John O’Sullivan to edit Quadrant in 2015 and 2016

KEITH WINDSCHUTTLE

I am pleased to announce that the distinguished British journalist John O’Sullivan will be editor of Quadrant for the next two years. John is one of international journalism’s most experienced editors, having spent nearly a decade in New York as editor of National Review, and in Washington DC with the Nixon Center where he edited National Interest and the Heritage Foundation where he edited Policy Review. Most recently he lived in Budapest as director of the Danube Institute and associate editor of the Hungarian Review.

From 2001 to 2003 he was editor-in-chief of United Press International and from 2008 to 2011 executive editor of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty in Prague. He remains editor-at-large and a frequent contributor to National Review. From 1998 to 2001 he was an editorial consultant to Hollinger International Inc and a leading member of the journalistic team that created the National Post, Canada’s first national newspaper. In the 1980s he was editorial page and op-ed editor of both the New York Post and the London Times.

John’s book The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister (2006) on the central roles played by Pope John Paul II, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the collapse of communism and the revival of Western market democracies, has been published in English, Portuguese, Spanish, Czech, Polish, Italian and Hungarian.

In 1987–88 he served as a Special Adviser to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Downing Street. During this period and after he left Downing Street, he served informally as a regular speech-writer for the Prime Minister. Later he was one of the small team that assisted Lady Thatcher in the writing of her two volumes of memoirs.

In 1996 he was the founder and co-chairman of the New Atlantic Initiative, an international bipartisan effort dedicated to revigoring and expanding the Atlantic community of democracies. Launched by Czech President Vaclav Havel and Lady Thatcher, the NAI played a major role in bringing the countries of central and eastern Europe into NATO.

During John’s tenure as editor, I am stepping down as editor of Quadrant magazine but taking up two new positions, one as chair of the board of Quadrant Magazine Ltd, the other as editor-in-chief, with a general oversight of the magazine and of Quadrant Online and Quadrant Books.

Elizabeth Prior Jonson, who has been chair of the board of Quadrant Magazine Ltd for the past seventeen years, has stepped down from that position. I want to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge how valuable has been her service to the organisation. She became chair at a precarious moment in the magazine’s life in late 1997, when former editor Robert Manne had abruptly resigned and new editor Paddy McGuinness was picking up the pieces and arranging to move the office from Melbourne back to Sydney. Since then, under her chairmanship, the publication has not only survived but gone from strength to strength. During my seven years as editor, her support was unfaltering and her counsel invaluable. Fortunately for the organisation, she will stay on as a member of the board.
Aboriginal Voting Myth

SIR: Wolfgang Kasper is wrong when he states that Aborigines “had been denied the vote at federal elections before 1967” (January-February 2015). It is regrettable that a man of his erudition should add his support to perpetuating that myth.

The first Commonwealth Parliament passed the Franchise Act 1902 which provided: “No aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa or the islands of the Pacific, except New Zealand, shall be entitled to have his name placed on the electoral roll, unless so entitled under Section 41 of the Constitution.”

S. 41 stated: “No adult person who has or acquires a right to vote at elections for the more numerous Houses of the Parliament of a State shall, while the right continues, be prevented by any law of the Commonwealth from voting at elections for either House of Parliament of the Commonwealth.”

Before Federation there had been significant acquisition of Aboriginal voting rights in the colonies. However, the Commonwealth government ignored, as a matter of policy, the proper effect of those provisions until 1949, when the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1949 enfranchised federally “an aboriginal native of Australia ... [who] is entitled under the law of the State in which he resides to be enrolled as an elector of that State and, upon enrolment, to vote at elections for the more numerous Houses of Parliament of that State”. That Act also gave the federal vote to Aboriginal serving or former members of the defence forces.

During the next decade, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia passed legislation entitling Aborigines to vote at state elections. Aborigines were given the vote in West Australian state elections in 1962 and in Queensland state elections in 1965.

Further, in 1962 the Commonwealth passed legislation giving all Aboriginal adults the vote for Commonwealth elections with the proviso that an Aboriginal person had the option whether or not to have his or her name on the electoral roll.

Thus, Aboriginal people had the federal vote well before the 1967 referendum.

As to citizenship, the subject of another common myth, the Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948 made everyone born in Australia an Australian citizen: before that we were all, including Aborigines, British subjects.

The purpose of the 1967 referendum concerned two provisions of the Constitution, namely S. 51 xxvi and S. 127. S. 51 xxvi stated: “The Parliament shall, subject to the Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to: ... (xxvi) The people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.” S. 127 stated: “In reckoning the numbers of people of the Commonwealth or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.”

S. 127 was simply concerned with calculating the population of the states for the purpose of allocating seats in the House of Representatives and per capita grants and preventing Queensland and Western Australia from gaining extra seats or funds due to their large Aboriginal populations. It was, of course, discriminatory.

The 1967 referendum was a vote on the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) Act 1967 which became law on August 10, 1967, following the referendum. The actual question in the referendum was: “Do you approve the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled—‘An Act to alter the Constitution so as to omit certain words relating to the People of the Aboriginal Race in any State and so that Aboriginals are to be counted in reckoning the Population?’” The successful referendum resulted in the deletion of the words “other than the aboriginal race in any State” in S. 51 xxvi and the deletion of the whole of S. 127 from the Constitution.

No doubt the myth that Aborigines gained the federal vote because of the 1967 referendum will continue, helped along by assertions like that by Wolfgang Kasper.

Mervyn Kimm
Mallacoota, Vic

SIR: It is hard to dispute Wolfgang Kasper’s central contention that constitutionally entrenched discrimination in favour of one ethnic group leads to social disharmony and is self-defeating. But he is in error to characterise the likely referendum on indigenous recognition as seeking to entrench positive discrimination.

On the contrary, the most likely referendum proposals will seek to remove two race-based clauses. One is an historical dead letter clause sanctioning denial of voting rights based on race (S. 25) and the second empowers the Commonwealth to make laws that discriminate on the basis of race (S. 51 xxvi). Given Mr Kasper’s view that race is a problematic concept at best, a view fully shared by the 2011 Expert Panel, he should logically support these changes.

Mr Kasper is also in error when
he repeats the common misconception that the 1967 referendum granted voting rights to indigenous Australians. It did not. That was achieved federally by the 1962 Electoral Act. Moreover, Aboriginal men were enfranchised in state elections in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales in the 1850s, although it took until the 1960s for this to occur in Western Australia and Queensland. The 1967 referendum repealed S. 127 under which Aborigines were not counted in the national census. Somewhat bizarrely, it also amended S. 51 xxvi to extend the Commonwealth power to pass laws based on race to indigenous peoples who were previously excluded from this power.

In proposing the repeal of S. 51 xxvi, the Expert Panel proposed retaining the existing Commonwealth power to pass laws with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples so as to preserve the power under which cultural heritage protection, land title and incorporation laws had been passed and to preserve the validity of those laws, a recommendation also supported by the Joint Select Parliamentary Committee in its recent interim report. But the panel proposed to circumscribe this power by inserting in the Constitution a general rule against discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion or national origin. This proposal has garnered little support from conservatives and is unlikely to be endorsed, as Noel Pearson has recently conceded.

In short, there is little evidence to date that the emerging referendum wording will evince a “surreptitious intention … that positive discrimination and redistribution policies are to be given permanent constitutional foundation” as Mr Kasper asserts.

Lastly, his fears that some form of recognition will be proposed for insertion into the preamble to the Constitution is also misplaced for the simple reason that there is currently no preamble to the Australian Constitution. (This has been overlooked by numerous commentators, including several prime ministers, in recent statements on the topic.) Indeed, both the Expert Panel and the Joint Committee rejected this idea on the basis that crafting a totally new preamble, incorporating necessarily much more than indigenous recognition, was neither desirable nor capable of winning widespread support.

Graham Bradley
(member of 2011 Expert Panel)
via e-mail

Fossil Fuels, Here to Stay

SIR: I refer to Stephen Kates’s review of David Archibald’s book *Twilight of Abundance: Why Life in the 21st Century will be Nasty, Brutish and Short* (September 2014). It is fanciful to suggest that one of the reasons why it will be “nasty, brutish and short” is because of, as Kates puts it, “the potential for the planet to run out of cheap sources of energy in the next half-century or so”.

I acknowledge that the price of oil won’t stay as low as it is at the moment and other forms of energy may become cheaper as time goes by, but it is fanciful to believe that we will run out of oil—or other fossil fuels—in the next half-century. It was fanciful when Kates wrote his review and when Archibald wrote his book.

An article in the May 2013 edition of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the title of which was “What If We Never Run Out Of Oil?”, points out that, far from reaching the limits of oil reserves, we are continuing to discover more thanks to the fracking revolution which, by the way, is also discovering huge amounts of gas. Kates acknowledges this when he says, “Is this true? We seem to be finding new energy sources at every turn and new techniques for extracting known deposits from existing sources. Yet our resources may prove to be finite after all.” Yet Kates seems to suspend reason—perhaps because this “happens to be Archibald’s area of expertise”—when he goes on to quote Archibald, who claims that peak production of oil was achieved in 2005.

Is this true? According to the *Index Mundi* website, basing its information on the US Energy Information Administration, world crude oil production in 2005 was 72,176,090 barrels of oil per day. According to the International Energy Agency website, world crude oil production in September 2014 was 93,800,000 barrels per day.

There may be any number of reasons why production of oil may drop, even substantially, in the next half-century, but not because the world is running out of oil and other fossil fuels.

Christopher Rule
Gilmore, ACT

Failed Interventions

SIR: Professor Michael Evans (January-February 2015) has given us a fascinating and discouraging insight into the world of counter-insurgency. I only wish he could have developed his theme further.

The failure of counterinsurgency programs from Vietnam to Afghanistan owes more to Western arrogance than to the failures of implementation of the various campaigns. In part, Evans blames a lack of strategy. Worse, there have been failures to define an objective in any of the campaigns, with the result that the objective and therefore the strategy become very plastic, subject to political whims or military fashions. For me, the failure arises from a presumption that we in the West know better and can do better because we are wealthier and smarter. The prob-
lem is that those we believe we are helping don't agree. Moreover, many Westerners don't agree either, so Western leaders cannot achieve the persistent domestic political support that effective counterinsurgency demands.

In respect of insurgency in the Muslim world, the West’s failure owes much to its refusal to factor the question of religion into the debate. Whether the West is seen by the insurgents as Christian or, more likely, irreligious, we in the West are infidels and thus by definition the enemy. We cannot win that battle despite the blood and treasure wasted in trying to prove that we can.

Those committed to intervention argue that the threat of Islamist insurgencies from Nigeria to Pakistan is, for the West, an existential threat. It may well be for the polities of those countries; for the United States, Australia, the UK and others in the West, any threat that does exist is essentially a minor challenge to domestic law enforcement.

Michael O'Connor
Home Hill, Qld

SC or QC, or Nothing?

SIR: We are still reading of controversy surrounding QCs and SCs. Some say it should be one or the other. Some say they should no longer be appointed at all. I fall into the latter category. In whichever style or title, the notion has long outlived its usefulness.

In an age where legal costs are an increasingly serious issue, we keep appointing people to a rank that leads only to increased litigation costs. As to access to justice, and as to the costs of justice itself, they are *grosse impedimenta*. Generally they charge a lot of money for what they do. Per day, they charge considerably more than several working persons could ever hope to charge in a week. Worse, though, the rank has been diluted greatly over recent years and it is doubtful if all of those appointed QC or SC these days would have made it even as late as twenty years ago.

Chief Justice Warren of Victoria would not be of this view, of course. She is the sole appointing authority in Victoria—she determines who is in and who is out—in contrast to New South Wales and Queensland. She has said she undertakes in that role “a wide and demanding consultative process”. But in 2014 it was the state Attorney General Robert Clark, and not the Chief Justice, who turned SCs into QCs in Victoria (without much of a consultative process in evidence) if they wanted it—and most did, strangely. That consultative process she undertakes must surely take up much valuable time, at public cost, which could be better spent on other things.

Be that as it may, in her words of welcome, in a court of not three but five judges, the Chief Justice in December 2014 obligingly emphasised to the new Silks their privileged rank—as they each took a quaint Dickensian bow. She reminded them of the important role of pro bono work—and who will deny that? But at the same time she urged them to recall they are now Senior Counsel—leaders of the Bar—who generally should not be appearing in court without a Junior.

Therein lies the rub, and it must not have been obvious to the Chief Justice that she was being inconsistent. The need for pro bono work has arisen because people cannot afford lawyers any more, one reason being some stupid traditions of the legal profession which have priced lawyers out of the reach of ordinary people. Prime example: Senior Counsel should not appear in court if unaccompanied by a Junior. This is completely indefensible and it is one of the reasons ultimately why a need for pro bono work has arisen.

This can’t have been obvious to the Chief Justice, but it shows the matter was not thought through.

The time for having any arrangements in place to appoint Senior Counsel has long gone by. The legal profession needs to move into the twenty-first century or be bypassed by accountants and others who in various areas can do just as good a job. There is no need for accountants to do pro bono work, and there is no need to employ both a Senior and Junior accountant for any purpose. Nor is there any rule that a Senior Surgeon should not operate without a Junior Surgeon.

It was the irascible Hayden Starke, and not Lionel Murphy, who was on the right track nearly 100 years ago when he showed leadership by never becoming QC.

Damien Cremeanc via e-mail

Lawrence and Fascism

SIR: Robert Darroch, President of the D.H. Lawrence Society of Australia, claims (January-February 2015) that in the novel *Kangaroo* Lawrence had discovered and was exposing Australian fascism. In fact the “fascist secret army” consisted of patriotic men, often ex-servicemen, quite understandably alarmed by communism. When, in its best-known action, New Guard member Francis de Groot upstaged Premier Jack Lang at the opening of Sydney Harbour Bridge, it was said that he was furious Lang had upstaged his friend, the Jewish Governor-General Sir Isaac Isaacs.

If Lawrence was exposing fascism, he himself was associated with something a good deal worse. He was in important ways a proto-Nazi, and at the worst, gas-chamber, end of Nazism at that. Lawrence, who like the Nazis believed in mystical “blood” and “soil” (*blut und boden*) like them...
believed in the mass extermination of the unfit:

If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace, with a military band playing softly, and a Cinematograph working brightly; then I’d go out in the back streets and main streets and bring them in, all the sick, the halt, and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks; and the band would softly bubble out the “Hallelujah Chorus”.

There are many anti-Semitic references in Lawrence’s writing, and it was probably mere oversight that Jews were not included in that passage. Lawrence wrote in 1913:

My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and bridle. What do I care about knowledge. All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling interventions of mind, or moral, or what not.

Hitler would have approved, as he would doubtless have approved Lawrence’s opinion of the bourgeoisie who would eventually fight fascism, flying Spitfires and sailing to Dunkirk. When a London publisher turned down Sons and Lovers on the ground that its “want of reticence” would render it unacceptable to the public, Lawrence responded with a wholesale denunciation of the English people:

Curse the blasted, jelly-boned swines, the slimy, the belly-wriggling invertebrates, the miserable sodding rotters, the flaming sods, the snivelling, dribbling, dithering palsied pulse-less lot that make up England today … God blast them, wishwash. Exterminate them, slime.

Hal G.P. Colebatch
Nedlands, WA

Contrarians

SIR: Nicholas Hasluck (January-February 2015) asserts that “contrarians … are mostly well-known … for the predictability of their opinions—whether they conform to the fashion of the day”. I beg to differ.

The American philosopher Marilyyne Robinson defines contrarian thinking as follows: “The prevailing view of things can be assumed to be wrong, and … its opposite, being its image or shadow, can also be assumed to be wrong … There are other ways of thinking, for which better arguments can be made.” In other words, it’s not about disagreeing with a prevailing mindset. A contrarian is willing to think about complex topics, often from the inside out, seeking to answer a different set of questions that most are unwilling to consider. That implies a real independence of outlook, and a complete lack of predictability.

Ludwig von Mises made an important distinction: “The masses, the hosts of common men, do not conceive any ideas, sound or unsound. They only choose between the ideologies developed by the intellectual leaders of mankind. But their choice is final and determines the course of events. If they prefer bad doctrines nothing can prevent disaster.” He was undoubtedly a contrarian.

Peter McCloy
Wollombi, NSW

A Coincident Balloon

SIR: I have in common with my namesake columnist several other attributes, such as nonagenarian status, a love of the language, Second World War service, a regular magazine contribution and even publication in Quadrant, but credibility of coincidence was stretched to the limit with his description in the November issue of a near collision with a hot-air balloon. A similar monster nearly clipped my house on its way to a nearby park; but an unscheduled and involuntary descent to earth came not from a balloon, as in his case, but from a parachute which miraculously avoided the numerous trees on our property to land safe and sound. The parachutist simply gathered his canopy and strode away in silence.

I can but quote my namesake’s comments: “Well, what’s so remarkable about all that? No one was killed, were they? Nobody injured? No significant damage? And don’t I say that one of the main reasons I regard my whole life as a blessed one is that it’s seldom been dull for long?” That is another thing we hold in common.

