-dependence, domestic violence, and most frequently, unfulfilled potential.

The urge to soul-mating is ancient, and it's a wonder it has survived as long as it has. In Plato's *Symposium*, he discusses the obsessive draw towards togetherness: 'Do you desire to be wholly one; always day and night in one another's company? for if this is what you desire, I am ready to melt and fuse you together, so that being two you shall become one.' This version of coupledom doesn't seem to leave much time for things outside a relationship, things like reading, new friendships, or parties, let alone working on projects that might have some value to others.

In the few times I have felt distressed by the prospect of some kind of eternal singledom, I have reminded myself of how difficult and suffocating romantic love can be, especially in the belittling shadow of celebrity couplings, their affluence, glamour, and unavoidable clichés. I draw on my accumulated life data, which tells me that no-one is a perfect partner, even with 'hard work'. And there are many more things to love than some perfect other individual - kids, animals, colleagues and friends, and work. These entities tend not to impede on vital alone time, either. Or in Oprah-speak, 'me time'.

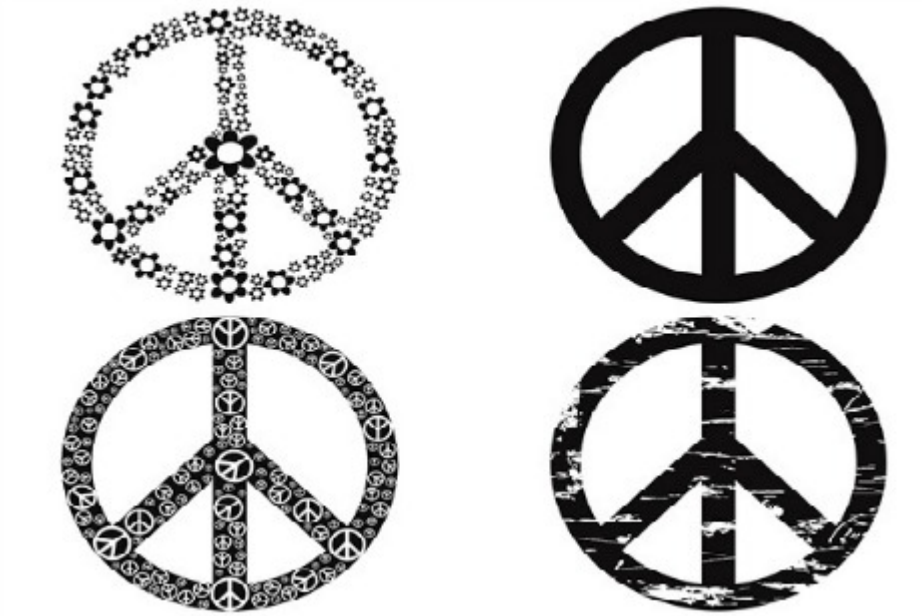
The human-rights-lawyer-captures-the-heart-of-Hollywood-silver-fox story is a quaint and old-fashioned one, and in and of itself, it's kind of charming. But that charm ends when it is consumed by single people, who, in my social networks, are accomplished single women who see the marriage as a reflection on their own failures, it's just a boring repetition of what we already know - that people are truly successful when they publicly enshrine their romantic love for another person.

Ellena Savage edits arts at The Lifted Brow, *politics and culture at* Spook Magazine, *and is a postgraduate student of creative writing at Monash University. She tweets as @RarrSavage*

An erstwhile pacifist's IS quandary

INTERNATIONAL

Gillian Bouras



I used to style myself a pacifist. Or hoped I was one. Or something. But that was before I had children. The minute I clapped eyes on my first-born, I realised that any threat to him would see me transformed into a murderous monster, and I later felt the same about his two brothers. Nor does passion diminish with age: woe betide anybody who even attempts to harm my three grandsons.

Life, as we know, plays tricks, is deeply ironic, so formerly pacifist me has had to cope with the fact of a marine commando son, a member of the Greek Special Forces. I strive mightily to avoid thinking about his training and expertise, while being deeply thankful that so far he has not seen action, although in 1997 he spent six months in Bosnia. The worst was over by then, but he still could have lost his life or had it ruined in one way or another. He seldom talks about those months, but on his return he made a comment that has never left me: 'This is never going to be sorted out, Mum, because the whole set-up is tribal, and the Powers don't seem to understand that.'