L. Peter Ryan
Clayfield, Qld

This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.
Exactly eight weeks separate the Sydney siege in which the gunman and two of his innocent victims died and the Copenhagen shootings, occurring as we go to press, in which the victims so far number two dead and five injured (including several policemen). A lone gunman was apparently the murderer. He fled. Police have since killed him in a gun-battle.

In between these two events there have been at least fourteen other major terrorist attacks by Islamists accounting for approximately 1000 dead and many more wounded in countries including France, Iraq, Nigeria, Cameroon and Pakistan. All these murders are horrifying, but some more so than others. The murder of 132 children of army personnel in a Peshawar school by the local Taliban was unusually vicious, but the mass killing of 150 women by ISIS for refusing to marry their captors more or less matched it in cruelty.

What makes the Copenhagen murders, like the murders at Charlie Hebdo, stand out from the general ruck of Islamist massacres is neither the number of their victims (relatively few) nor the cruelty of their methods (shootings in the main) but their explicitly ideological and anti-liberal character. They belong to a mini-series of threats and murders, starting with the Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa against Salman Rushdie and the stabbing of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, that are justified by the murderers and their religious superiors as necessary to limit free speech and, in particular, to outlaw what Islam regards as blasphemy. These murders even aim to elevate blasphemy—long a dead-letter in Western societies (which smugly provide blasphemous art with state subsidies)—into a capital crime.

That motive was clear both at the office of Charlie Hebdo which specialises in outraging all religious sensibilities and at the Copenhagen conference where the gunman fired between thirty and 200 random shots into a crowd gathered to discuss “Art, Blasphemy and Free Expression”. Inna Shevchenko, a Ukrainian activist from Femen, was midway through arguing that whenever free speech is being praised in European debates, “there’s always a ‘but’...” when another “but” rang out in the form of gunfire.

Western political and intellectual establishments, in effect, confirm the “but” with a sad regretful shaking of heads. They marched arm-in-arm along the Champs Elysees in defence of free speech after Charlie Hebdo, but in recent years they have imposed significant restrictions on it—and continue to do so. Being devoutly secular, they can’t actually institute overt anti-blasphemy laws. But they can and do restrict political speech on vaguer grounds such as “offensiveness” to racial or religious groups. And that is a larger step than one might first think.

Restrictions on free speech, especially in the English-speaking world, have traditionally avoided criminalising the content of speech. They have been justified instead on grounds of its effects: on national security, the reputation of individuals (libel), and public order (“fighting words”). To prohibit speech because its content might offend someone or a group of people—especially when its offensiveness is determined by those supposedly offended—is to replace free by licensed speech and to place the burden of proof on the speaker rather than the censor or heckler.

Over time—and the regulation of speech has been advancing for several decades—that shift in perspective begins to alter how the authorities treat ordinary citizens. Recent British media reports revealed that several police authorities had asked newsagents to hand over the names of customers who ordered copies of Charlie Hebdo. This might be the usual serio-comic blunder by Mr Plod, but the fact that it happened in several areas suggests something more worrying—a kind of pre-emptive cultural cringe or “Round up the usual victims” on grounds of community cohesion.

Now, this is not an uncomplicated matter. Good manners should deter us from insulting other people over their faiths on most occasions. In what used to be normal circumstances I don’t think that I would have had much time for either Charlie Hebdo or Femen (which, for the puzzled, is a kind of ideological striptease collective devoted to challenging patriarchal power). Charlie Hebdo’s cartoons struck me as crude, vulgar, wounding, and not very funny; Femen I originally admired when they challenged genuine oppression but they lost my sympathy when they interrupted a Catholic Mass naked and challenged not patriarchal power but the
worship of ordinary believers.

But these are not normal times. And the one occasion when good manners should not determine our actions is when others threaten us with death or maiming if our speech offends their faith. We are then under an obligation to defend free speech, if not by blaspheming ourselves, then at least by protecting the right to blaspheme expressed in the speech of fellow citizens. Not only does the right to free speech include the right to offend, moreover; it is largely meaningless without that right. Speech that offends no one requires no protection.

Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, the right to be offended is also an important right because, even if we are reluctant to admit the fact, it frees us from the prison of unconsidered opinion and the prejudices of our own religious-cum-ideological community.

It is not hard to understand, however, why political leaders shrink from this “hard” defence of free speech. Nor why they don’t say what the murderers are about in unambiguous terms. Plainly the Copenhagen and *Charlie Hebdo* murders flow in some sense or degree from the Islamic faith of the murderers. The murderers often say so, citing chapter and verse of the Koran in justification. Many Islamic scholars, respected by the faithful, confirm their claims. And opinion polls suggest that large numbers of the faithful share this view. Given all these facts it is plainly absurd to argue that crimes like those in Copenhagen “have nothing to do with Islam”.

But there are a billion and a half Muslims in the world. Most are peaceful, law-abiding, decent people and good neighbours. Governments want neither to frighten them, stigmatisate them, nor drive them towards a sympathy with the jihadist murderers. Sensibly, governments want nothing to do with a war on Islam. So they become coy, evasive, double-tongued and almost terminally unwilling to admit that a jihadist murder is either terrorist in nature—the Fort Hood murders were classified as “workplace violence”; the Sydney siege murderer dismissed as mentally ill—or relates in any way to Islam.

An especially striking example of this was pointed out in the May 2009 issue of *Quadrant* by Peter Day. Australia’s official parliamentary brief on Islam, *Muslim Australians*, described the belief that apostates from Islam should receive the death penalty as a “misconception” about the religion. This was written by a distinguished Muslim scholar who, however, published his own book around the same time in which he described the same belief (execution for apostates) as being the dominant view among Muslim scholars (though he himself took a different view to the majority). That it was a “misconception”, however, became the official view in Australia if not in Muslim-majority countries.

This nervous conflict in the official mind almost everywhere is real; but the policy of evading the truth about the Islamic roots of jihadism is a mistake. It makes the governments that adopt it look slippery and/or unrealistic; it alarms the non-Muslim public who suspect that they may not be well protected against terrorism by such governments; and above all it harms ordinary Muslims and their faith worldwide.

In effect, peaceful Muslims are being protected from the truth that the faith they cherish is implicated in the murders they abhor. When Western leaders say these crimes have nothing to do with Islam, they reinforce that protectiveness and, not coincidentally, postpone the day when Muslims (who are the only people who can do this) begin to purge their faith of its deadly excrescences that justify murder.

Where Western governments have been timid, however, the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has been both perceptive and brave. He attended a Christmas Mass at the Coptic cathedral, the first Egyptian president to do so, where he called on Christians and Muslims to love one another in a united Egypt. A few days before that he had held a meeting with senior Islamic theologians at Al-Azhar University, where he called on them to sift the chaff of murderous “thinking” from the wheat of genuine Islam. He attacked in particular the genocidal absurdity of waging a jihadist war on the non-Muslim world, describing it as “impossible”.

No Western leader has spoken in such clear and hopeful terms, neither before nor since this speech. It is hard to know why. They would be taking only moderate political risks—with great things to gain.

Al-Sisi is offering a draft peace treaty in the clash of civilisations. For doing so, however, he has placed himself on the top of the jihadists’ list of apostates for execution.

Some very nice things are said about me in this issue by two of my distinguished predecessors as editor, Keith Windschuttle and Peter Coleman, and as Lyndon Johnson once said of similar encomiums, my father would have enjoyed them and my mother would have believed them.

I first saw *Quadrant* at a party in Robert Conquest’s London flat in 1974; I borrowed it; and I very soon became a regular reader. I graduated to a grateful contributor in the 1980s. I have often envied it from other editorial chairs. No intellectual journal has a better record of resisting fashionable follies in the interest of freedom, truth and common sense.

I will try to deserve Peter’s and Keith’s kind introductions in future issues.
Now that John O’Sullivan has assumed the editorship of Quadrant for the next couple of years it may help to look at what he has had to say on a number of public issues.

O’Sullivan’s First Law: “Any institution that is not actually right-wing will over time become left-wing.”

On Catholic atheists: “Recent years have seen the rise of ‘Catholic atheists’ or ‘Christian atheists’. Oriana Fallaci was one of these. Kenneth Minogue has distinguished them from Christophobic secularists who increasingly seek to uproot what remains of Christian tradition from national law and custom. In resisting their attacks we should seek out allies among ‘Christian atheists’. If they are as clever, brave and principled as Oriana Fallaci and Ken Minogue, we will have recruited powerful intellectual auxiliaries.”

On immigration: “Getting patriotic assimilation right is as vital as—perhaps more vital than—getting border security right.”

On the new anti-Semitism: “No one who grew up in the thirty years after the Second World War could ever have imagined then that anti-Semitism might recover from its links with Nazism and the Holocaust. Nations are cultural communities and the sense of common fellowship and destiny they promote enables different ethnic and religious groups to live together in relative harmony. If those commonalities evaporate or are frivolously destroyed, a war of all against all will erupt and spread by degrees. Europe’s current ‘war on the Jews’ is the first flickering sign of that Armageddon.”

On working for Mrs Thatcher: “Almost everyone who worked on her staff loved her. The ladies who served tea, the doormen, her beloved detectives, could do no wrong; her ministers and senior civil servants must have sometimes felt they could do no right. When a waitress at Chequers stumbled and poured soup into the lap of the Foreign Secretary, Mrs Thatcher jumped up and comforted the waitress!”

Before he joined Mrs Thatcher’s staff, O’Sullivan was a frequent contributor to Quadrant. Some excerpts may also be a useful guide.

On Britain before Thatcher: “Mrs Thatcher’s government was elected last month amid scenes of modest and restrained celebration. Can she really curb trade union power, we whispered? Will tax cuts revive Britain’s static industrial production? Is firm control over the money supply enough to restrain the rate of inflation? If the British disease is incurable, then our reluctance to celebrate was right. Mrs Thatcher deserved not congratulations but sympathy.” (October 1979)

After three years of Thatcherism: “Since coming into office in 1979 Mrs Thatcher has presided over a deep recession, rising unemployment and high inflation. Voters may have judged the government incompetent; they have not assessed it as unfit to govern. What will be the eventual impact on British politics of the Falklands War, the most momentous political happening since Suez? Mrs Thatcher has been transformed from a partisan politician to a great national leader.” (August 1982)

On reforming businessmen: “There are few more necessary tasks than preaching capitalism to capitalists. A lifetime spent selling soap—and indeed in eating, living, breathing and thinking soap—will leave the sharpest businessman vague and baffled when it comes to the general principles that justify his way of life. He may be able to convince a packed hall of the superior virtues of Kleen-in-a-Minute but still be floored when told by a university student that the principal effect of Kleen-in-a-Minute is Alienation. He is usually defeated not by facts (the facts are overwhelmingly on his side) but by words …” (April 1983)

On leaving UNESCO: “The assistant director-general of UNESCO, Richard Hoggart, recalled a British diplomat who, asked his opinion of the campaign by Arab nations to expel Israel from UNESCO, replied, ‘My instructions are to sit on the fence.’” (January-February 1985)
The decision of the publisher Connor Court to bring out a new edition of my *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* prompted me to look again at the wide-ranging criticisms of the first edition. It was a bracing exercise and ended up as my Introduction to the new edition. This is what turned up.

When *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* was first published twenty years ago, a number of reviewers complained that I was far too reticent. It was plain to all that I was no confessional poet compelled to advise readers of my sexual peculiarities and mental aberrations. But the complaint went beyond that. I was too uptight. I seemed afraid to let myself go, said Dick Hughes, the jazz pianist and himself an autobiographer. Why is there so little about my inner life, asked John McLaren, then editor of the leftist literary-political *Overland*? Father Edmund Campion, another autobiographer, found it a "shy", "taciturn" and "dreamy" book. "No thrusting ego here, no raucous self-justification, no settling of old scores." Geoffrey Dutton, poet and critic, found stray references to childhood unhappiness and loneliness which I "pass over at high speed but which must have gone deep". "Not a trace of self-pity," said the writer and composer R.J. Stove. The political commentator Max Teichmann also noted the early disappearance of my mother from the story and my total silence about my father's second wife.

Other reviewers were closer to what I had set out to do. The poet Patrick Coady and the historian Nicholas Brown, for example, saw that the book was not meant to be an intimate personal autobiography. Its real theme is the cultural and political turbulence of the 1940s and 1950s—a turbulence that had formed me. According to Jeff Shaw, later a Labor Attorney-General in New South Wales, the book is a “document” of Australian intellectual life. (I should have stuck to writing, he said, and not strayed into parliament—"a mistake", he told me when I met him while door-knocking his street in suburban Gladesville.)

The American critic Margaret Boe Birns took this a step further: the point of the book is “the larger life of the mind”. Forget about my supposed reticence. When the book is read properly, “We learn more about Coleman than we think we do.” More precisely, the memoir is about the reach and limits of secular liberalism. Teichmann thought my deconstruction of the Left, in which I had grown up, was accurate enough but I should also, he said, have got stuck into the conservatives. Stove would have liked more “astringency” in presenting Sydney's boomens. Birns thought she found a key in my sketch of Manning Clark—the anguished historian and sage torn between the Catholic Church and the Kremlin. In a word, the book is, as Christopher Pearson put it, a *Bildungsroman*.

Doug Buckley, writing in a Christian magazine, was the most pointed of all. Far from being too reticent, *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* was, he said, “amongst the most self-revealing” books he had ever read. Its core is an “ardent life-long search for political and spiritual truth”. It takes its sympathetic readers on an “expedition to the edge of Christianity” (but stops short of submission). This fancy high-mindedness of mine irritated some readers. Was it too prissy, ultimately evasive, a little ridiculous? John Douglas Pringle, a former editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in a broadly sympathetic review, found something “comic” in the book's excessive earnestness, its “magnificent obsession” with spiritual truth. Patrick Coady, also sympathetic, thought some of my more earnest passages may be “tongue-in-cheek”. One anonymous reviewer in *Gerard Henderson's Media Review*, more exasperated than the generous Coady, found all that heavy stuff “boring”, “depressing” and “pretentious”, the book should be renamed *Memoirs of a Slow Failure*. Fair dinkum! he expostulated.

Readers will make what they will of these reviewers. But looking back across twenty years I see more clearly than I did at the time that the real origin of *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* was my immersion in the poetry of James McAuley (my old co-editor at *Quadrant*). I had already written one response to his work and genius, *The Heart of James McAuley* (also republished by Connor Court). His autobiographical poems moved me deeply, especially his “Letter to John Dryden”. It distantly echoed a similar family background to mine (freethinking father, Protestant mother), a similar education in a selective state high school and Sydney University, infatuation with communism, mysticism and Christianity. But whereas McAuley found a resolution of his quest in the Catholic Church, I persevered with secular liberalism, in the belief that imagination and feeling could still moisten its parched landscape. Several writers published rejoinders to McAuley’s “Letter”—Jack Lindsay, Amy Witting, A.D. Hope. *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* was mine. It could be called *A Letter to James McAuley*. In the years since, I have come to accept many of McAuley’s criticisms of my liberal secularism—many but not all. I am now more sceptical of the freethinkers who influenced me in my youth such as the philosopher John Anderson, and far less sceptical of church leaders like Archbishop Gough who deplored their influence. The conversation continues.
Grooming with Nail Clippers

After barefoot, grump and gomp
the toenail clipper is echoing
itself in the wood floor, trimming
impact ridges off outer nails.

The oblique rudder lever mis-thumbed
against its chisel opposite
crims awry, gets re-occluded
biting corners off middle dabs.

Splitch! The entire plier skimming
under the sofa—up-heave sofa
to recover crossed arms askew
and redeploy to crop some more,
embracing your knees in opposition
you show inner thigh, and lift
toe-horn turrets which will grit
the flooring with grey beetle bix.

Les Murray

Ornithology

The Wood Thrush sings a duet
All by itself, using two separate
Voices, while the whip-bird’s one cry—two creatures,
Nothing between them, though you know the fiction,
Standing on Point Sublime, to listen:
“One. Are we one. We are. One”

Gleission

Commissioned by BBC Radio 4’s Today programme
after the Gleision mining disaster, 2011

Tops of trees, their roots in seams
Of dark. King under mountain.

The cave’s an open mouth whose words
Are men who work their mountain.

Pine, larch and oak. Don’t touch the bell
That tolls from out the mountain

Or he will stir, and miners die
Like light inside a mountain.

His breath is black and marks each face
That seeks beneath the mountain.

Leaves drift down, but they won’t heal
The sentence of the mountain.

It’s time to lose all hope and seal
The grave. King lies in his mountain.

Gwyneth Lewis

The Uncharitable Type

A thin blanket on a winter pavement
finds you daily between a rock and a hard
face; refused by me, as you are, payment
of attention, let alone money. Don’t you know
how bad you make me feel? Why not go
somewhere else, for pity’s sake?

Trevor Bailey
In case you suffer from the delusion that America’s Democratic Party is the party of equality, Joel Kotkin, in The New Class Conflict, is here to tell you otherwise. Kotkin is a master of revealing statistics, and his book is a short, sharp, inspired diagnosis of what ails America today. It is a damning portrait of a society in awe of smug sanctimonious self-serving Left-liberal elites. These elites use reformist rhetoric and guilt tactics to engineer upward mobility for themselves and downward mobility for the American middle class. Kotkin observes that 95 per cent of the income gains during President Obama’s first term went to 1 per cent of the population. In the 2012 elections, Obama triumphed in eight of the country’s ten wealthiest counties, sometimes by margins of two-to-one. In the first term of his presidency, average annual US household income dropped by $2600 and the number in poverty grew by six million.

Over time America’s middle class has been hollowed out, and the ranks of the low-income service and welfare classes have swelled. Kotkin notes that by 2020 almost 30 per cent of American employees are expected to hold low-wage jobs with earnings at or below the poverty line. The old Democrat New Deal coalition that united well-paid industrial workers with farmers and minorities is long gone. Democrat power today pivots on a coalition of the urban poor and the high-tech rich. The wealthy fund the party’s political campaigns; the poor trade votes for transfer payments; the forgotten middle class pays for these income redistributions through taxes and regulation.

The Democrat coalition is cemented together by what Kotkin amusingly calls the clerisy: the mainly postgraduate-educated leaders of America’s large symbolic industries. These industries make up the media-entertainment-government-foundation-university (MEGFU) sector that churns out an endless diet of progressive ideology. One of its many functions is to retail redistribution schemes like Obamacare, designed to hike middle-class health insurance payments to pay for the insurance of low-income Americans. The shrinking size of the middle class today makes these transfer schemes punitive. Fewer taxpayers pay more.

The clerisy turns a blind eye to this reality. Its business is fairy-tales. It tells its tales in all sorts of ways. It produces everything from schlock blockbusters to unreadable academic tracts. Among its most potent tales is the one that says that progressives represent “equality”. In reality Left-liberals are in awe of America’s high-tech oligarchy—and it of them. This oligarchy grew out of the once innovative information technology industries. Today the oligarchs have replaced innovation with government lobbying, a sure sign of decline.

America’s Silicon Valley used to be a stronghold of libertarian politics. Big-government liberalism now dominates. Kotkin points out that Facebook’s lobbying budget grew from $351,000 in 2010 to $2.45 million for the first quarter of 2014 alone. High tech has joined the rest of America’s crony capitalists. The clerisy loves this. It believes that the salvation of society lies in bureaucratic regulation. The clerisy moralises; the oligarchs lobby; the state regulates. The clerisy’s vocation is to instruct us how to live our lives. Its members are secular priests. They offer a fake religion (environmentalism), a pulpit (the media) and lashings of pseudo-theology (impenetrable academic theories). Tech specialists assisted Barack Obama’s electioneering with voter-turnout data mining. The same knowhow though was notably absent when the Obama administration launched its dismal health insurance site. This reflects the horns of a dilemma. Technology is efficient. Bureaucratic government is anything but.

The Silicon Valley titans made their fortunes in technology. Yet the art of oligarchy is to grow
wealth through government regulation. That is where the action is today. Kotkin observes that in 2012 Washington DC replaced New York as the wealthiest region in the United States. The high-tech oligarchs make money from data mining. They want privacy rules designed to facilitate that. They also make their money from intellectual property. Understandably then they want government to extend intellectual property rights interminably. None of Thomas Jefferson’s fourteen years of intellectual ownership, please. Patent trolling is one of the malicious effects of this. The oligarchs have shifted from free-market apostles to postmodern mercantilists. What was once a pioneering class has increasingly become a parasitic class dependent on state favour. Its vast wealth belies how little it has contributed to general economic productivity. Its devices have transformed consumer and office habits. Yet only in the late 1990s did it contribute measurably to an increase in economic productivity. Mostly its office software has fuelled the growth of bureaucracy. The contradictions of the Obama-era high-tech-big-government alliance are increasingly evident. Facebook billionaire Chris Hughes bought the ageing Left-liberal New Republic only to see it self-destruct. Its contributors left in a huff at the thought of a technology make-over. The tech elite constantly talks as if information is knowledge, and knowledge is imagination. This is quite untrue. Books today are freely available on the internet to a remarkable extent. Yet book reading has declined precipitously in the past twenty years. As numeracy declines as well, the clerisy responds with the cry of “national standards”. In America the latest of these bureaucratic fads is Common Core. Unsurprisingly a major financier of Common Core has been the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to the tune of $2.3 billion. This is now big business—with IT companies, publishers, state administrators and the curriculum industry all jumping on the band wagon. But neither tech nor bureaucracy, nor its offspring technocracy, can fix the problems of persistently declining knowledge and evaporating creativity in the age of big data.

Kotkin points out that most of the world’s twenty-five richest people come from the information, fashion and media industries. The MEGFU sector is very self-conscious—and very thin-skinned. Its sworn enemies are the energy and manufacturing industries. It has a deep distaste for fossil fuels. Yet the most important economic innovation of the past twenty years has been the fracking of shale oils in the United States. The MEGFU sector funds green policy initiatives to ban coal-powered power stations in order to punish traditional industry sectors with higher electricity costs. All the while it is mesmerised by the environmentally-suspect electric car.

The difference between self-image and reality is striking. The MEGFU economy sees itself as creative, yet its wealth increasingly depends on recycling old hits. The 1998 US Copyright Term Extension Act (also known as the “Mickey Mouse Protection Act”) added two decades to corporate and individual intellectual property protection. This was an uncomfortable reminder that the best of America’s great cultural industries resides in the past—in Mickey’s case, as far back as his first appearance in Steamboat Willie in 1928. Microsoft’s ubiquitous Word software has offered users few updates of interest since the early 1990s. While Facebook may dominate today, Geocities hosting service provided free personal web pages from 1994; when its US service closed down in 2009 it hosted 38 million user-built pages. Online social networking goes back to the Usenet web forum in 1980. Yet the MEGFU industry relentlessly insists that it employs a creative class.

For years Kotkin has sparred with the social scientist Richard Florida. Florida coined the term “the creative class” a decade ago. The term took off. But increasingly it has become apparent that the contemporary economic drivers in the USA are not the Democrat-leaning blue states with big MEGFU sectors like New York or California but rather Republican-leaning red states built on agriculture, energy and manufacturing.

Writing in the New York Times this year on January 3, Florida acknowledged that real living standards are better in red states than blue states. The blue states are weighed down with high taxes and expensive housing. Kotkin has persistently made this point. Unfashionable places, the “fly-over states” derided by the MEGFU elites, offer the best standard of living for middle-class Americans.

The consequences of America’s gilded liberal ideology are often perverse. The blue-state gentrty love a certain stylised bohemia. But that same bohemia is now priced out of big city neighbourhoods. Kotkin
quotes Patti Smith: “New York has closed itself off to the young and the struggling.” Even pilots avoid New York postings, Kotkin notes, due to the high cost of living. The result is social deformation. The middle class is squeezed out, leaving the Obama coalition of the rich and the poor behind.

Florida admits the insidious consequences of this. In 1979 three blue states made the top twenty most unequal American states. Today, nine of the top twenty are blue states. The most unequal are Democrat-dominated New York and Connecticut. The social regime that has emerged in these states, as in Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area, combines the postmodern plutocrats and the postgraduated gentry with low-income service and welfare classes. Democrat-leaning states now systemically produce the kind of inequality that Democrat Party acolytes feign to deplore. Even the credentialled gentry struggle with the cost of living.

Florida is a scrupulously honest social scientist. He allows now that blue-state knowledge economies are very expensive to operate. Their innovative edge, he concedes, is based on a high-cost research infrastructure that is supported by public subsidies. Almost everything in that statement is true bar the innovative edge. It is increasingly clear that ever-larger public investments in research and innovation have yielded ever-fewer ingenious outcomes. This applies not least of all to the sacred cow of bio-medicine.

Kotkin and Florida are both urbanists. Both think that cities are crucial to innovation and growth. But there the agreement ends. Kotkin believes that the sprawling suburbs are the key to America’s prosperity; Florida advocates high-density cities. In the latter, Kotkin notes, inequality gaps are big. Working-class and minority groups do poorly.

Both authors have a point. Most Americans prefer the suburbs. Red states provide low-cost suburban living, with housing costs per square foot around half of comparable blue-state costs. On the other hand, creativity concentrates in dense cities. On that score Florida was right. Centre-right intellectuals live in Washington DC and New York, not in Albuquerque. What Florida misunderstands is that the creative class is tiny. He confuses it with the 11 per cent of the US population who today have some kind of graduate degree. The latter are a self-aware voting and social bloc. They lean heavily to the Democrats. They see themselves as creative. What they actually are is a credentialled class dependent on the growth of government and corporate bureaucracies. Like the character “Julia” in the Obama election ad, they see themselves as the entitled recipients of womb-to-tomb largesse. The graduate class not only receives public largesse, it also distributes it. In a neat circle, class members dole out grants and tax dollars to other class members to engage in a cornucopia of specious projects. This is the higher-educated version of neo-patrimonialism. It is distribution from the credentialled to the credentialled. The invariable justification for this self-serving merry-go-round is the poor or the disadvantaged or else the promised miracles of creation and innovation which, while much lauded, are never actually delivered. Funny, that.

Helping-money often makes individuals helpless. It reduces the kind of do-it-yourself ambition and drive that make a society great. Kotkin observes that expanding the regulatory scope of government threatens the American sense of autonomy and self-help. In doing so, it kills ingenuity and economic growth. Real income in the United States has been stagnant for forty years; future growth prospects look sluggish.

Many in the cleriity delight at this; they are anti-growth. They revile manufacturing and extraction industries. Coal is a demon, one of many. Their dreams are neo-medieval. They are the intellectual children of Lewis Mumford. In their heads are neo-pastoral fantasies of windmills and hand power. All around them are the demons of modernity. Yet they want all the benefits of modernity. They rack up frequent-flyer points and pay an indulgence to offset their generation of carbon dioxide: poor old carbon dioxide, yet another modern demon that haunts their fervid medieval imaginations. The cleriity work in offices; thus office industries are fine. If your office has a green waste bin, you are noble. The neo-medieval fantasy is that office industries don’t need energy and manufacturing industries. The real industry is regulation. Work that takes extra bureaucratic steps is good. Its rationale is morality. All things, from power generation to education, are justified by regulation. Regulation is the sanctification of modern life. If something is accredited it is good. If it requires accreditation then it needs auditors, assessors and inspectors.

Kotkin’s story of the new class conflict focuses on the rising oligarchs and the dissipating middle class. That is part of the story. Another part, less remarked by Kotkin, is the office class. It is the sinews of the clerical economy. This class has expanded markedly over the last century. The oligarchs who pursue sweetheart deals with the state are not the direct sponsors of this class. Nonetheless the revolving-door regulation of bureaucratic capitalism swells the size and scope of the office class. This class processes the time-consuming steps in
the elaborate procedures that policies and regulations create. All that the oligarchs want to know is that if they do A, B and C, then by regulatory definition they have protected users’ privacy; some of those steps they can automate; the rest they employ office workers to process. The media-university-entertainment industry generates moral alarms; commissions, consultants and congresses devise laws authorising regulation; government bureaucracies write the rules; corporate bureaucracies then comply with the rules by generating their own procedures.

This is the production of nothing. It is one bureaucracy talking to another bureaucracy. Silicon Valley in its inventive decade of the 1980s was the opposite of this. It embraced free-market conservatism, libertarian social morality and technological utopianism, Kotkin reminds us. That is all gone—and so is Silicon Valley’s inventiveness. Social media is a concertinaing of online communities (which began in the 1980s) with blogs, personal home pages and digital data-mining techniques (all of which began in the 1990s).

For all of their headline status, social media companies employ a handful of staff. Kotkin points out that as of 2013, the leading social media firms directly employ fewer than 60,000 people in the United States; in comparison, even a shrunken General Motors employs 200,000. Since 2001, the US book, periodical and newspaper publishing industry has lost 250,000 jobs while internet publishing and portals generated 70,000 new jobs. If you think that social media is a model of a buoyant economic future, think again. If you think that literacy, reading and writing are helped by this, think again.

The tech industry is highly centralised. Google accounts for two-thirds of internet searches; half of North American computer users are signed up to Facebook. This is a degree of concentration that eludes traditional manufacturing to this day. No car manufacturer, Kotkin explains, controls more than a fifth of the US market. The promise of the internet was decentralisation; the reality has been high degrees of concentration. The oligarchs lobby to avoid anti-trust legislation.

The libertarian investor Peter Thiel argues that competition is no match for originality. He has a point. Companies compete over what exists. They invent what does not exist. The implication is that it is better to be an inventive monopolist than a competitive oligopoly. There is some truth in this. But what then are the intellectual fruits created by informal agreements between big oligopoly firms not to compete for staff?

The great periods of automobile and IT invention were characterised by many firms both competing and inventing. Facebook’s semi-monopoly today is a sign less of industry pioneering than of industry maturity. There came a day also when Crosley, Duryea, Hudson, Jeffery, Winton, Nash-Kelvinator, Oldsmobile, Packard, Studebaker and innumerable other US car manufacturers had all folded, leaving the terrain dominated by the Big Three—General Motors, Chrysler and Ford—whose penchant for bureaucratic capitalism would leave them all in strife in the long run. Notably one of Barack Obama’s first acts in office was to provide a 557 billion taxpayer bailout for the ailing GM. The tacit understanding was that GM would push high-cost electric-powered cars. These cars are an ideological gimmick. They are environmentally worse than internal combustion vehicles when the full life-cycle of power generation, manufacturing and disposal is properly accounted for. This is in an age when expensive electricity supply networks struggle to meet demand.

Silicon Valley today remains the home of venture capital. What the venture capitalists invest in is instructive. MEGFU favourites dominate: electric cars, bioscience or alternative energy and fuels, social networks, communications and messaging, data management and analytics. Many of these ventures seem far from venturesome and distinctly tired. Crucially they offer little in the way of sector invention that might off-set the approaching people-less robot factory and driver-less-car future that is going to have a deep transformative impact on labour markets. Many of these markets will be eliminated. This applies not only to blue-collar sectors but to white-collar, service and professional segments as well. Low-level medical diagnoses, preparation of tax returns, para-legal document searches and university essay marking will be automated. The same is happening to the work of travel agents, bookkeepers, marketers and meter readers. Self-service is taking over airline check-in and supermarket checkouts. Any formula task can be automated. A lot of professional operations are just that. Others can’t match the power of
big data processing. Pattern-recognition software will replace much of radiology diagnostics.

A sign of the seriousness of this is that Japan plans to take on China industrially with a massive program of robot factories. Meanwhile Foxconn, the giant Taiwan-based iPhone manufacturer, projects its own program of automation. How many commercial truck drivers or taxi drivers or forklift drivers will there be in thirty years’ time? Likely, not many. Farm robots will weed, prune, monitor produce, check on herds and harvest crops. Globalisation exported traditional manufacturing jobs from developed to developing countries. Skilled jobs were replaced with service jobs. Now service jobs are being automated. Lowe’s, the US hardware retailer, is trialling humanoid robot shop assistants. Japan plans robot nursing home assistants to cope with its aged population. Health assistants are one of the prime projected employment growth areas in the next twenty years. What if these jobs are gradually replaced by machines? There are lots of long-term scenarios for wealth creation but few for job creation.

The problem is not automation as such. Automation is built into industrial societies. The first factory machine was the start of industrial automation. Software today is expanding an old process. This is less industry innovation and more industry maturation. Robotics has been in the pipeline for fifty years. The first industrial robot was installed in 1961. Any repeating task, be it glamorous or grimy, can be turned into an algorithm and mechanised or automated. The ultimate protection against automation is creative tasks. These cannot be reduced to a set of rules that precisely define a sequence of repeatable operations. Creative work flourishes in new industries. Today’s problem is that there are no new industry sectors visible on the horizon. Mass manufacturing, transport and health services are mature industries. The MEGFU economy is rapidly ageing. Like all such sectors, it began in a crucible of ingenuity. It then expanded through an entrepreneurial phase of proliferating businesses, organisations and professional practices. Finally it consolidated into large institutions and oligopolies. The entrepreneurial phase created jobs; the institutional phase eliminated them. That cycle is almost a law of nature. This is not an issue as long as the cycle begins again, with new sectors. This is what the current era lacks.

As the MEGFU sector decelerates and the lower-level professions are automated, the hunt for new industries begins. Kotkin suggests that these will be generated out of the pool of sole proprietors. He observes that while unemployment in America surged after 2007, self-employment also grew. A lot of people dropped out of the traditional labour market. Many exited into welfare but others stepped into work-at-home businesses. Sole trading is part of any future economic matrix. It is a plausible model of economic self-reliance. But it can be easily romanticised. Some yeoman enterprises succeed; a lot do not. Moreover, the current increase in the number of non-employer businesses belies a disturbing decline of business start-ups in the United States, which are at their lowest number in thirty years. Garage businesses are only a small part of the story of business creation. For every case of a MITS, the designer of the pioneering Altair personal computer, there is a well-funded start-up like Intel. Initiative scales—from the tiny to the titanic.

More than anything, what makes self-starting possible is culture. Culture can stimulate it or smother it. Contemporary clerisy culture smothers it. The clerisy is hostile to high-energy enterprise. Its public policy preferences invariably belittle initiative and risk-taking. This sometimes leads to comic consequences. Among the worst affected by Obamacare were sole traders, which include freelance writers. This group is part of the self-reliant enterprising middle class. Because of their trade, freelancers also happen to be perennial Democrat voters. So naturally most of them extolled Obama’s affordable care legislation—until they realised just how unaffordable the scheme actually was. Oh irony.