But here we are on the warpath yet again: allied forces have taken to the skies in an attempt to destroy IS, the Islamic State, and there is increasing pressure to have, as the military is fond of saying, boots on the ground. Lord Richards, recently retired as Britain's Chief of the Defence Staff, is in favour of said boots, but also says 'you don't do wars unless you really have to.'

History, however, is full of wars that could have been avoided. World War One is a dreadful example of a great mistake that should never have been made, and many experts argue forcefully that it is not yet over: modern Iraq (more irony) was created as a result of the Ottoman defeat in 1917, created by Western powers who had little regard for tribal loyalties or traditional territories, and still less understanding of the prevailing mindset or emotional environment. Not a lot has changed.

Lord Richards says we cannot destroy IS, but he thinks we can defeat it. The question is: How? There is a knee-jerk reaction, it seems to me, in favour of violence and war, and

they both beget more of the same. Henry Reynolds has recently written that Australians are obsessed with war, and yesterday I read that whereas British PM David Cameron at least debated the whole matter in Parliament, Tony Abbott did not, but committed eight Super-Hornets to the rather dubious cause: whatever Super Hornets are, precisely, and whatever the cause is. The arms merchants must be laughing all the way to their banks. Again.

When very young, I had to teach Robert Ardrey's book *The Territorial Imperative,* first published in 1966. Its message made a lot of sense to me then, and it still does. It is an investigation into the animal origins of property, the human tendency to be territorial, and the way in which, having secured territory, we then do our best to defend it. Ardrey sympathised with the Zionist cause, but strenuously made the point that without the pressure of the Arab League, Israel was almost sure to implode.

In all this worry about IS, few people in power seem to be heeding the advice of American Chelsea Manning. The former Bradley Manning was an all-source analyst of intelligence in Iraq, and is now serving 35 years in a U.S. military prison because of his whistle-blowing activities. In a recent article, Manning echoes and repeats Ardrey's message: the idea is not to react, not to be caught in a repetitive cycle of attack and response. Instead, Manning outlines various strategies that could result in IS becoming a failed state, one that is unpopular and unable to govern: it might thus fracture internally.

Manning suggests that the world needs to be disciplined enough to let the IS fire die out on its own. General bravery and the desire for peace are also necessary. Here's hoping: I think and pray for all the women who, like me, simply want their descendants to live and thrive. In peace.

Gillian Bouras latest book, Seeing and Believing*, is appearing in instalments on her website.*

Peace sign image by Shutterstock.

What IS has to do with evil

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

IS is getting a bad press in Australia. Deservedly so, for its brutality and totalitarian instincts. In the headlines the word 'evil' has been dominant, sometimes even 'pure evil', over pictures of balaclava'd and hooded figures in black. This suggests that they belong to a totally different world than ours, one incomprehensible to us in its absolute darkness.

This characterisation is unhelpful for two reasons. First, if we are to respond to IS intelligently and effectively in such a complex environment we must be able to enter their minds. Otherwise we shall be like the police in crime shows who plan a frontal attack on the villain holding a cigarette lighter near a lake of gushing petrol. Simply to call him evil, vicious and senseless may satisfy our anger but it does not help save his hostages or protect the town.

Second, and more important, if we are to judge their actions we must measure them by the same moral calculus as we do our own actions. Otherwise we empty the word 'evil' of any meaning. Evil becomes what they do; good is what we do. This is precisely the kind of thinking adopted by members of IS.

The questions relevant for evaluating both our own and IS's actions are whether they respect the dignity of other human beings, whether their goals and the means by which they pursue them are ethically justifiable, and whether the good consequences of their actions will be proportionate to the bad consequences.

Actions such as the killing, torture and rape of defenceless human beings and the denial of freedom to worship, certainly violate human dignity. They assert that people are of value and entitled to flourish only if they are on our side or share our beliefs. We are right to call this evil, but it is ordinary human evil, not beyond understanding.

The goal of IS appears to be to create a Caliphate through the Middle East. This is not in itself necessarily bad. But the means taken to achieve it, which include the killing of people because of their religious allegiance, the use of torture and arbitrary killing as a way of subduing civilian populations, and carrying out exemplary, brutal executions to embroil foreign powers in the conflict and so draw recruits to IS, are morally unjustifiable. They all involve infringing grossly the dignity of one group of people in order to secure goals that have nothing to do with their welfare.