No one can tell exactly what shape the next industrial revolution will take. But unless the pernicious pall of clerisy culture is removed, it is not going to arrive in the near future. Kotkin’s great service is to confront this problem head-on and not flinch.

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The Haircut

I felt especially honoured when allowed, this once, to take a pair of scissors and, ever so timidly, gingerly, trim a few silver curls from your beloved head.

I snipped a few tufts to even up the back then stopped, afraid to go beyond the bounds of what was necessary. Zeal was inappropriate.

When I bent to sweep them up, the few fallen tendrils, and throw them into the dustbin, I thought to myself, perhaps I should have kept some, saved them for later.

One Hundred Times

At my grandfather’s table, no talking during the meal; chew each mouthful 100 times. No staring if your grandpa licks meticulous fingers to mop up crumbs from his bread-and-butter plate. Think of children starving in Asia.

And eyes off the white napkin as he dabs at strands of moustache or hurrumps a rumbly throat and sips from the cut glass tumbler.

We all chewed faster than Grandpa but none of us scraped her chair to rise and leave the room until he was finally finished.

The Chigaree

A cheeping thornbill on the lawn with sunlight-buttered rump sings to welcome signs of dawn as cheerful birds will do but he is more the subtle sleuth that twitches stalks apart, investigating cryptic earth in a beetling underworld.

Arrested by a skilful tweak, insects meet their end caught in a ruthless thornbill’s beak and never seen again.

Suzanne Edgar
Back in August 2014 the former chief of the Australian army, Peter Leahy, spoke of a 100-year war against “radical Islam”. The Islamic Council of Victoria’s Ghaith Krayem slammed Leahy’s analysis as “ludicrous” and “grossly negligent” and likely to encourage “right-wing extremism” in Australia. For anybody following Bill Roggio’s *Long War Journal* website over the years, Professor Leahy’s comments were anything but controversial. Every day Roggio’s site chronicles another military or political episode in the global Long War. The December 16-17 siege killing at the Lindt Chocolate Café was duly featured by Roggio’s editorial team—“Sydney Siege Over”—but only for a short time and plainly in the broader context of worldwide Islamic militancy.

During the forty-eight-hour period following the Martin Place siege the *Long War Journal* reported the Taliban launching an attack on a high school in Peshawar massacring 133 children, the Islamic State (IS) over-running a town in Anbar, Western embassies in Egypt closing because of a Muslim Brotherhood-associated terrorist threat, suicide attacks in Kabul, the Nigerian army fighting a battle with Boko Haram, the Al Nusrah Front executing two men for blasphemy in Syria, and Turkey’s religious schools growing in strength as President Erdogan continued to Islamise his formerly secular nation. The Sydney deaths were but—albeit appalling—moment in a continuing global war waged by individuals, gangs and movements that have adopted the ideology of stealth or violent jihadism.

Prime Minister Abbott chose his words with care when he discussed the Martin Place siege. He categorised the calamity as a “brush with terrorism” and deliberately differentiated everyday Muslims from Man Haron Monis, the Lindt Chocolate Café siege-killer: “We don’t blame the pope for the IRA and we don’t blame the Catholics next door for the folly and madness of some people who claim Christian motivations.” Tony Abbott might have been cautious in his remarks because many Muslims are not only victims of militant Salafism but are also prepared to give their lives fighting jihadism while protecting non-Muslims in the process (see “The Battle for Modernity on the Kurdistan Border”, *Quadrant*, January-February 2015). Notwithstanding this, as Frazer Egerton makes clear in the indispensable *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Jihadism* (2011), Islamic terrorism might not be “dictated” by religion and yet it is “informed” by it.

Many of those accusing Tony Abbott of politicising the emergence of militant Salafists or Salafi jihadists in Australia—more than 450 according to the latest report in the *Australian*, with up to 110 now having travelled overseas to fight with Al Qaeda or the IS group in Syria and Iraq—are the same commentators who exploit the crisis for their own narrow partisan purposes. When Abbott disclosed to the Australian public that “terrorist chatter” had skyrocketed in the wake of Martin Place, critics of the Coalition hit back hard. Professor Jeff Lewis—“terrorism expert at RMIT”—was provided with a platform in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to censure Abbott for exploiting the public’s fear of domestic terrorism: “Given the unpopularity of this government, security is always something governments will use for their own purposes.” In the immediate aftermath of the Lindt café siege, Mark Kenny, chief political correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, lamented the Orwellian nature of the government’s latest security regime—“gathering new information on the private dealings of people”—while disparaging the efficacy of those very same measures. Kenny wondered, for example, why the $630 million allocated to counter-terrorism had failed to remove the hazard of “so-called lone-wolf attacks” in our cities.

The conspiracist crew at *Crikey* would have appreciated the employment of the adjective “so-called” by the chief political correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Bernard Keane, in
an October 2014 edition of Crikey, dismissed the theory that lone-wolf terrorists were being radicalised in our midst via exposure to IS propaganda and under-the-radar encounters with jihadist ideologues (or “radical preachers”). The lone-wolf scenario, insisted Keane, was “the new black in terrorist narratives”, and encouraged Westerners to view themselves—erroneously, of course—as the passive, blameless victims of irrational malevolence. Writing in the wake of the October 20 and October 22 killings in Canada, Keane noted that Muslim convert Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, the Ottawa gunman, was a crack addict with a history of mental illness. Keane pointed out that Australia’s Khaled Sharrouf, father of the seven-year-old who appeared in August on social media holding aloft the decapitated head of a Syrian soldier, had been diagnosed previously with “chronic schizophrenia, delusions and a history of drug use”. Keane additionally informed us that another Australian IS member, Mohammed Baryalei, was associated with “drug use and mental illness”. In short, Australia should be indicted for “failing to provide sufficient resources to ensure vulnerable, marginalised people have access to effective mental services”.

Not even the Lindt Chocolate Café siege could divert Crikey’s political editor from his theme. Keane deplored the idea that the hostage-taker should be categorised as anything other than a “mentally ill violent criminal”; associating his actions with violent jihadism was “wrong in every possible way”. Many ordinary Australians might have thought Keane was “wrong in every possible way”, given the prominence of the black Shahada flag during the siege and Mon Haron Monis’s self-declared allegiance to the Islamic State before and during the siege, not to mention his past association with Hizb ut-Tahrir leader Ismail al-Wahwah. Needless to say, the IS group’s Dubiq magazine praised the siege-killer for his “daring raid” and “striking the kuffar [non-Muslims] where it hurt them most—in their own lands”. An editorial in the Spectator Australia sensibly declared the debate about whether the Sydney gunman was “a terrorist or a lunatic” to be “nonsensical” since “self-evidently the answer is both”.

The Charlie Hebdo shootings on January 7, 2015, should have cleared up any doubts. Gunmen repeatedly bellowed “Allahu Akbar!” as they fired up to fifty shots with AK-47 assault rifles, murdering twelve people, including the satirical magazine’s editor, Stéphane “Charb” Charbonnier, and seven other employees. Even the most obtuse observer chose not to explain away this calamity as confirmation of France’s underperforming mental health services.

The derisive humour of Charlie Hebdo could be expressed as leftist but of an iconoclastic type that in France has retained a real potency. Because secularist Marxism, rather than the identity politics of anti-bourgeois bohemianism, informed their sensibilities, Charbonnier and his colleagues were resistant to politically correct decorum. Genuine leftists in Australia who eschew PC protocol and maintain a high public profile are rare. The indefatigable Brendon O’Neill writes for the Australian, but then he is British and a resident of the United Kingdom. With some honourable exceptions, Australia’s modern-day leftists opposed Brendon O’Neill’s one-man Marxist alliance with the Coalition to repeal or at least modify Section 18C. It goes without saying where Charbonnier stood in the freedom wars.

US Secretary of State John Kerry referred to the murdered journalists and cartoonists as “martyrs of freedom”, while President Obama described the shooting as “horrific” and offered every assistance “to bring these terrorists to justice”. Nevertheless,
Barack Obama cannot be credibly included in the “Je Suis Charlie” camp. The official US outreach to the Islamic world between 2009 and 2014 was characterised by all manner of PC rectitude, including the administration’s attempt to blame the Second September 11 Massacre (Benghazi, 2011) on a poorly made video titled The Innocence of Muslims. White House spokesman James Carney, as far back as 2012, queried the value of Charlie Hebdo publishing images of Mohammed that were “deeply offensive to many” and had the “potential to be inflammatory”. That said, freedom of speech is enshrined in the Constitution of the United States and so there was a necessary nuance in Carney’s remarks: “In other words, we don’t question the right of something like this to be published; we just question the judgment behind the decision.” Here lies the real fault line in our civilisational war: freedom versus submission.

If the behaviour of the Islamist terrorists in Paris could not be plausibly attributed to France’s mental health services or the country’s (allegedly) time-honoured misogyny, some other explanation indicting the French people for their own grief had to be evoked. Senator Rand Paul, the American libertarian-isolationist, found a motive for the Charlie Hebdo carnage in President François Hollande’s recent interventions in Africa and the Middle East against Islamic jihadism:

They see us attacking them, and killing innocent people, so yes, they, they have—this doesn’t justify, so don’t put those words in my mouth—it doesn’t justify, but it explains it.

Robert Fisk, the Independent’s Middle East correspondent, also held France culpable for its own misfortune. He claimed the Paris bloodbath perpetrated by the Algerian-French brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi was a response to the Algeria War. Though this particular conflict ended more than half a century ago, France’s aggression in Algeria supposedly “provides a fearful context for every act of Arab violence against France”. Fisk’s rationalisation raises more questions than answers. For instance, if the parents of the Kouachi brothers considered the French “spiteful and filthy”—à la the IS group’s depiction—why emigrate to France in the first place? And why did the Algerian-French policeman, Ahmed Merabet, lose his life attempting to protect the employees of Charlie Hebdo? And how come the Algerian-French copy-editor Mustapha Ourrad—also murdered by the Kouachi brothers—worked for the satirical magazine? And last, but not least, why were the Kouachis doing the bidding of Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, part of a transnational Islamic terrorist network? AQAP is a notorious outfit that often makes an appearance in Bill Roggio’s Long War Journal, and it does not give a fig for Algerian self-determination.

More murders followed the Charlie Hebdo outrage. On Thursday, January 8, a Malian-French Muslim convert, Amedy Coulibaly, shot dead an unarmed French policewoman, Clarissa Jean-Philippe; the next day he slaughtered four Jewish patrons of Hyper Cacher, a kosher supermarket. Chloe Patton, writing for the anti-Israel outlet Mondoweiss, explained the murder of seventeen people by Islamic jihadists without making any reference to the deliberate targeting of the four French Jews. Her explanation for these grotesque crimes—“the historical traumas of the global south continue to haunt the postcolonial present”—amounted to little more than another version of Robert Fisk’s apologia for monsters.

Robert Fisk, Chloe Patton, Peter Wheeland, Bernard Keane, Mark Kenny et al are what Christopher Hitchens derided as “soft left”, while Rand Paul might have been dismissed as merely “soft”. Their capacity to delude themselves about “Islamofascism”, avowed Hitchens, was “something more like self-hatred than appeasement”.

Bernard Lewis, in Notes on a Century (2012), offered a different perspective on the same phenomenon. He maintained that a “cultural arrogance” permeated our commentariat, and this caused it to believe that “the West is the fountain of everything and that everything that happens in the world is determined by the West”. In an earlier time, this conceit encouraged not a few to presuppose “everything Western was good, but at the present time it is more fashionable to assume that everything Western is bad”. The determination of so many latter-day leftists to explain every development in the world as a consequence of Western actions is the “same prejudice” of old “but turned inside out”.

The “soft left”—the purveyors of bohemian socialism, identity politics and PC orthodoxy—found Lewis’s critique of Islam and the Greater Middle East inconsistent with their faith in a nascent global people’s community built on harmony and mutual respect. There was no place in their utopian reverie for Lewis’s warning about a “clash of civilisations”, his use of the expression pre-dating Samuel Huntington. Published soon after the September 11 attacks, Lewis’s What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response (2002) contended that the Islamic world has held a grievance towards “the West” since the defeat of the
Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683. A sequel, The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror (2003), placed Islamic “fundamentalism” within the wider tradition of Islam. Lewis, in Reflections of a Middle East Historian, claimed that once the shock of September 11 receded, our PC-minded guardians grew less interested in his concerns, given that they were not “in accord with their worldview”.

Bernard Lewis’s analysis did not match the beliefs of the gatekeepers of progressive orthodoxy, and yet events have largely corroborated his counsel. In Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism, Frazer Egerton synthesizes a variety of evidence to argue that militant Salafist grievances have their genesis not so much in real events as in the anti-modernity “big story” espoused during the first half of the twentieth century by the likes of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyib Qutb. The Islamist or Salafist tale contends that the global Muslim community (the ummah) is under immense danger from “the West” (or modernity) and only through a return to the purity of seventh-century practices and the strictest enforcement of Islamic law can good triumph over evil. War and violence, for Salafi jihadists, denotes the apotheosis of Islam: “Militant Salafism is a movement inspired by a religious and political metanarrative that demands militancy in the face of Western hostility towards Islam.”

Malek Merabet spoke some powerful words about his late brother, the Algerian-French police officer murdered outside the offices of Charlie Hebdo by one of the Kouachi killers: “He was proud of the name Ahmed Merabet, proud to represent the police and of defending the values of the Republic—liberty, equality, fraternity.” Ahmed Merabet lost his life attempting to protect the writers and cartoonists of a satirical magazine that expressed opinions he might have personally disliked. That fact ought to put paid to the preconception that Muslims cannot embrace the values of secular democracy, which includes allowing everybody else to practise their own faith in their own time so long as they do not use it as a weapon to silence, censure, intimidate or regulate others. However, Malek Merabet went further in his eulogy and rebuked the terrorists who murdered his brother as “people who pretend to be Muslim”. This assertion, which somewhat echoes Tony Abbott’s comments in the immediate aftermath of the Lindt café siege, was understandable in the circumstances and not entirely awry. But it is not the whole truth.

Daniel Pipes has coined the expression “Sudden Jihadi Syndrome” to point up the astonishing rapidity with which a young Muslim living in the West can transform into a militant Salafist. Egerton’s Jihad in the West, based on genuine research and authentic case studies, confirms that religion—or, more specifically religious culture—should not be ignored when accounting for the conversion of an individual to a Salafi-jihadist state of mind. Attempts by sociologists to explain Sudden Jihadi Syndrome in generic concepts of “alienation” are deficient because a “militant Salafist is someone who considers their identity as a Muslim as paramount and holds that Muslims face hostility and aggression to which they have a duty to respond with violence”. Likewise, it is not tenable to explain terrorist attacks in the West—from 9/11 to Charlie Hebdo—in terms of “blowback” because militant Salafist indoctrination has its antecedence in the half-truths of Joseph Goebbels’s Ministry of Propaganda. An Islamic terrorist, to give one instance, who gave Tony Blair’s 2003 intervention in Iraq as his motivation for the London bombings on July 7, 2005, had cheered on the terrorist attack on America in 2001. Finally, Sudden Jihadi Syndrome can afflict any number of personality types, from the mentally unstable Lindt café siege-killer to playboy Mahmoud Abdullahif, up-and-coming male model Sharky Jama, and even La Trobe University business student Yusuf Yusuf. All of them, due in large measure to the mastery of “the hypermedia” by militant Salafist propagandists, based into a totalitarian ideology. Their grasp of the Koran and hadiths might be limited but this is of no consequence because their religious-political faith happens to be “emotional and anti-intellectual”.

Salafi jihadism, not to mention Iran’s rendering of Islamofascism, has embarked on a fight to the death with the West, “the West” being not just a geographical entity but also the presence of liberal humanism and secular democracy in the Greater Middle East. Nevertheless, most of the major defeats and victories in the Long War go uncommented upon or are misapprehended in the West. The triumph of the Egyptian people, led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, over Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood administration was misconstrued by the White House and much of the Western press

When President el-Sisi talked of the need for “religious revolution” be meant the secular revolution of Kemalism rather than the anti-modernity revolt of Islamism.
as a setback for liberty. In the same way, Michelle Obama, Julia Gillard et al focused their attention of Boko Haram’s kidnapping of 276 Nigerian girls in 2014 without addressing the broader aims of violent jihadism, while our professoriat typically construes Hamas as a national liberation movement when it is actually an apocalyptic death cult. Though many politicians and commentators have been prepared—unlike Chloe Patton—to classify the carnage at Hyper Cacher as an act of anti-Semitism, even that acknowledgment does not capture the full lethal intent of Salafi jihadism, its Judeophobia having less in common with traditional European or Ottoman bigotry than with Hitler’s exterminationist anti-Semitism (Vernichtungantisemitus). And this list of cases, regrettably, is but an abridged catalogue of viewpoints so myopic that the parable of the blind men and the elephant comes to mind.

Salafi jihadism is a contemporaneous Islamic manifestation of violent apocalyptic millennialism. Its ultimate goal is the creation of a global entity, Ummah al-Islam, ruled in strict accordance to Islamist coin. Having attempted to emasculate the growth of religious schools in Erdogan’s Islamic law. Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi’s Khmer Rouge-alogue of viewpoints so myopic that the parable of the blind men and the elephant comes to mind.

The mentality that massacred 12 innocent people in Paris on January 7 is the same mentality that has slaughtered Kurds in Kobani, Sinjar, Mosul and Kirkuk.

After the murders in Paris, President Erdogan insisted that “terror has no religion”, before his prime minister likened the horrors unleashed by the Kouachi killers to Benjamin Netanyahu’s “criminality”. A leading member of Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party then expressed the suspicion that the massacre was “staged like a movie scene”. Soon Erdogan was blaming the French security forces for permitting the deadly attacks and accusing the West of “playing games with the Islamic world” resulting in Muslims having to “pay the price”. A week later, Erdogan—who is in the process of dismantling Turkey’s secular democracy whilst giving aid and comfort to Salafi jihadists in Syria—charged Charlie Hebdo with being “provocative” and “wreaking terror by intervening in the freedom space of others” and banned the new edition of the magazine in Turkey. Soon Erdogan will be claiming that the only victims in the Paris atrocity were the terrorists themselves, though hopefully he won’t start referring to them as “martyred heroes” as per Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Many conservatives have hoped that Russia would play a constructive role in the defence of Western civilisation and the promotion of Western values, but that was always unlikely while Vladimir Putin’s FSB ran a police state. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attended the Paris “unity rally” or “march against hatred” on Sunday, January 11, but the next week protesters in Moscow holding up “Je suis Charlie” placards found themselves promptly arrested. The only state-sanctioned demonstrations in Putin’s Russia were the anti-Charlie Hebdo ones in Chechnya. Lavrov began blaming the Paris massacre on the Western-backed aim of ousting Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad, which makes as much sense as Erdogan blaming it on the failure of the West to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. All we require is one of those latter-day leftist commentators possessing “something more like self-hatred than appeasement” to square the circle and find the Western powers guilty on both counts.

In stark contrast, one Kurdish representative after another—almost all Muslim or with Muslim heritage—demonstrated complete understanding of the significance of the Charlie Hebdo killings. As the spokesman for the Democratic Kurdish Council in France declared:

As the guardians of human values in the fight against ISIS terrorists in Kobani, we promise again to confront the vicious terrorists until the end when justice is served.
The Long War has taken many unexpected turns. Hours before the carnage in Paris, Egypt’s Abdel Fattah el-Sisi made an historic visit to Cairo’s Coptic St Mark’s cathedral. His inclusive message to Pope Tawadros II’s congregation, attending the Coptic Christmas Eve mass, signified a local version of Tony Abbott’s Team Australia mantra: “We must only be Egyptians.” At the very same time an imam at the Abu Hamda mosque near Alexandria denounced over a loudspeaker Christians celebrating Christmas as “miscreants”, “polytheists” and “unclean”. Just a week earlier, President el-Sisi—a pious Muslim but an implacable foe of the Muslim Brotherhood and its jihadist affiliates—berated Islamic clerics around the world for unenlightened and exclusionist attitudes that are “antagonising the whole world”. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s various criticisms of politicised Salafism and Salafi jihadism—or Islamic “fundamentalism”—suggest that he wants to undercut the Islamic revivalism so beloved of men such as Hassan al-Banna and Sayyib Qutb. When President el-Sisi talked of the need for “religious revolution” he meant the secular revolution of Kemalism rather than the anti-modernity revolt of Islamism.

The Long War—or the War of Freedom—is real and its fault lines are not only geographical but also existential. To assert, as did the chief political correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald, that the Abbott government’s commitment of ADF personnel and sophisticated warplanes to the defence of the Kurdistan regional government and the Republic of Iraq brings no advantage for Australia’s future security—“Quite the opposite”—amounts to short-sightedness of a very special kind. Surely any kind of triumph by the Peshmerga against the Islamic State group is a success for the civilised world over the psychosis of apocalyptic millennialism now haunting the entire planet. The liberty-loving peoples of the world, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, did not initiate the Long War, though they will, given half a chance, finish it. Freedom of religion, in the era of modernity, is important; but never more so than the religion of freedom.


Sabbath Poem
after Wendell Berry

World, I’m asking you for quietude, not silence. I’m happy with the hum of insects, trill of one bird answering the cheep of another, the rumble of Sunday cars about their business. World, I’m asking you for stillness, not a total halt in proceedings. Let the wind rattle the leaves, seed heads bob on their stems, my own heart keep pumping for a while yet. World, reveal to me the peace beneath this peace, the one which passeth etc. There’s a garden in the secret place in my heart. Someone’s mowing the grass there—making a path for me to enter, showing me the gate.

Victoria Field
My title is really too broad. There are many religions and many ways they might connect with public life. Indeed the phrase “public life” is itself very broad. It certainly will include the political, but there is or should be much more to the public realm than the political. It is a deformation of public life if everything public is political. Many areas of public life should be seen as independent of politics, even producing a counterbalance to the political through the autonomous institutions spawned in and by those areas. These areas should include the law, the arts, sport, the military, education and much else besides. In the modern world much blurring of boundaries goes on between the political and the rest of public life. This is objectionable for all sorts of reasons which would have seemed obvious to nineteenth-century thinkers such as J.S. Mill, and should be obvious to us for different reasons, following our experience of twentieth-century totalitarianism. After all, totalitarianism is precisely the move on the part of the state to bring everything within its own control and direction.

Nonetheless the state and politics are necessary and desirable even as providing a framework in which people can lead peaceful and orderly lives, taking responsibility for what is rightfully theirs, pursuing their own projects and seeking their own salvation. Action by the state through the political process is also necessary on occasion to remove obstacles to liberty and opportunity, and also to give some legal backing to what the society as a whole regards as the basic conditions necessary for living together as a society. Of course, putting things like that may be consistent either with a great deal of state activity and regulation or with very little. My own position is a pluralist one in which the state and politicians should exercise far more care than they normally do in taking on themselves what is better seen as the prerogative of individuals, of their families and of autonomous institutions and organisations.

It is pluralist in two directions, however. There should first be a plurality of sources of power and influence in a society: the autonomous-institutions point. Second, it is pluralist in a more fundamental sense. While each of us might want to defend a particular view of life as being the right one or the best (for all, even), I believe that no one has such a comprehensive monopoly of wisdom as to have the right to impose that view on everyone else; this follows in part from a belief in human fallibility, which can be expressed in either secular or religious terms. So within the limits imposed by the very fact of a group of people living together, individuals should be free to follow and develop their own philosophies of life, including religious ones.

What those limits to freedom might be will no doubt vary from one society and from one mentality to another. Even within the broadly liberal conception of society presupposed here there will be differing conceptions of the limits of the acceptable in different times and places. Even within a very liberal or pluralist conception of society there will be some very specific limitations on what people might be allowed to do stemming directly from a joint acceptance of what will allow groups and individuals to pursue their own higher-level philosophies of life. In other words, there will have to be a degree of live-and-let-live on contentious issues arising from competing philosophies of life, which would condemn—and even legislate to prevent—actions which conspire to undermine the liberties enjoyed by all. To take some specific examples, we should condemn the bombing of abortion clinics (even if we are fiercely opposed to abortion); we should ensure that novels and cartoons can be published without fear of reprisals, even though we find them offensive and some find them blasphemous; and we should be on our guard against creeping censorship through the implicit acceptance that some areas are off limits to academic inquiry.

What I have to say derives from a specific reading of the Christian tradition, and from attempts within that tradition to find a modus vivendi with
the secular world. But I will not be too disturbed if some modern Christians disagree with my conclusions, because there are trends within Christianity which strike me as part of that very swallowing up of everything in the political which I was criticising a couple of paragraphs ago.

A core element of religion is the relationship between the believer and God; indeed I am tempted to say that this is the key element, at least in the type of religion I am interested in. So what I say here will not apply to conceptions of religion, such as that proposed in at least part of the Old Testament, where the focus is on a chosen people rather than on saved individuals, and even less to that expounded by Durkheim in which, when primitive peoples worship their god, what they are actually worshipping is the tribe itself. Obviously in such essentially communal interpretations of religion there will be different accounts of religion and public life and also of the relationship between the individual believer and his god from the one I am here developing.

With this clarification, we can say that what is ultimately at stake in religion as I am taking it is the care of the individual soul, the turning of the soul away from fantasy and towards reality, and in Christian (as in Platonic) terms the soul is understood as having a destiny which transcends this life. In Christian mythology Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, to be sure, but the kingdom was not of this world. It was hidden, like a mustard seed, and grew in the hearts and in the community of believers. Jesus’s kingdom was distinguished in this respect from the kingdoms and communities of this earth.

On my understanding of Christianity, however, religion has all sorts of public implications in the sense that it imposes on us social duties. But these duties arise from the sacredness of each of us as individuals and from the individual transcendent destiny of each of us. It is because other people are sacred, individually, that we have duties to them, and because I am sacred, individually, that I have responsibilities to myself and others. In this sense religion is not essentially social in a worldly sense, and should not be seen as attempting to produce a political settlement on earth. From the point of view of the believer it is essentially individualistic, not in the sense that it is selfish, but in the sense that it is primarily concerned with the worth and fate of each of us as individuals, and how each of us responds to God’s transcendent self-revelation breaking in on us from outside time. Each of us, as an individual, needs faith and repentance, as the basis of the religious life. Each of us enters the world alone and leaves alone, and religion must focus on these moments of ultimate loneliness, particularly the last, as the point at which, pace John Donne, each man is very much an island, confronting in his nakedness his Maker. Religion is about the turning of the soul in preparation for this moment, and that is something each one of us has to do alone, even if it can be done only with the help of divine grace and from within a Christian community, and even if, once turned, we are helped by the community of the Church militant, journeying with that Church in the hope and expectation of ultimate membership of the Church triumphant.

The ethic which largely underlies contemporary Western societies, however, is that of liberal individualism. Some would see this philosophy as essentially secular, as arising in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. No doubt the prevailing political philosophy today tends to be a somewhat uneasy agglomeration of Enlightenment notions of human rights and of a broadly utilitarian approach to ethical and political questions. For all their differences both utilitarianism and human rights philosophies, by taking the individual (individual rights, individual pleasure and pain) as their starting point, feed naturally into the politics of liberal democracy. And both utilitarianism and theories of human rights in their secular forms will differ from religious views in making no appeal to a transcendent source of value or of any notion of the sacredness of the individual that cannot be analysed in terms of this world.

By contrast, as with Socrates in his prison, the religious view will see life as a journey through this life to a better world, provoked and borne up by intimations of transcendence on the way. While this view is not essentially communitarian, as I have already argued, the individual on his or her pilgrimage through the secular world will need to be supported by communities in various ways. First there will need to be a religious community which transmits and develops the religious message, and supports the believer on the journey, but there will also need to be the secular community within which the religious quest takes place. It is here that we see an important role for the state or political authority,
even from the religious point of view. According to the Western-liberal concept of politics, a key role of the state is to provide security for those who live within it. This, of course, means protection of life and property within—and defence against threats from without. From the perspective of the religious life the state will be seen as necessary to provide a settled and secure order within which the religious life and community can flourish and develop.

But there is also a potential tension between church and state, especially if the state is secular. The religious perspective, being transcendent and appealing to a divine and timeless authority, will also provide a yardstick by which other institutions, regimes and customs can be judged. Christ’s authority is not of this world, and because it is not of this world, but of a higher authority altogether, it stands in judgment over this world. In particular, it will judge the actions of the secular state unfavourably if these actions are seen as compromising or undermining the sacredness of the individual—if, for example, the state in any way seems to be seriously abusing individuals for its own ends. From the point of view of Christianity, it is never expedient that one man dies for the people.

So is it ever expedient that one terrorist is tortured or sent back to where he is likely to be tortured? Is it ever expedient that an old person is quietly and gently disposed of, or a disabled foetus aborted, or embryos manufactured for research? Obviously these areas will be of central importance to religious moralists, and may well bring them into disagreement with a prevailing public ethic of utilitarianism and the prevailing politics of administrative convenience. Conflict of this sort should not seem surprising, when one reflects just how demanding the idea of the sacredness of the individual is, nor should we be shocked that others find this ethic inconvenient. What would be more shocking would be a religious collapse in the face of contrary public opinion, or perhaps more so, in the face of the convenient pragmatism so easily favoured by legislators and bureaucrats (though what not collapsing might entail in a secular or pluralist state is not always easy to determine).

As I have already suggested, it should not involve bombing abortion clinics even if we think abortion is wholly wrong. Living in a free society, as well as affording all of us freedoms, imposes restrictions on what individuals can do to others in their society even for what might seem the best and morally most urgent of reasons. On the other hand I am not at all clear what someone wholly opposed to embryo research on religious grounds should do if he or she were invited to go on the British government’s Human Embryology and Fertilisation Authority.

That is unlikely, I admit, and liable to happen only through some oversight on the part of the bureaucrats. If it were to happen nonetheless, should it be seen by that individual as a chance to prevent some harm, or rather as collusion in what should not be given any support or credibility at all?

But this is a practical question. It does not impinge on the right and duty of the Church to speak out clearly against what it believes to be seriously wrong, though even here there might be disagreements about just how this speaking out should be pursued. One might think here of what strikes critics of the Catholic Church as pusillanimity or worse in Nazi Germany, but what might also be seen as a degree of prudence which did not actually compromise the Church’s underlying stance. (This had been very clearly set out in the encyclical Mit brennender Sorge written, incidentally, by Pacelli before he became Pope Pius XII). Whatever we might think are the practical implications in specific cases, however, it is clear that a religious standpoint is one from which we will judge other values and decisions. The religious citizen or subject will see rulers as themselves under a higher law. This higher law—maybe in the medieval sense of natural law—is one to which we are all subject, whether in the political sense we are rulers or subjects.

In this understanding the religious person will take issue with the Roman view of the state, that in which the emperor is the sole source of law and divinely endorsed, and also with legal positivism, in which there is no law other than that which is determined according to correct constitutional procedures. He will also stand aloof from the more sophisticated form of legal positivism of some contemporary American theorists of law, who want to judge actual decisions of the courts and actual legislation in terms of what they, the theorists, take to be those principles which can be seen as best explaining the rights and liberties enshrined in American and British law. From the point of view of a religious thinker, the spirit of these laws (assuming we can identify what is meant) is itself a human artefact, and may be found wanting from a timeless, transcendent perspective. This sense of being found wanting will only be increased when it emerges that the spirit in question, as discovered by the theorists, turns out to be precisely that of the contemporary secular progressivism which religious people often find lax on questions of fundamental human values.

The sense that the religious community has values which are not necessarily identical with those of the secular power—and which in any case derive not from raisons d’État but from a different source altogether—allows us to rule out from the
religious point of view a number of possible relationships between religion and state. One, which we may call Kemalism (after Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkey) would be where the Church (or mosque in this case) is allowed to exist, but where its role is conceived as being essentially to support the secular power. We may indeed have problems with fundamentalist Islam (to which we will turn shortly), but one can hardly quarrel with devout Muslims who find Kemalism objectionable. If this is what living in a secular state is to mean, it is not surprising that religious people might reject secularism.

Staying in that part of the world, we might also glance at the Orthodox notion of the Turkokratia. This was a doctrine developed during the time of the Ottoman empire, when it seemed to the Orthodox hierarchy that survival depended on what amounted to collusion with the Turkish authorities. Again, there may have been reasons for this. But one cannot help reflecting on the extent to which the Orthodox hierarchies of the Eastern Bloc were prepared to collaborate with the authorities in communist times. All this may have been a legacy from the spirit of Turkokratia (which may not be extinct even after the fall of communism).

But Kemalism and Turkokratia are by no means the only ways religions can be compromised in their dealings with the state. A more difficult example, and one which may take us closer to home, might be the way the Catholic Church in general—and according to their enemies, the Jesuits in particular—were prepared to condone scandalous behaviour from Louis XIV and his court in order to give the Church an easy ride in France. Of course, it wasn’t put quite like that. The argument was that allowing the King concessions on sexual matters which would not be allowed to ordinary believers would be the means to the salvation of many thousands of those ordinary believers whose religious practice could thus be secured by maintaining the position of the Church in France. It has to be said that this was ultimately a self-defeating practice even from the pragmatic point of view. Having compromised its sexual morality to suit the monarch, the Church was then in a weak position when it came to commenting adversely on the pointless and utterly immoral wars which disfigured the later parts of Louis’s reign (ironically at a time when, once married to the formidable and formidably pious Mme de Maintenon, Louis actually began to behave far better in his personal life). This example aside, maybe it could be asked whether there is not a degree of Jesuiticalness in the behaviour of the churches today in the sense of too easy an acceptance of the nostrums of secular morality. Observers quickly gain a sense that many church leaders are relativistic and flexible about moral matters, while others who stick to what they conceive of as timeless truths are made to seem obstinate and unfeeling.

It is easy to understand and up to a point to sympathise with the tendency of religious people to seek accommodations with the secular world. After all, even within an institution claiming divine guidance, doctrine does develop, and not all insights from the secular realm are misguided, even from a religious point of view. There is always the genuine possibility that some of what religious people take as being divinely inspired is itself simply an aspect of contemporary and local practice. In fact there may be a far worse temptation for the religious person thinking about the relationship between the church and the world than engaging in casuistry or attempting to sympathise with or reach accommodations with the better and more humane elements of the secular world. That temptation at first sight seems to be the opposite position: instead of making religion consonant with the world, one tries to make the world in the image of religion by setting up some form of theocracy, in which the rules and practices of the public realm are themselves determined by religious edict.