These actions, however repugnant, do not set ISIS in a unique category of pure evil. There are many other examples of using bad means to achieve dubious goals. Some of the more egregious have included the pattern bombing of Dresden to weaken civilian morale, the El Mozote massacre in El Salvador to empty the pond in which guerillas swam. The sustained detention of asylum seekers in the 'factories of mental illness' by Australia to deter others is another example of using bad means for a doubtful goal. Like IS's activities, these actions are comprehensible. They may be morally wrong and inhumane, but are not pure evil.

The consequences that can be anticipated to flow from unchecked IS actions are great. They include the killing and intimidation of civilian populations, displacement and impoverishment and more intense violent conflict in an already violent world. Human misery will grow. The bad consequences are disproportionate to any good goals.

The consequences of the Western use of military force, however, also need to be weighed. It is not clear that any good consequences of a bombing campaign, with its

inevitable civilian casualties, in concert with other militant groups and nations with their own interests and a bad human rights record, will outweigh the bad consequences. Consequences generate new consequences. Given that the goal of delivering Iraq and Syria from the threat of IS is unlikely to be achieved simply by bombs and rockets, it is predictable that at some time troops will be committed on the ground. Whether these are from nations outside the region or from nations and groups with interests in the region, it is also predictable that they will intensify, not heal, conflict.

Talking about the 'pure evil' of the actions of IS distracts us from the more exigent question whether our own actions are morally justifiable. The fate and the lives of millions of people depend on us weighing that question diligently.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.

Self-absorption dressed up as romanticism

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Wish I Was Here (M). Director: Zach Braff. Starring: Josh Gad, Ashley Greene. 107 minutes

Talk about your big disappointments. I'd been a fan of Zach Braff's work on the cult noughties comedy series *Scrubs* and on his feature filmmaking debut, 2004's *Garden State*. As an actor, writer and director Braff has always proved adept at balancing goofy wit and whimsy with warmth and even, occasionally, profundity.

I had no real qualms then about chipping in to his Kickstarter campaign to fund his follow up to *Garden State*; notwithstanding the backlash he received, as a wealthy man using his high profile to (arguably) exploit his fans - and the very concept of crowd funding - for pride and profit. I was easy enough with being exploited. The disappointment came with the discovery that the movie is crap. Braff stars as Aidan, a 35-year-old out-of-work actor. His wife, Sarah (Hudson), works an excruciating data entry job to support both him and their two cute and quirky kids, Tucker (Gagnon) and Grace (King). That the man-child Aidan apparently believes Sarah is living her dream while he traipses from one failed audition to another chasing his own reflects the depths of his self-delusion.

Aidan's father Gabe (Patinkin), meanwhile, has cancer, and has just blown the last of his savings on a failed experimental treatment. Those savings had been going towards Tucker and Grace's education at a private Jewish school (something upon which he insisted). Gabe is just one of the characters in this film who, in vain, tell Aidan it's time to grow up and start supporting his family.

Aidan's solution? He decides to take the kids' education into his own hands. He calls this 'home schooling', but it pretty much consists of taking them for trips into the desert or conning the salesman at a luxury car dealership (*Scrubs* co-star Donald Faison in an entirely wasted cameo) into letting them take a car for a spin, while spouting trite platitudes about life, death and the getting of wisdom.

It's not that the film is entirely charmless. Braff nails a few good gags (at the end of his tether, Aidan spies a brochure stand labelled &'This pamphlet will save your life&'; it is empty). His repartee with Tucker and Grace is frequently authentic and entertaining. And his conversation with a Rabbi about the existence of God is disarmingly frank for a mainstream film, even if its insights are trite.

But the film is plotless; a collection of frayed ends rather than tightly woven threads. And it is almost impossible to sympathise with Aidan and his flailing 'dream', especially when there is nothing in the film to suggest that he even has any particular talent as an actor. This is self-absorption dressed up as romanticism, and Braff does not always seem to be aware of the distinction.

The film features a motif of Aidan dressed as a sword-wielding space warrior; a returned childhood fantasy in which Aidan imagined himself as a hero. 'But what if we are the ones who need to be saved?' he muses. This is insincere. Aidan, really, is just trying to find other ways to be heroic. The film explores what it is to be a son/husband/father/*man*, and in so doing reinforces patriarchal norms.

For example, Aidan confronts Sarah's workplace sexual harasser in a supermarket, despite her expressly demanding that he not do so. We are expected to accept that he is entitled to her dream, even at the expense of his children's education and his wife's

happiness. It's white male wish fulfilment, pure and simple, albeit spilt through the sieve of suburban middle-class angst.

Braff attempts to seem enlightened, but doesn't succeed. Sure, Sarah's harasser, Jerry (Weston), is an odious creep who gets his comeuppance. On the other hand, Aidan's slovenly, self-involved brother Noah (Gadd) is able to have sex with a cute 'geek' girl simply by being rude to her and then designing a cool costume to wear to a comic convention. Talk about your male wish fulfilment fantasies.

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Just like the original TPV only nastier

AUSTRALIA

Kerry Murphy

Last week Immigration Minister Scott Morrison proposed migration law changes that would 'allow the government to commence processing asylum claims of the legacy caseload'. He described them as the implementation of 'more rapid processing and streamlined review arrangements, as detailed at the election', adding that 'any further delays in processing or repeated processing of claims simply adds to cost and uncertainty and prevents people getting on with their lives'.

In fact they do nothing of the sort. The changes are part of an amendment Bill consisting of 181 pages and over 250 pages of explanatory memorandum. This is not the only change in Parliament as there are two other Bills, one introduced in June to make it more difficult to be granted complementary protection, and easier for the Department to refuse cases. There was another that included the further strengthening of the already overly puritanical character provisions.

Those seeking asylum in Australia have a maze of at least 28 sections in the Migration Act to deal with (not including review rights), as well as the regulations, Ministerial Directions, and hundreds of leading cases. On my calculation, the changes make it at least 35 sections relevant for refugees and asylum seekers (not including the review rights), and adding two new temporary visas. There is also a whole new review mechanism called 'fast tracking' which is separate to the existing Refugee Review Tribunal provisions.

Whilst there are a number of very troubling provisions in the Bill, including the TPV series 3 and related Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa (SHEV), and the fast tracking proposal.

Those who have followed the issue will be familiar with the TPV that was first introduced in 1999. It led to an increase in boat arrivals because it prevented refugees from sponsoring their immediate families until they were granted a permanent visa. It also prevented travel to visit family in a safe third country. The TPV was made less draconian

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in 2005 when the ban on applying for other visas onshore was lifted. It was abolished under Rudd in 2008.

TPV series 2 was introduced in October 2013 but disallowed in the Senate. TPV series 3 reintroduces the worst features of the previous series 1 and 2, with the added bar of not being able to apply for any other visa including a permanent protection visa. This means the holder of the TPV 3 will be on a three year visa which allows them to work, but no family sponsorship, no travel to see family, and no certainty about their ability to stay in Australia beyond three years. How this helps a refugee to 'get on with their life' is a mystery to me.

The other visa is a new creation, the Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa (SHEV). No regulations are available yet so all we have is commentary by the Minister and the Department. This visa confuses the difference between refugee and migration and seems to require refugees to meet as yet unspecified work or study criteria, irrespective of their refugee case or possible person traumatic experiences. It will last for up to five years and allows a refugee to work. However they must work, or study, in a regional area (yet to be stated), and if they fail to work, or study for 40 of the 60 months, they will not be able to access as yet unstated other visas.

Requiring people to move to regional areas, and help where there are employment needs, is understandable. But making it a condition of moving beyond the temporary visa is totally unreasonable. Previously TPV 1 holders moved between regional areas in search of work, which was essentially seasonal. This was because many of the younger men could easily move around and were prepared to share accommodation. We saw some of the stresses refugees faced in the 2003 Tom Zubrycki documentary *Mollie and Mubarak (pictured)*.

What happens when there is no work, or the specialised language or medical services needed are not available in remote or rural areas? SHEV refugees will be in competition with the backpackers and other temporary visa holders, as well as Australians in these areas. Will people have to move back to a TPV if they cannot get work in a regional area? How will the older men manage to reskill, learn English and support their families? Already clients tell me that being separated from their families for more than three years will be too hard for them and their families.

The psychological deterioration on the TPV series 1 group is well documented by clinical psychologists. Re-traumatising refugees by putting them through this punishing process is totally unwarranted.