There have, of course, been theocracies in Christian history, notably the Geneva of John Calvin and the Muhlhausen of Thomas Müntzer (much admired in East Germany, by the way). There are also the attempts to set up Islamic states, run by religious authorities, such as those of the early caliphas and those in Iran today and Afghanistan under the Taliban. The very notion of the Dar-al-Islam, central to Islamic thought, envisages a pure society run on Koranic lines, in which there are no distinctions, except of administrative divisions of labour, between the religious, the legal and the political. During the Christian Middle Ages and for some time subsequently the Papacy itself was a secular ruler (though it is not clear to me that there was any rigorous attempt there to set up a theologically inspired regime).
Theocracy as used here refers to a political set-up in which the government is in the hands of religious leaders by virtue of their being religious leaders, who then attempt to impose a theologically-inspired regime on the people. Its advocates would doubtless say that such a regime would be the best possible one because its precepts and aims would be pure, unworldly and inspired by transcendent values and insights. To go back to the kingdom of the New Testament, could we not, by political means, achieve a society founded on the virtues of the New Testament and inspired by the spirit of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount? In such a society people would be more just, more humane, more equal, more virtuous and more compassionate; oppression would be absent, and the people, freed by the nature of the regime from the pursuit of selfish ends, would do what was best from a timeless point of view, because, encouraged by the politico-cum-religious authorities, they would see that it was the best and they felt happy in its pursuit.

What is involved in theocracy as so defined has a striking resemblance to Plato’s Republic, ruled by philosopher kings in the interests of virtue and with an eye on the ideal world above. Theocracy here would not, of course, involve the rigid class stratification we find in Plato, but even without that it would still suffer from many of the defects of Plato’s vision, the best once more being the enemy of the good. Even if we are religious, we should be careful here. Indeed, we should be particularly careful not to be seduced by the perennial excuse offered by advocates of utopian visions from Plato himself onwards (assuming for the moment that Plato was actually arguing in favour of his republic)—the excuse that when, as inevitably happens, a utopian project ends in tears and worse, the fault is not with the vision, but with a specific, flawed attempt to implement it.

This excuse is a monumental mistake. The theocratic vision is itself fatally flawed, and flawed in the first instance for a good theological reason, namely that of original sin. Human beings are imperfect and so are human institutions, manned and used as they are by human beings. This fundamental fact experience has shown us to be universally the case even aside from the actual doctrine of original sin, and the point ought to be granted even by those who do not accept original sin in its theological sense. Even if an institution is founded in the name of faith or virtue, enshrining within itself the highest principles and standards, it will not be immune from corruption. This point applies to churches too, as history amply demonstrates. Looking at history and keeping original sin in mind, the wonder is not that the Catholic Church in 2015, say, is imperfect in all sorts of ways; the wonder rather is that it has moved away from some of the grosser imperfections of the medieval church.

In fact, leaving aside a theological belief in the divine guidance of the church, we might be able to offer a purely historical explanation for the morally improved state of the Catholic Church today compared to the fifteenth century. For much of the medieval period, the church was a powerful secular ruler as well as the religious authority; monasteries and bishoprics were often politically powerful and rich in their own right. As institutions of power they gave those heading them careers of immense wealth and prestige. So major religious institutions and even the Church itself became prizes to be seized and fought over (much as the big state bureaucracies are in our own day). In being prizes to be seized and fought over, they were easily diverted from their ostensible aims, and began to be run mainly for the benefit of those running them, as we saw with the Papal states (and as we see in today’s nationalised health service in Britain). In short the medieval Papacy itself became an Italian princedom, in behaviour little different from the other states of central Italy—though actually having a bigger influence throughout Christendom than its neighbours, owing to its universalist religious pretensions, its claims to a divine mandate, and its wealth from the donations of the faithful.

Once it became a secular power, the Church was potentially more dangerous than a purely secular state, precisely because of the divine authority it claimed for itself. That gave its adherents and leaders an extra tool, so to speak, in the furtherance of their ambitions, which in turn was sure to attract to its ranks people whose own ambitions were far from those of the Church in its pure state. To take another example, people are sometimes surprised that the Taliban and the Iranian theocracy, or perhaps more accurately, people acting in their name, indulge in great cruelty. They should not be; the power claimed by these theocracies in the name of Allah makes it inevitable that psychopaths of all sorts will be attracted to them, in much the same way that a communist system will reveal and release hundreds of little Lenins in every village and commune, and a fascist system similar outgrowths of little Hitlers. Worst of all, once a church has been subsumed into a theocracy, it will cease to perform the essentially critical role it has in society when it is clearly separate and independent. Far from being the greatest role religion could play in our imperfect world, theocracy is actually its greatest temptation.

This can be illustrated by the changing attitude
of Dante to the Guelphs and the Ghibellines of his time. The Guelphs were the party in Italy (and Florence) who were broadly in favour of the Papacy and its power, while the Ghibellines favoured the establishment in Italy of rule by the emperor. As a Florentine leader, Dante was initially a Guelph, but his experiences in Rome and Florence and then in exile convinced him that a politically powerful Papacy would inevitably suffer from all the defects sketched above. Not for nothing does Dante consign a number of Popes to hell, including his arch-enemy and contemporary Pope Boniface VIII. They used the Papacy and its power as if it were a secular princedom.

But secular power, which is bound to corrupt and compromise the Church once they become intertwined, does have a positive role to play in stopping wars and in ameliorating discord and crime. And it could do so under a wise and powerful sovereign. Because Dante hoped Italy might fall under the beneficent rule of the putative Emperor Henry VII of Luxemburgh, he moved towards the Ghibelline cause after his exile from Florence. These hopes were dashed with Henry’s death, but Dante’s own experiences allowed him to develop in The Divine Comedy a picture of the clear separation of the roles of church and state—the church being concerned with salvation (only) and the state with providing the conditions of peace and security which we (and the church) all need in our journey through the world.

Actually there was nothing very new in Dante’s political vision. Writing on the papal reforms instigated by Hildebrand (Gregory VII) in the eleventh century, which attempted to sever the close relationships which then existed between church and state, the historian Reginald Lane Poole wrote (in Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought and Learning, 1884):

It is perfectly clear that if the church was to exercise that sway which all Christians agreed it ought to exercise over the consciences of men, it must be as free as possible from those ties which bound it to the secular state.

Further, as Gregory regarded civil government as a human institution deeply polluted by its sinful origin, there could be no preferred type of regime, such as monarchy for example (so much for the divine right of kings). Indeed, “granted only the superiority of ecclesiastical power, there was no concession she [the Church] would not make in favour of popular rights”. Also we find in the writings of Manegold of Lautenbach, a follower of Hildebrand, as eloquent a statement of the theory of the social contract as any in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

Are we now seeing a new kind of tension in church–state relations, however, in what strikes me as an aggressively strident official secularism, lambasting what is referred to as “religious fundamentalism”? I am thinking here of attacks on what in Britain are called faith schools, whether Christian or Muslim, and also of the British government’s use of charity and equality legislation to confine the activities of religious charities, such as adoption agencies, within its own vision of the good life.

At the most general level the question raised by faith schools is that of the responsibility for the education of children. Where does this primarily lie, in the hands of parents or vested in the state? We can all follow Mill (in On Liberty, Chapter 5) in agreeing that the state has a duty to ensure that education actually takes place, while insisting like Mill that the responsibility for carrying out and directing that education ought to be that of the parents who have brought their children into the world. Like Mill one could argue, on broadly liberal grounds, that a general State education [would be] a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another … [and that] in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it [would] establish a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.

Without going into details, let me record my impression that in Britain as the state has regulated education more and more (particularly since it nationalised the curriculum and exams twenty years ago), what Mill says has been largely borne out in experience. The state clearly has no monopoly of wisdom (or even no wisdom at all) on educational knowledge, which is Mill’s point. One could add to Mill’s refreshing pluralism here the more specifically religious conviction (which I share) that children do not belong to the state or its agencies.

Further, if the state insists on funding education in such a way as to put private education out of the hands of most families, then it will have to...
countenance not just the existence of religious schools but schools of other sorts. In equity, if there is parental demand, it will have to fund them too. After all, families of Catholics, Mormons, Muslims and Scientologists all pay taxes just as much as the families of agnostics, atheists and secularists.

What, however, if some of these schools teach Islam or creationism? I am inclined to ask simply, “What if they do?” and leave it at that. But that then raises the question: just how deep does our liberal pluralism go? I am assuming here that there are limits to what is tolerable, given what I said earlier about mutual tolerance. So if a school was manifestly abusing children physically or psychologically as part of a supposed religious ritual, or urging its pupils to train as terrorists, then action should be taken, swiftly and firmly, to stop this. But teaching that Islam is the only true religion and that ideally its remit should include the political, or that the world began a mere 10,000 years ago—these claims hardly fall into those categories. Do they in any uncontentious sense amount to abuse at all?

Maybe they do. But rather than the state issuing lists of doctrines proscribed in all schools, or issuing a list of its own approved “values” to be inculcated in all schools, we will do better just to accept that there may be at the margins a degree of irresolvable conflict between religion and whatever is the prevailing ethos. Actually I suspect that with mutual goodwill all sorts of reasonable compromises are possible in this area, and that they will in the main be made. After all, children of creationist parents will mostly do public exams in science, and plenty of Muslims are prepared to live under the Dar-al-harb and to engage in its political processes. So the discomfort many of us might feel in the area of schooling can in the main be ameliorated. But where compromises do not seem to be possible, a genuinely pluralist, liberal society ought to act permissively towards religious dissenters, just as religious people should act permissively towards the existence of abortion clinics.

On whether Christian adoption agencies should be forced to accept homosexual couples as prospective adopters (in the UK) or whether religious institutions should be compelled to finance sexual behaviour contrary to their beliefs (in the USA), the situation seems to me to be clearer. The state is simply abusing its power in forcing religious people either to act against their principles or not act at all, where what they want to do compromises no one’s freedom. After all, homosexuals are not being barred from adopting through non-religious agencies, nor church employees from purchasing contraceptives; so if it is a question of equality, the state has already secured that. But these cases set a wider and worrying precedent, in that in them the state is using the law to enforce a code of ethics which is in itself contentious. It goes too far beyond any general consensus on what is required for us as a society to live together to be a justifiable case for legislation.

Nor does the illiberal abuse of state power stop there. In Britain recently we have had the (Conservative) Education Secretary insisting that schools teach gay rights as part of the “fundamental British values” teachers are supposed to respect in their work. She did not make it clear what would happen to a teacher who told a class that he or she opposed gay marriage. Equally, under the protection of fundamental British values (a nostrum actually introduced to protect schools from the incursion of radical Islam) the British school inspectorate has criticised Jewish (!) schools for being insufficiently explicit about homosexuality and Christian schools for being insufficiently diverse in their approach to multiculturalism. The state and its agencies are thus using their power to enforce views on which there are honest and deep disagreements in the population. Taken far enough, such a state begins to look like its own church—a theocracy in reverse—imposing its doctrines on a surprised and perhaps alarmed people. We have already reached a point at which religious people should in all logic join forces with Millian liberals to shelter under the freedom Mill advocated and to protest at their violations by an over-mighty and illiberal state power.

Throughout this paper I have defended a pluralist view of society in which religion has a role to play distinct from that of the secular power or sovereign. Anticipations of this view can be found in the Middle Ages. It would be fascinating to think that the limited, pluralist state of Western democracy is itself the descendant of a powerful strain of medieval Christian thinking represented by Hildebrand, Manegold and Dante, at least in the limited role that strain accords to religion in the political realm. Given this, and given the contemporary examples we have just looked at, it would not be entirely unfitting if in these post-religious days, religion itself becomes a guardian or advocate of the classical liberal state and of its proper limits.

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Three poems in praise of *Forest Trees of Australia*  
by Hall, Johnston & Chippendale (AGPS, Canberra, 1970)

I. *Eucalyptus saligna*—Sydney Blue Gum  
(*p. 57*)

Descend, descend and the forest increases over you:  
The biomass of shade, the change of rooms until light,  
where allowed, is a tinkling of chandeliers.  
A community hall of quiet elders watch as you pass  
or that sense of just one whose gaze follows  
with mild interest, as he might the changing weather.  
Dropping, you skid over the white scree of a track,  
the heat brilliant, a scattering of so many little suns,  
and slip, your feet spearing the thatched roof of litter  
through to the moistness of decay.

And overhead, everywhere,  
small bunches of heads, opening, closing,  
wind-silly and as ignorant of you as kids free of school.  
Sometimes, animals, that shiver of disappearance,  
sometimes birds, their cries like cries, urgent, and lost.  
Mostly though it is air which visits here, packed with heat,  
thick with smell the way a perfume is persistent  
throughout a department store. But it pinches as from spices.  
That said, this is not Bali—there is no indulgence in its cinnamon,  
in the blue haze of its oil little forgiveness.

It has weight like stacked bales and will not shift,  
until like a workman who has knocked off for the day  
it changes clothes and swims with the late afternoon breezes  
lazing in from the coast, frivolous with an excess of blue  
and gauzy with moisture and salt. Ah! Those few hours of release  
before night, sudden as a guillotine, refrigerates all this into stiff leather.  
Otherwise this is a gated community, restrained as Quakers,  
indifferent as all cities. You are not excluded but neither  
is there welcome.

Yet standing here is to be surprised  
by gifts of light spattered between the confusion  
which is the massed stems of words, one masking another,  
as deeper and deeper the eye searches, hungering for an end,  
such as the certainty of a city upon a skyline  
or a farm, calm and breathing easily into the dusk,  
or simply for that clearing where there is no language.

Here then is your mind and your loneliness  
as a branch breaks or limbs squeak, one rubbing  
against another, and always the drift of things dropping  
—the snake-skin of bark sloughed off, summer’s ochre-burnt peeling,
small boats of leaves lost while unshaven old men ache and lean uncertain they might ever recover from gravity.

And from a ridge you look across hills, crumbled black-green, intensely self-absorbed, lumped like ploughed ground, the massed crowns swaying like bull kelp in their dark oceans. It will be a long climb out. You might not make it. Held here, you might also come alive in its dream.

II. *Eucalyptus melliodora*—Yellow Box

(*pp. 240–241*)

(*i.m. Rob Murray, who I heard today had died in a tractor accident*)

There are the facts of botany, then there is the tree. It is the tree of all that is solid and enduring; those grandfathers left conferring in wheat paddocks. The elders dotting the parks, silent and aboriginal and watchful. It is torture to split, it hazes with bees, sweetens the air thick with the small fizzing stars of its flowers. Like most box it has fenced itself in, has burnt itself out in generations of Rayburns, making scones for its honey. From a distance it smokes a grey veil all over itself like one an orchardist uses to camouflage his fruit and everywhere it stands out like a natural leader among ill-disciplined recruits; its shade black as corridors, where stock fold and breathe softly through the heat. It bends and grows through cracks in the air to be most eccentric; great boughs like arms extending into hives or working through tunnels or as if searching after the legs of a calf in the intricacies of labour. It is the decent man, the honesty and plain-speaking and the class of it.

And this one we found on your place, Rob, all blue, strangely blue, the blue of sepia photograph blue as if the sky were the weak wash of it, it the original pot of colour. Its fruits clustered everywhere almost glossy, shoe-polish-brown, apple-red. We swarmed over its branches thinking this a treasure we might not see to collect again as though it were an ancient city which would easily disappear into the sands if we left off picking for that day. That one day, Rob, we collected seed of that tree and have not returned. Nothing can be returned. *Melliodora*. Sweet honey hived in the memory, the tree endures.
III. Macquarie Pass  
(for Lyn Miller)

This is the day of a picnic, first outing in a new car  
and I am not yet stale with travelling—  
flicker, glare, flicker—  
the forest is chattering  
and loud to itself, and scurryings of song,  
flashes with leaves shivering  
the way things tell of suddenness, of absence.  
As when a door has been closed, a curtain, flowers in a vase,  
the air—all unsettled, uncertain.  
And a deep musk that tells the world has mysteries  
which are always here and this something now you know.  

Overhead,  
further than the world of adults talking their strange words,  
almost at the edge of that hazy blue, the future, the stretched tips  
like the last of a coastline disappearing into ozone,  
like fingerlings in darting shoals, careless as a girlish wave,  
like wishes for the impossible, these copper children  
almost escaped from their parents, alive  
in their own adventures, teasing the wind and I am envious.

Flicker, glare, flicker as dozing we are cradled through.  
The windows reflect our faces, our eyes stare  
into the rushing, then for an instant, the photographic moment,  
of undergrowth, looking for anything. Fronds of fern droop,  
drops of water shaken by our mudguard, splash.  
Just here there is moistness, the air damp as sex, wetness  
trickling like solder bright in the creases of the tannin-black sandstone.  
The sun makes a temple of these columns,  
Rose and Flooded Gum and shaggy Turpentine  
but there is no Old Testament here. Light is everywhere:  
having broken through, this world is awash  
in spangles and glitter and confetti and froth.  
As we slow for a corner, like hearing a party nearby,  
there is ease and mingling and the silver sprinkling of sound.

Then out onto a ridge, a clearing, a break where the sun has a chance,  
out of the dark, down and around a switchback  
and plunge deep again.

Today though, there is no darkness:  
this boy’s heart learns what sacred means  
and there are no lessons in it. Just a day,  
as clear and bright and blue as the beach to which we are heading  
—all this among the one silence of that tumbling, austere escarpment.  
Flicker, glare, flicker, rejoice.

Russell Erwin
Here are some of the spies and traitors of my lifetime. There were many more, but these are the ones I remember. Some spied and betrayed for money, some for the challenge or the romance of the game, but most did it for a grand illusion. In the end a few were remorseful, but most stayed defiant. None felt sufficiently appreciated by their masters or their contemporaries. None claimed or seemed to be happy.

Part 1: School for Spies (1931 to 1939)

1931 Harold “Kim” Philby meets Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean at Trinity College, Cambridge. Philby joins CUSS (Cambridge University Socialist Society). Burgess is a member of The Apostles, a club favoured by many communists and homosexuals. Maclean and Philby are soon joined by a close friend, James Klugmann, who remains openly pro-Soviet throughout his life.

1932 Klaus Fuchs, a nineteen-year-old student, joins the German Communist Party.

1933 The American communist Whittaker Chambers goes to Moscow for espionage training. In Shanghai, the legendary Soviet spy Richard Sorge meets a young German-Jewish communist named Ruth Kuczynski (later known as “Sonia”) and enlists her for the GRU (Soviet military intelligence). Ruth becomes a friend of Sorge’s assistant and (probably) mistress, a communist journalist named Agnes Smedley. Smedley is also acquainted with a young English journalist and tobacco company clerk named Roger Hollis. (Twenty-five years later Hollis becomes the head of MI5.) Hollis may meet Sonia in Smedley’s circles in China, along with a German Comintern official, Arthur Ewert. Sonia goes to Moscow to attend a six-month training school for spies.

1934 Philby goes to Vienna. He marries an Austrian-Jewish girl named Alice Friedmann (“Lizi”), a communist. In Vienna Philby is recruited for the Soviets by the Hungarian agents Theodor Maly and Gabor Peter (who later becomes Hungary’s chief of AVO, the communist State Security Police).

Anthony Blunt, a Fellow at Trinity College (later code-named “Johnson”) and his lover Guy Burgess (“Hicks”) are recruited by the Soviets. Philby (“Stanley”) is said to play a part in Blunt’s recruitment. Blunt in turn recruits Michael Straight, Leo Long and others.

1935 Donald Maclean (“Homer”) is recruited by Burgess and Blunt, on instructions from the Soviets via Philby. (These Cambridge spies are a rare instance of agents knowing one another.) Maclean joins the British Foreign Office as Third Secretary.

1936 GRU officer Walter Krivitsky (Schmeka Ginsburg) is transferred to the KGB (then called NKVD) and becomes rezident (station chief) in The Hague, co-ordinating Soviet intelligence in Western Europe.

Philby, by then a fully-fledged Soviet agent, pays several visits to Germany pretending to be a Nazi sympathiser.

Guy Burgess, on Soviet instructions, joins the BBC.

John Cairncross, an open communist at Cambridge, is recruited through James Klugmann. He “quits” the Communist Party, sits for a Foreign Office examination, and soon joins the same department as Maclean.

An American Comintern activist, Gregory Kheifetz, meets and develops a young Italian-Jewish student named Bruno Pontecorvo in Rome. On his suggestion Pontecorvo establishes contact with the famous French scientist (and prominent communist) Frédéric Joliot-Curie. Eventually Pontecorvo, code-named “Mlad”, will be the Soviet’s conduit to the atomic secrets of Enrico Fermi.

1937 Chambers, disillusioned, quits the Communist Party and his spy assignment.
Philby goes to Spain, ostensibly as a correspondent for the London Times. He separates from his too obviously communist wife Lizzi, who goes to live in Paris (but will spend the war years in Britain working as a Soviet agent, still married to, but separated from, Philby).

1938 Krivitsky’s best friend, another Jewish KGB agent, is killed in one of Stalin’s purges. Krivitsky defects, initially to the French, and gives clues about KGB moles. If followed up, Krivitsky’s clues could lead to Maclean (“a Scotsman of good birth”) and Philby (“a newsman in Spain”). The clues aren’t followed up, and both Maclean and Philby end up joining British intelligence. Maclean is not exposed for another thirteen years, while Philby is not exposed, at least not fully, for another twenty-five.

In Spain the KGB recruits the American Morris Cohen, who later marries Lona Cohen. She is to become a top Soviet courier. Among other things, she will carry in a box of paper tissues the first detailed description and drawings of the atomic bomb, given to her by Klaus Fuchs.

Roger Hollis is taken on by MI5.

1939 Blunt’s friend Guy Liddell eases Blunt into MI5 at the start of the war (on behalf of the public school network rather than the Soviet spy network—though some other sources also name Tomas (Tom) Harris as Blunt’s mentor). As for Guy Burgess, he finds a place for himself in MI6, and manages to bring in Philby.

The FBI gives sanctuary to Krivitsky in America where he meets Chambers. They agree to expose Soviet agents in the USA and Britain. Chambers goes as far as to approach Assistant Secretary of State Adolph A. Berle, but is reluctant to reveal any names. Roosevelt’s White House finds the whole matter too vague and ignores Chambers.

Igor Gouzenko, aged twenty, is accepted to study at the Kuibishev Institute of Military Engineering in Moscow.

Ribbentrop and Molotov sign the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact. Germany invades Poland; the Second World War begins.

**Part 2: The Big Bang (1940 to 1945)**

1940 Roger Hollis becomes Acting Head of MI5’s “F” division, overseeing pro-Soviet communist activities in the UK.

Gouzenko, with the rank of lieutenant, trains as a cipher clerk. One of his colleagues, a Lieutenant Panchenko, is executed for mistakenly throwing a coded telegraph from Molotov into the garbage.

Anthony Blunt joins the temporary (wartime) staff of MI5. So does Guy Burgess. Leo Long is in MI4 (a more technical section, involved in logistics evaluation).

Donald Maclean marries an American, Melinda Marling.

Pontecorvo, by then a nuclear physicist living in France with his Swedish-born wife, finds refuge in the USA shortly before the Germans reach Paris.

The Soviets invade Finland.

France falls; the Battle of Britain begins.

1941 Krivitsky in Britain exposes two code clerks (Captain John Herbert King and Tyler Kent) but has only imprecise clues to give about moles in high places in the USA and Britain. (Volumes of his documents are stored by the French in a barge on the Seine, but documents are lost when the bottom of the barge inexplicably rots away.) Despondent about the failure of British and US authorities to follow up his leads, Krivitsky commits suicide in Washington or, as some claim, is killed there by the Soviets.

In the same year Ruth “Sonia” Kuczynski, who had been working in Switzerland in a spy-ring under the code-name “Lucy”, is sent by the GRU to establish the British branch of “Rote Capelle” (the famous Soviet spy-ring “Red Orchestra”). She is to recruit spies and send intelligence to Moscow through dead-letter boxes as well as radio transmissions. Her assignment coincides with MI5’s move from London to Blenheim Palace, near Oxford.

Sonia also settles near Oxford, just a few miles from Blenheim Palace, where Hollis works, and the town of Oxford, where he lives. During this time Sonia and her brother Jurgen meet and enlist a fellow German refugee, the scientist Klaus Fuchs (later code-named “Charles”) who is working for the British on something named “Tube Alloys Project”. It is, in fact, the joint US-British effort to develop the atomic bomb.

Japan attacks Pearl Harbor; Germany invades the Soviet Union.

1942 The GRU recruits Cambridge-educated British scientist Allan Nunn May, who is soon assigned to the British side of the “Manhattan” (atomic bomb) project.

Sonia moves to Oxford itself, where she now lives less than a mile from Hollis’s residence.

Gouzenko, aged twenty-three, is assigned to GRU headquarters in Moscow. He marries his teenage sweetheart, Svetlana.

Chambers goes to the FBI, but still reveals no names.

The Allies institute a ban on decoding Soviet traffic (presumably for the duration). Soviet radio
messages are copied and stored, but not decoded or analysed.

1943 The Soviets, through the web of KGB spymaster Pavel Sudoplatov (Department S), start penetration operations against Los Alamos and other American labs. They target, in particular, the scientists Robert Oppenheimer (code-named “Star”), Leo Szilard and Enrico Fermi (“Editor”). Influenced by ideals of “scientific internationalism”, these scientists, along with the physicist Niels Bohr, begin to act as sources or agents of influence for the Soviets, whether unwittingly or, as in the case of Oppenheimer, willingly.

On Oppenheimer’s suggestion, the Americans invite Fuchs to work on the “Manhattan” project in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Bruno Pontecorvo (“Mlad”) joins the British atomic team in Canada at the Chalk River nuclear research project.

Gouzenko is given a “legend” (false identity) and is posted as a cipher clerk to Ottawa. He goes by air; his wife Svetlana follows him by ship after the birth of their first child.

At Roosevelt’s request to Stalin, Moscow announces the dissolution of the Comintern.

1944 Blunt is named MI5’s liaison with Allied High Command, while Philby is named to head Section IX (Soviet counter-intelligence) of MI6. Donald Maclean is appointed First Secretary of the British embassy in Washington.

Meanwhile Fuchs transmits to the Soviets key secrets of the atom bomb (specifically the implosion design and data on U-235). Although Fuchs belongs to Sonia’s GRU spy-ring in Britain, in their eagerness for Fuchs’s material the Soviets transfer him to their KGB controller in the USA, Anatoli Yakovlev. The Soviets use their US couriers, including Lona Cohen as well as a communist named Harry Gold, to contact Fuchs.

Gouzenko and his family are recalled to Moscow.

1945 The Second World War ends with atomic bombs exploding over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Gouzenko is still in Ottawa because his masters extended his tour of duty by a year, but is now recalled to Moscow again. A month later he defects with his two-year-old son and pregnant wife. (At first Canada is at a loss about what to do with a defector from a wartime ally, and very nearly sends Gouzenko back.)

In the USA a disillusioned communist, Elizabeth Bentley, tells the FBI about a GRU technology theft spy-ring operating in the USA, and gives the name of one contact as “Julius”.

The Cold War begins. KGB officer Konstantin Volkov attempts to defect in Turkey, but the information ends up on Philby’s desk. The Soviets kidnap and kill Volkov.

The Soviets are having problems with their first nuclear reactor. The KGB sends the scientist Yakov Peytonrovich Terletsky to Denmark to meet Niels Bohr and ask for some tips. The meeting is facilitated by the Danish fellow traveller, writer Martin Andersen Nexø. (Bohr probably recognises the purpose and likely result of this “scientific exchange”.)

The Soviets permit Blunt to leave MI5 and devote himself to his art work, but Blunt stays in touch with his former colleagues in intelligence as well as with the KGB.

President Roosevelt dies.

Gouzenko’s second child is born in a town near their Royal Canadian Mounted Police hideout, “Camp X”.

Part 3: Handwriting on the Wall (1946 to 1953)

1946 The Kellock-Taschereau Commission in Canada begins its inquiries into the Gouzenko affair. The evidence reveals a joint GRU/KGB operation in Canada, code-named “Candy”, seeking information on the atomic bomb.

The Cold War goes public.

Canadian members of the spy-ring include a Member of Parliament, Fred Rose, and the organising secretary of the Communist Party of Canada, Sam Carr. Another eighteen men and women are civilian functionaries, military officers and scientists working variously for the National Research Council, the Department of Munitions and Supply, External Affairs, the RCAF, the RCN, the Wartime Information Board and the British High Commission. Ten are eventually convicted in Canada and given sentences ranging from six years (Fred Rose and Sam Carr) down to a 500 fine (John Soboloff, a Toronto medical doctor). Ten are acquitted.

Altogether, Gouzenko’s evidence and documents implicate some twenty-one Canadians and Britons, including “Alex” (Allan Nunn May) and a certain “Elli” whose identity is unknown to this day. The young cipher clerk’s information also contains clues, though no solid evidence, about the US atomic spies Alger Hiss. In addition, Gouzenko describes a graveyard “dubok” in England, a secret hiding place for messages, later found to bear a striking resemblance to St Sepulchre’s cemetery about a mile from Sonia’s and Hollis’s homes in Oxford.

The man sent by MI5 from Britain to debrief Gouzenko is (or appears to be) Roger Hollis.
Normally MI6 handles both intelligence and counter-intelligence abroad, and the initial interview is conducted for the British by an MI6 officer named Peter Dwyer, but in this instance, after Dwyer puts in his report, MI6 chief Sir Stewart Menzies asks Philby to go to Ottawa himself. Philby pleads other business and suggests Hollis rather than another MI6 officer for the Ottawa trip.

Later that year Allan Nunn May is tried, convicted and sentenced in Britain to ten years in prison.

Klaus Fuchs returns to England to take up a post at Harwell, Britain’s new nuclear research establishment. Attention is called to Fuchs for the first time because a Canadian suspect named Israel Halperin on Gouzenko’s list has Fuchs’s address in his notebook. This information is passed to MI5. They put Fuchs under surveillance, but he does nothing suspicious and after a few months the surveillance is dropped.

Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee appoints Sir Percy Sillitoe, former Chief Constable, to head MI5. This outside appointment, probably made by Attlee because insiders in the intelligence establishment are thought to have Tory leanings, results in mini-class-warfare inside MI5. Sillitoe is isolated from senior officers such as Guy Liddell (who was in line for the promotion), Dick White, Roger Hollis and others.

Philby asks his MI6 chief for leave to go to France to divorce his estranged wife Lizi, in order to marry Aileen Furse, with whom he has been cohabiting and produced several children. Though Lizi is known to MI5 as a Soviet agent, Philby’s marriage is viewed as a youthful mistake and nothing further is said about it by either branch of the service. The divorce goes through quickly and quietly, and Philby marries Furse in September 1946.

Georges Paques, a secret communist and eventually French attaché to NATO, is recruited by the KGB. (He becomes a member of the “Sapphire” spy-ring that is to inspire the Leon Uris book and Alfred Hitchcock movie *Topaz.*)

The first Soviet nuclear reactor becomes operational.

**1947** Alexander Foote, a British spy originally recruited by Sonia for the GRU in Switzerland, becomes disillusioned with the Soviets and gives information to MI5 about her. MI5 questions Sonia (Ruth Kuczynski) and her English husband Len Beurton, but conclude that this innocent Jewish mother and housewife was at worst a minor collaborator with the Soviets until the Stalin-Hitler pact, so they do nothing further about her. (What happens next is still in doubt. The official story is that Sonia and her husband fled Britain shortly after this interview, but this is probably disinformation. There is evidence that Sonia continued to live in Britain until 1950. The difference is crucial in that it points to Sonia possibly being shielded by a highly-placed mole in British intelligence.)

Fuchs is confirmed in his position at Harwell after being cleared as only “a slight risk” by MI5.

Donald Maclean is appointed Joint Secretary of the Western Allies’ Combined Policy Committee on atomic energy development (giving him unescorted access to all secret installations).

Gouzenko and his wife buy a house in Ontario. Their third child is born.

**1948** George Blake (born Behar) is angered at the British establishment because of a frustrated love affair with Iris Peake, later Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen. Blake is a Jew, and Peake’s family disapproves of the relationship. At this point Blake has already been recruited by his uncle, the Dutch communist Henri Curiel. Thirsting for revenge against the ruling circles of Britain, Blake finds employment with MI6.

Whittaker Chambers finally testifies before the House Un-American Activities Committee and reveals the name of Alger Hiss, a senior figure in the US foreign policy establishment. Chambers claims that Hiss is a Soviet agent who gave him sensitive documents to photograph and pass on to Moscow. When Chambers produces the microfilms, Hiss (who at first denies even knowing Chambers) is eventually convicted of perjury.

Donald Maclean is posted to Cairo as Embassy Counsellor.

Roger Hollis becomes Director of C Branch (Protective Security) of MI5.

Fuchs, working at Harwell, manages to convey information about the triggering mechanism of the H-bomb to his masters (according to what he eventually tells a cell-mate named Hume in prison).

Gouzenko publishes his first book (*This Was My Choice*) in Canada.

**1949** Philby becomes Washington station chief for MI6.

Alexander Foote publishes his confessions, *Handbook for Spies*, in Britain. (The book is said to be written in Foote’s name by his MI5 case officer, Courtenay Young.)

A CIA cryptanalysis project (variously code-named “Bride”, “Drug” and “Venona”) laboriously scans Soviet traffic recorded during the war and finds evidence of an atomic spy-ring. The description of one spy fits Klaus Fuchs (code-name “Rest”). The other description fits a man-and-wife team
with a relative working on the “Manhattan” project, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Ethel’s brother, David Greenglass, works as a technician at Los Alamos.

Bruno Pontecorvo gets transferred to Harwell. (The FBI search his home in the USA while he is working at Chalk River in Canada and find some documents indicating communist affiliations, but as it happens they pass the information to the British via none other than Philby, MI6’s new Washington station chief.)