Another issue of concern is the fast tracking process which will probably be used for those who arrived after 12 August 2012 until 19 July 2013. This process has an emphasis on speed, not on fairness and this is reflected in the proposed law.

Getting these cases wrong is not like losing a game show completion. It means a refugee could face persecution. We should be trying to make sure the decisions are high quality ones, not quick ones.

In general the changes reflect an obsession with people arriving by boat, and a conflation of the need to reduce the risk of people drowning with the focus on punishing the refugees for coming in an irregular way, as most refugees do in the world. This is at a time of heightened security tensions and tougher character rules. The Minister is right that he promised to do these things, but these are promises it would be better he did not keep.

Kerry Murphy is a partner with the specialist immigration law firm D'Ambra Murphy Lawyers. He is a student of Arabic, former Jesuit Refugee Service coordinator, teaches at ANU, an IARC ambassador, and was recognised by AFR best lawyers survey as one of Australia's top immigration lawyers.

A place for women in church leadership

EUREKA STREET TV

Peter Kirkwood

For two weeks from this Sunday, the much anticipated Synod on the Family will be held in Rome. Those attending include around 150 bishops, some specially appointed clergy, a number of lay experts and 14 married couples, a total of about 250 participants from all corners of the globe. Only the bishops and clergy will have voting rights at the Synod.
The deliberations will be in two stages: this first gathering will discuss the multiple issues and problems surrounding contemporary family life - issues such as contraception, cohabiting couples, same sex unions, whether divorced Catholics who remarry should be allowed to receive communion - and in a second meeting twelve months later in 2015 they will formulate and vote on Church policy about the family.
Of course it is lay Catholics - not the bishops and clergy - who are living contemporary family life, and who will be most affected by Church teachings on the family. It seems obvious their expertise, experience and insights should be central to the upcoming Synod.
The Australian lay delegates to the Synod are: Ron and Mavis Pirola, chairs here of the bishops' Catholic Marriage and Family Council and one of the married couples chosen; Christopher Meney who is director of the Sydney Archdiocese's Life, Marriage and Family Centre; and Joan Clements, co-director of the World Organisation of Billings Ovulation Method Australia.
Several progressive Australian Catholic groups under the umbrella of the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Renewal made a push for women's participation in the Synod. They nominated former NSW Labor Premier, Kristina Keneally as a possible participant, but she was not chosen. In this interview, she talks about her hopes and frustrations with the Synod, and more broadly about women's and lay leadership in the Church.
Kristina Keneally is one of the most prominent lay Catholics in this country. She was born in the USA and met her Australian husband at the World Youth Day Congress held in Czestochowa, Poland in 1991. After they got married she moved to Australia, and became an Australian citizen.
She has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science, and a Master of Arts in Religious Studies from the University of Dayton, a Catholic university in Dayton, Ohio. In 1990 she was elected President of the National Association of Students at US Catholic Colleges and Universities, and was chosen by the US Catholic Bishops' Conference as one of eight delegates to attend the 1991 World Youth Day.
Keneally worked as a primary school teacher and youth worker before marriage and having three children. In 2003 she was elected as a Labor politician to the NSW State Parliament, and from 2007 she held the Ministries of Disability Services, Ageing and Planning before becoming Premier in 2009.
She is a former athlete and has a strong interest in sport and physical fitness. After leaving politics in 2011 she was chair of Basketball Australia till 2012, then its CEO from 2012-2014. She is on the boards and is patron of a number of charities and philanthropic organisations.

This interview is in two parts - Part 1 (10 mins) above, and Part 2 (5 mins)

below:

Peter Kirkwood is a freelance writer and video consultant with a master's degree from the Sydney College of Divinity.

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Taking care of business

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas


Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda, The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

Using the Uber app in the city of brothers

CREATIVE

Tess Ashton

Advertisement for Uber, The Thinker, my sister and daughter and all things about love in Philadelphia My loving sister who lives in Philadelphia first city of America city of a thousand trees and slim pretty streets where window boxes spill with flowers and 4th of July flags and people gather on pavement chairs tipped out doorways over high front stairs terrace-house knees negotiating close as the tree limbs colonnading speak brotherly love drink sisterly wines on hot Friday nights My sister I was saying has the Uber app on her phone we used it twice when we visited right now I'm started… she Uber'd to get us round the corner me, husband Lloyd and grandson Caspar from Parkway Apartments art deco with a hint of gothic flair in Logan Square to terrace house digs in sweet Meredith heart of the arts quarter where Rocky at the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art is hot property the city's latest addition to its statue collection as I was saying enlivened by our exciting reunion with our daughter Alex and granddaughter Olivia down from Canada on that first evening at my sister's we and Caspar wafted one with the lift that once carried education board people out to the marble edge of Winter St and elegant Pennsylvania Avenue where classical trees loftily mind the people below who stop by Rodin's 'The Thinker' and those mesmerised by the art at the Barnes Foundation who come out bearing Cezanne apple and pear candle fruit mementos that make fools of customs officers at airports - ha! and bring postcards of Matisse and Picasso riches home for mantel pieces High classical trees that cool people who visit the science museum of Benjamin Franklin in the summer season and who loll on the grass with homeless people like lionesses while grand children play on the swans and the giant First Nation people at Logan Circle but re my sister and Uber our light toes had barely reached the pavement our hearts one with the hot American night when our Uber appeared a black Chevvy sculpture a mere click of the fingers from there to here Denzel Washington quipped hubby later was the driver tall as a Pennsylvania night and lustrous as a god we were fated to be in possession of for a moment gave reason to later

muse on the panoply of guiding trees the dark bronze sculpture in Rodin's Gallery garden we would pass several times on our walk to Wholefoods organic supermarket where they employ disabled people and yellow shopping bags have LOVE in big letters a take on the famous Love sculpture in the Love Park on the JFK Boulevard by the fountain where the kids all rush and play in the heat of July holidays It was 'The Thinker' got me humming through the week that came the plaque explained on close inspection is the top small figure created for a sculpture of Dante's 'The Gates Of Hell' then the artist enlarged his expression to personify all inspiration behind creative thought an answer to my old question about what's behind all things poetic bizarre this driver for a moment personified the revelation that love is in motion here in Philadelphia In the back of his Chevvy our stuff and my family tumbled about the leather excitedly from the front I marveled the way of our limo-trained driver the pay-later scheme completed the golden mile next day we returned from being out to find Caspar's red running shoes glowing on the doorstep like Cinder's slippers dropped in the getaway returned by Uber a surprising thing for a taxi driver But Uber is like no other fits well in the city of brothers where Penn the Father devoted to St Paul and words of love and freedom said: 'Love is above all; and when it prevails in us all, we shall all be lovely, and in love with God and one with another' hail to Philadelphia's far walking father and my sister, daughter, grand daughter husband, and grandson and the Uber driver and trees and art in Pennsylvania **Side note:** America's first city named by its far-seeing owner William Penn who dreamed it all devotee of St Paul and America's first Quaker set the hopeful standard for extravagant love his city plan and libertarian principles inspired Benjamin Franklin Thomas Jefferson the Declaration of Independence and the American constitution invited British and European persecuted Hugenots, Mennonites Amish, Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews in time art lovers with Penn's Oxford training people with money got persuaded made bronze statues of mothers and fathers heros and heroines planted them like muses on the ridiculously clever town planner's broad plazas

Tess Ashton is an Auckland poet who introduces poetry to the people she works with in her role as a Training for Work program manager.
Window box image by Shutterstock.

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Going to war is a decision for parliament

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst

The Prime Minister has announced that we are going to war with the Islamic State. He hasn't actually declared war but effectively that is what has happened. Waging war becomes business as usual rather than out of the ordinary.

We know from recent history that such commitments can escalate through what is called mission creep. One relatively small step can be followed in time by steadily larger ones. Any such decision should not be taken lightly by Australians. But it is taken and announced by executive action without much formal political discussion.

There is a stark contrast between going to war and passing government legislation through Parliament. This has been graphically illustrated by recent parliamentary struggles over the government's budget.

In the latter, Parliament is essential. In the former, it doesn't even have to be recalled if it is not already sitting. Our Parliamentary schedule hasn't been altered.

The difference between the approach by the British and Australian governments is striking. In Britain, Prime Minister Cameron, despite having a large majority, made the parliamentary debate in Westminster central, while in Australia Prime Minister Abbott spoke only of 'updating' the Parliament on his return from New York. His emphasis was on consultations with his Cabinet.

There should be greater involvement by Parliament in Australia for reasons both of substance and symbolism.

There is no chance that the involvement of Parliament would change the decision to be part of a war against the Islamic State because it has bipartisan major party support. Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has made that clear, with only the slightest qualification about the need to avoid upwardly creeping commitments.

The case for parliamentary involvement through the recall of Parliament, despite the expense and inconvenience of doing so, stems rather from a recognition of the multiple roles of Parliament. Too often Parliament is discussed only in terms of legislative power.

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Its other roles include non-voting ways of keeping governments responsible, such as Question Time and parliamentary committees, as well as its representative role as a popular assembly meeting to inject the people's viewpoints into public deliberations.
So it is not just a question of whether the government has the substantive support of the Parliament, but of whether the nation's formal representative body effectively marks the occasion of a serious national commitment of troops into a combat situation.
That is why there is a strong case for the immediate recall of Parliament whenever a nation goes to war. We must draw the line somewhere and there will be minor interventions where this is not justified. But given the history of the Iraq and Afghan wars this intervention should not be classified as minor. The commitment is already substantial and looks open-ended.
A special recall of Parliament would be worthwhile for several reasons.
First, it would formally recognise the seriousness of the step being taken. It should be the occasion of major speeches by the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader, supported by the Nationals Leader, the Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministers and their shadow ministers in the Opposition. They would speak comprehensively and for the parliamentary record. That record is important when we look back in years to come to reflect on where this step eventually has taken us.
Secondly, it would be an opportunity to put alternative points of view. At the moment those views are being put by Labor MP Melissa Parke and by Christine Milne, Greens Leader, and her colleagues. But others may come forward given the formal opportunity to do so. They would be representing alternative views which undoubtedly exist in the community and should be heard.
Thirdly, a recall would appropriately focus wider community attention. As a nation we should forget our daily routines for a moment and concentrate our full attention whenever a momentous decision such as going to war is taken on our behalf. It should never just be business as usual.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and a Canberra Times *columnist.*

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Rise of the corporate cowboys

AUSTRALIA

Tony Smith

A previous Prime Minister reckoned that he aimed to make Australia the world's biggest share-holding democracy. He succeeded in changing the political culture to have a greater focus on individualism, financial worth and competition.

Unfortunately, when people pin their hopes for a just and fair society to a corporation, they can be sadly disappointed. A spate of deaths around the country suggests that many corporations have plenty of power to influence governments to produce policies and legislation convenient for their operations, but fail to take responsibility for their bad outcomes.

The saddest aspect of these deaths - some in workplaces and some on the roads - is that they seem to have been very easily avoidable, and if this so, then management was negligent. Young men have died cleaning out apparatus or in scaffolding collapses. Women and children have died when heavy vehicles collided with them. Given that the Abbott Government has assiduously pursued Labor over the tragic deaths that occurred during installation of ceiling insulation, we have grounds to hope that it might take a stronger line in bringing corporate cowboys into line with decency.

Although governments might like to cry 'hands off' where private business is concerned, they cannot evade responsibility entirely. During the Wran years in New South Wales, a strong member of the railways union complained about a deliberate but tacit policy of sending more freight onto the roads. He implied that he thought that some ministers were receiving inducements from trucking companies and fuel suppliers to support the policy. Either that or they were promised some future benefit. We can debate forever the social impact of having more heavy vehicles on the roads, but the old slogan applies - 'privatise the profits' while letting the community pay the costs.

When the BP shareholders accept their dividends this year, some of them might spare a thought for the laws which enable the company's profits to grow. A few might even wonder whether the company's management policies, which are predicated on the maximisation of profit, meant that its trucks could be sent out without adequate maintenance, or their drivers despatched without proper training and rest periods.

The loss of some 40 Australian lives in the MH17 air disaster was a tragedy that the federal government rightly addressed. It took firm action and spoken plainly to many people in positions of great power. Coalition policies on workplace relations and economic development make it questionable whether it will take effective action to challenge unscrupulous management in industries such as mining and building. As far as road deaths are concerned, it seems to think that spending more on major roads is the best way to increase safety.

There are, however, serious problems with this approach. As one veteran state MP told

me, he thought that addressing one difficult road simply shifts the bottleneck to another place. Another problem is that improving the road surface inevitably leads to demands for higher speed limits. When this happens, the safety gains made by the improved road are lost. When the road between Lithgow and Bathurst received a deal of work, the limit was lifted from 100 km/h to 110 km/h in a kind of macabre experiment. I say 'macabre' because the only evidence worth considering would involved fatalities. Ironically perhaps, the work had been promised to eliminate bends after the death of a local television newsreader when a truck's load spilled onto her car. The government of the day probably felt additional responsibility because it had raised the height limits for such loads.

It should not have escaped the notice of governments at every level that we so-called 'baby-boomers' are becoming a hefty bulge in the population pyramid. We have always been that but as we age, our needs change. Some small part of maintaining independence into maturity is the ability to be mobile. Of course that can mean walking but it also means travelling longer distances, and given the poor state of public transport in many areas, especially rural areas, a car remains important. Policies which depend on raising speed limits are not conducive to the safety of drivers with slower reaction times than the very young should have. It is in the interests of general safety to have roads which can be travelled safely at a lower speed, such as 80 kph..

Following the deaths incurred by a BP tanker in North East Victoria earlier this year, it was appropriate that the company's fleet was grounded and inspected. It was right management gave public assurances that the driver would co-operate fully with inquiries. Perhaps he will be found to have been at fault. Truck drivers are almost always males, while victims are not, but that is another story.

While drivers are easy and direct targets for public anger and potentially for imprisonment, perhaps it is time that corporate management began to take ultimate responsibility for polices that minimise maintenance and expect drivers to meet dangerous schedules. Subsidising heavy vehicles by building solid roads at public expense is one matter. Allowing the destruction of lives is quite another. Perhaps there should be clear and immediate penal provisions for any company executives or directors conducting their businesses in a manner dangerous to the public or their employees.

Tony Smith is a political scientist and former academic who lives near Bathurst in Central West NSW.

Corporate cowboy image by Shutterstock.

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Society says freak show must go on

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

It is a regrettable reality of human nature that witnessing the suffering and anguish of particular individuals can be a source of entertainment for the rest of us. Making fun of mental illness has a long history that unfortunately continues to the present day.

This was highlighted in the past week in the reporting of plans of the Royal Agricultural Society of WA to offer an amusement at this year's Perth Royal Show based on the notorious Bethlem Sanatorium in London, commonly known as Bedlam.

Bethlem was known for its cruel treatment of mental illness patients as far back as the 13th century. Today it provides specialist care for more than 450,000 sufferers a year, and seeks to avoid the deliberate stigmatisation that was for so long part of its method of operation. The Perth Show attraction was to feature actors posing as disturbed psychiatric patients from centuries ago, when they were displayed as a public spectacle.

The chief executive of the trust that runs Bethlem, Dr Matthew Patrick, said in an open letter that the attraction would 'foster discrimination and promote the perception of &'scary mental health patients&' which [would] undoubtedly deter people from seeking the help they need'.

Mental health advocates criticised the Perth Show's reinforcement of negative and inaccurate stereotypes. SANE Australia's Jack Heath said: 'We had thought that these sorts of attitudes or making jokes about these sorts of things had been put to bed, you know, 10 - 20 years ago, so it's a great surprise to us.'

Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan said he was most concerned by the Agricultural Society's 'perpetuating the sort of idea that mental illness is something abhorrent and something that affects others and something that we should be frightened of.'

In reality, he said, mental health is something we are all close to. 'One in five Australians experience a mental illness every year.'

The Agricultural Society has responded to the criticism by merely modifying the

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attraction, removing all references to mental health. However it remains to be seen whether the revised theme of 'the outbreak of a deadly contagion' represents much of an improvement.

Judging from what we know, it is still a something of a freak show, stigmatising individuals and making fun of their suffering. If we ask ourselves how we should approach contagion, we might urge the physical isolation of those carrying the ebola virus, for example. But not their stigmatisation. The plight of these humans is certainly not a subject for amusement.

The Agricultural Society of WA has been around since 1831 and is apparently a respected and influential institution within the community. Its chief executive Peter Cooper claims the Show is 'the most important community event in the State'. But his limp response to the Bethlem attraction controversy suggests the Society was more interested in appeasing critics than exercising leadership by fostering responsible social attitudes.

It could have owned the criticism and made a positive statement about understanding mental illness and how to deal with it. But instead the statement merely said the Society did not want to cause offence.

 *Michael Mullins is editor of* Eureka Street.

Image: 18th century Bethlem portrayed in a scene from William Hogarth's A Rake's Progress *(*Wikimedia Commons*)*

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