Agnes Smedley, the journalist and old mentor of Soviet recruits and agents in Shanghai, visits Britain on her way back to China, but she falls ill and dies in Oxford at fifty-eight.

The Soviets explode their first atomic bomb.

1950 MI5 interviews Fuchs. He soon confesses, and picks out a photograph of Harry Gold as one of his couriers. This, coupled with earlier information from Gouzenko and Elizabeth Bentley, leads the FBI to Gold, Greenglass, the Rosenbergs and the atomic spy-ring in the USA. The Rosenbergs are arrested and charged.

Ruth “Sonia” Kuczynski, along with her husband and three children, disappears from England and turns up later in East Berlin. (Apparently Fuchs does not implicate Sonia to MI5 until he learns in prison that she’s safely out of the country.)

Pontecorvo is vetted and cleared by MI5, but decides to leave Harwell and accept a post at Liverpool University instead, severing his connection with secret work. A short time later, while on a European holiday with his family, he defects and turns up in Moscow.

Hugh Hambleton, a young Canadian economist, is recruited for the KGB in Ottawa by Soviet “cultural attaché” Victor Bourdine.

The Korean War begins. So does the McCarthy period, with a speech by Senator Joseph McCarthy in Wheeling, West Virginia.

1951 The CIA’s “Venona” decrypts now finger “Homer” (Donald Maclean). Philby alerts the KGB. Spymaster Yuri Modin assigns Guy Burgess to exfiltrate Maclean from England to Moscow, but Burgess either panics and flees with Maclean or, as some sources think, is compelled to defect by his Soviet controllers. Incredibly, Blunt accompanies the MI5 agents searching Burgess’s apartment and removes incriminating papers pertaining to Philby.

Philby, known for his association with Burgess, is recalled to Britain under suspicion. He soon leaves the Secret Service with a small pension (although he retains his association with friends and former colleagues in MI6 while he continues to work as a journalist).

Fuchs is tried, convicted and sentenced to fourteen years in prison.

1952 GRU Colonel Pyotr Popov defects in Vienna by throwing a note into the car of an American diplomat, and becomes a CIA mole.

On the request of MI5’s director of counterespionage, Dick White, Gouzenko provides a detailed memo to RCMP Superintendent George McClellan about his information concerning the MI5 spy “Elli”. The memo produces no results.

In Canada RCMP officer Terry Guerney begins to compile a file code-named “Featherbed” listing ex-communists who later entered government service. Eventually this file is to become a mole-hunt operation under the same code-name.

On the basis of some notes found in Burgess’s apartment after his escape, John Cairncross, now a Treasury official, is interviewed by MI5. Believing him to be just an insignificant sympathiser-informer for the Soviets during the early war years, MI5 allows Cairncross to resign and go abroad.

Bruno Pontecorvo becomes a Soviet citizen. In the USA, McCarthysm waxes.

1953 Stalin dies. Beria is executed; the post-Stalin era begins.

ASIO begins to “turn” KGB resident Afansy M. Shorokhov (“Vladimir Petrov”) in Canberra.

Meanwhile the KGB recruits John Vassall, a homosexual clerk in the British Admiralty, by setting him up with a “raven” in Moscow.

In the USA, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are executed, but several more important members of the atomic spy-ring make deals or escape.

Maclean’s wife Melinda, pregnant at the time of her husband’s defection, disappears from Switzerland where she had been living with her three children, and joins her husband in Moscow. (Later she is to leave Maclean and move in with Philby.)

Dick White replaces Sir Percy Sillitoe as head of MI5. White appoints Roger Hollis as his deputy.

The Soviets put down the East Berlin uprising by force.

The Korean War ends.

Part 4: Skeletons in the Closet (1954 to 1963)

1954 In Australia, Shorokhov and his wife Evdokia defect (though the KGB nearly manages to take Evdokia back; she is already aboard a plane for Moscow when she is rescued with much ballyhoo in Darwin). Shorokhov’s debriefing yields further clues about Philby. Shorokhov and Evdokia settle
in Melbourne as “Mr and Mrs Sven Allyson” and lead a quiet suburban life.

Leslie James “Jim” Bennett, a Welshman and former GCHQ (British signals intelligence) officer, emigrates to Canada and joins the security and intelligence section of the RCMP. (Bennett’s innovative ideas include the “Movement Analysis” and “Vehicle Sighting Program”, both soon adopted by British intelligence.) Eventually Bennett rises to become the head of the Soviet desk of the RCMP.

James Watkins, a homosexual career diplomat, is appointed as Canada’s ambassador to Moscow.

In the USA, McCarthyism wanes.

The Gouzenkos’ fourth child is born.

1955 Gouzenko wins the Governor-General’s Award for Literature in Canada for Fall of a Titan.

Blake wins a vital posting for MI6 in Berlin, where he manages to betray the MI6-CIA communication tunnel to the KGB.

A Canadian counter-espionage operation (code-named “Keystone”) is foiled by a leak.

British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan states in the House of Commons that there is no evidence that Kim Philby ever betrayed the interests of Britain.

The Gouzenkos’ fifth child is born.

1956 Blunt, by then Surveyor and Keeper of the Royal Pictures, is knighted by the Queen (possibly as a reward for helping to retrieve from Germany after the war some embarrassing letters written by the Duke of Windsor).

Philby leaves England and goes to Beirut as a correspondent for the Observer.

Popov is assigned to Berlin where he is fingered by Blake. The KGB recalls Popov and attempts to “turn” him.

The KGB recruits Canadian ambassador John Watkins by a “honey trap” operation in Moscow (although they probably get no benefit from him).

Hugh Hambleton begins his work at NATO headquarters in Paris, where he continues to spy for the Soviets for the next four years.

Khrushchev reveals Stalin’s crimes in his secret speech at the 20th Party Congress.

The Soviets crush the Hungarian uprising.

Roger Hollis becomes Director-General of MI5.

1957 The Soviets launch Sputnik.

A Canadian counter-espionage operation (code-named “Dew Worm”) is foiled by a leak.

Herbert Norman, Canada’s ambassador to Egypt, is recalled to Ottawa for “discussions” under suspicion that he may be a Soviet agent. Norman commits suicide by jumping off the roof of his apartment building in Cairo.

The Gouzenkos’ sixth child is born.

1958 Niels Bohr visits Moscow University to help celebrate Physicists’ Day. (According to Sudoplatov’s memoirs, during the ceremonies Bohr affects not to recognise Terletsky.)

A man, who later turns out to be UB (Polish intelligence) agent Mikhail Goleniewski, begins writing German-language letters to the US embassy in Berne, containing valuable information on Soviet spies.

1959 KGB fails to “turn” Popov; he is executed.

Klaus Fuchs, released from prison, goes to East Germany.

As a result of further “Venona” decryptions, MI5 finally deduces that the innocuous-seeming German housewife Ruth Kuczynski must have been “Sonia”.

Goleniewski’s information yields clues eventually leading to the discovery of the “Navy spy-ring” of naval clerk Harry Houghton and his mistress Ethel Gee.

A Canadian counter-espionage operation (code-named “Apple Cider”) is foiled by a leak.

1960 GRU Colonel Oleg Penkovsky defects in Moscow by handing a note to US tourists, and becomes a mole for MI6. His handlers in Russia are MI6 agents Roderick and Janet Chisholm.

The “Navy spy-ring” operation in Britain leads to a spymaster posing as a Canadian businessman, Gordon Lonsdale. He runs, among others, Harry Houghton and Ethel Gee. In reality Lonsdale is a Soviet illegal, named Konon Molody. His arrest leads to his confederates, the booksellers Peter and Helen Kroger, who turn out to be none other than Morris and Lona Cohen. (Lona was the courier for Klaus Fuchs during the war who carried the first drawing of the atom bomb in her Kleenex box from Los Alamos to New York.)

Roger Hollis is knighted.

1961 A Sino-Soviet split emerges.

Mikhail Goleniewski (code-named “Lavinia”) physically defects to the CIA in West Berlin and blows Blake’s cover. Blake’s confessions to MI5 give more clues about “Stanley” (Philby). MI5 also learns but fails to absorb that Blake had earlier fingered Roderick and Janet Chisholm to the KGB.

Later that year Major Anatoli Golitsin, KGB rezident in Helsinki, defects to the CIA with his wife and child. (Eventually Golitsin is to exercise tremendous influence in the Western intelligence community.) He all but identifies Philby as a KGB mole. Over the next two years Philby, under Soviet
orders, submits to a series of interrogations by MI5, giving away as little as he can.

President Eisenhower breaks off diplomatic relations with Fidel Castro. After the election of President Kennedy, Cuban exiles try to overthrow Castro in the Bay of Pigs.

Khrushchev erects the Berlin Wall.

President Kennedy sends military advisers to South-East Asia, starting the full-scale involvement of the USA in the Vietnam War.

Igor and Svetlana Gouzenko produce their seventh and eighth children, twins.

Whittaker Chambers dies at sixty.

1962 While Oleg Penkovsky’s revelations are helping President Kennedy to face down Khrushchev in the Cuban missile crisis, Penkovsky is caught by the KGB partly as a result of information about the Chisholms supplied by the traitor Blake.

The RCMP get a crack at Golitsin, but misinterpret the defector’s clues about a homosexual Canadian diplomat enlisted by the KGB (John Watkins), and for two years mistakenly focus their investigation on David Johnson, Canada’s ambassador to the Soviet Union between 1956 and 1960, who also happens to be a homosexual.

1963 When Golitsin’s debriefing is completed, the clues yield (among others) John Vassall, John Watkins, Georges Paques and Kim Philby.

Philby disappears from Beirut and turns up in Moscow.

In the same year Michael Straight tells the FBI about having been recruited by Anthony Blunt at Cambridge. (Straight was a speechwriter for President Roosevelt while giving information to the Soviets during the war.) Blunt confesses to MI5 in exchange for immunity, and confirms Cairncross as another agent (possibly the “fifth man”). Blunt also betrays KGB mole Leo Long, who soon confesses under a similar deal.

Another Canadian counter-espionage operation (code-named “Moby Dick”) is foiled by a leak.

Meanwhile Penkovsky is tried and executed.

Burgess, an alcoholic, dies in Moscow at fifty-two.

President Kennedy is assassinated, probably by Lee Harvey Oswald.

Part 5: The Great Mole Hunt (1964 to 1973)

1964 Soviets set up “Line X” (industrial espionage unit) involving a KGB officer named Vladimir I. Vetrov.

Meanwhile Golitsin’s theories of deep KGB penetration into British and US intelligence lead to a ten-year mole hunt in both countries, fuelled by CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton’s support for Golitsin’s ideas (including the notion that the Sino-Soviet split is a KGB deception operation). Yuri Nosenko, another KGB defector, is illegally detained for three years because Golitsin convinces Angleton that Nosenko, who says there is no mole inside the CIA and that the KGB never had any operational interest in Lee Harvey Oswald while he lived in the Soviet Union, is spreading Soviet disinformation (which may or may not be true).

It is not until Nosenko and another defector named Yuri Krotkov refocus the RCMP’s investigation that Golitsin’s initial clues lead to John Watkins, David Johnson’s successor in Moscow. Watkins, sixty-two, by then retired and living in Paris, is interrogated by Bennett and another RCMP officer. The lengthy series of debriefings (conducted first in Paris, then in London and finally in Montreal) lead the RCMP to conclude that Watkins, groomed to be an agent of influence, never actually provided any benefit to the Soviets, and was guilty only of failing to reveal the KGB’s attempt to blackmail him. Near the end of the last debriefing session Watkins dies of a heart attack.

MI5 interviews Cairncross in Rome where, immune from prosecution, he makes a confession, also implicating Klugmann. He describes his own activities for the Soviets while at the Treasury and at MI6 during the war, where he passed on information relating to “Ultra” (the famous British code-breaking operation at Bletchley against the Germans’ “Enigma”).

Khrushchev is deposed; the Brezhnev era begins.

1965 The Soviets honour Kim Philby for his achievements by awarding him the Order of the Red Banner.

1966 Blake, serving a forty-two-year sentence, escapes from jail with the help of the IRA’s Sean Bourke and is smuggled to the Soviet Union.

1968 The “Prague Spring” is put down by the Soviets.

Kim Philby’s memoirs (My Silent War) are published in Britain with a foreword by Graham Greene.

1969 Border incidents in the Far East; Soviet and Chinese troops trade fire.

In East Berlin the Soviets award Sonia her second Order of the Red Banner for her spy work in Britain (her first decoration was kept secret).

1970 The great mole-hunt (code-named “Fluency” in Britain and “Featherbed” in Canada) degrades
Western intelligence during the early 1970s.

Sir Roger Hollis, by now retired at sixty-four, is investigated and questioned by MI5. No evidence is found to implicate him as a Soviet agent (a conclusion many intelligence analysts continue to dispute).

1972 Leslie “Jim” Bennett, head of the RCMP’s Soviet desk, is forced to retire under suspicion, a casualty of the great mole-hunt. Bennett is blamed for the various Canadian counter-espionage operations that went sour in the 1950s and 1960s. After retirement he settles in Australia.

Michael Henley, newly appointed head of MI5, reactivates the investigation into the Hollis affair. Gouzenko is interviewed again by an MI5 agent named Stuart, who shows Gouzenko a report of his debriefing by MI5 after his defection. The report is patently false, a “legend”, attributing statements to Gouzenko that he never made. This persuades Gouzenko (and others, possibly including MI5’s Peter Wright) that the KGB’s super-mole must be the agent who prepared the report, presumably the former head of MI5, Hollis, who interviewed Gouzenko in 1946.

Part 6: Secrets Buried (1973 to 1984)

1973 The Paris peace accords are signed by the USA and North Vietnam.

Gouzenko is interviewed by MI5 once again. This time he is asked to pick out the agent who interrogated him from six photographs. Gouzenko picks two as possibly being the man who interviewed him twenty-seven years earlier, but the very question indicates that MI5’s records of the initial interview—the proof that the interviewer was Hollis—may have disappeared from MI5’s files.

In Britain Sir Roger Hollis, sixty-eight, suffers a stroke and dies.

1974 James Angleton is fired from the CIA, ending the great mole-hunt which wreaked havoc with both the CIA and British intelligence services for ten years. Golitsin’s influence in the intelligence community fades.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is exiled from the Soviet Union.

1977 Ruth “Sonja” Kuczynski publishes her memoirs in East Germany. The book reveals at least some of her true activities, and she is again publicly honoured by Soviet intelligence for her efforts.

1979 Disgruntled MI5 officers leak the 1963 deal with Blunt, compelling Margaret Thatcher to admit it. Scandal; Blunt is disgraced, shorn of his knighthood.

A joint FBI-RCMP operation code-named “Red Pepper” leads to Hugh Hambleton. He is interrogated in Canada and confesses to having assisted the Soviets, but claims not to have harmed Canadian interests. In the next few years he publicly discusses some of his espionage activities, but for some reason is never prosecuted in Canada (which greatly annoys the FBI).

1980 DST (French intelligence) turns Colonel Vetrov, who becomes a mole and reveals technology theft operations.

1981 Following the publication of a book (Their Trade is Treachery by intelligence analyst Chapman Pincher), Margaret Thatcher denies again in parliament that the late Sir Roger Hollis was a Soviet mole.

Leo Long’s involvement as a Soviet agent is publicly exposed for the first time. Though immune from prosecution, Long apologises for his actions in a television broadcast.

1982 In a tragi-comedy of errors, Vetrov stabs and kills a KGB officer and wounds his own secretary-lover in a Moscow park. While he is in jail for murder, the KGB starts investigating him as a possible traitor and Vetrov gives himself away.

On a trip to England (which he undertakes against RCMP advice) Hugh Hambleton is finally arrested. He is subsequently tried, convicted and sentenced in Britain to ten years for espionage.

Gouzenko, by now a blind diabetic, dies of heart failure in Canada at sixty-three.

Part 7: Secrets Declassified (1983 to 1996)

1983 Vetrov confesses and is executed.


1985 Mikhail Gorbachev assumes the leadership of the Soviet Union.

1987 Peter Wright, assistant director of MI5, retires and publishes his memoirs, Spycatcher, in Australia. The book reiterates Wright’s belief that Sir Roger Hollis was a Soviet agent. The British government tries but fails to block the book’s publication.

1988 Philby, seventy-six, dies of natural causes in Moscow. Klaus Fuchs, seventy-five, dies in East Germany.

Melinda Marling quietly returns to America.
1990 Yuri Modin, KGB spymaster for the “Cambridge Five”, gives a series of television interviews in Moscow about his career to Western journalists.

Golitsin, living in the USA under an assumed name, claims that the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe is part of a long-standing Soviet deception plot.

George Blake is interviewed on Soviet television, where he boasts of betraying hundreds of CIA and MI6 agents.

1991 The Soviet Union collapses.


1993 Russian nuclear scientists admit that the first Soviet atom bomb was based largely on material supplied by Klaus Fuchs.

1995 The Gouzenko family, Svetlana, eight children and sixteen grandchildren, celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their defection in Canada and receive congratulatory letters from Anatoly Shcharansky, William F. Buckley, Conrad Black (as Lord Black of Crossharbour then was) and Lady Margaret Thatcher. Since most of the Canadian guests don’t know the real identity of their long-time neighbour, “the nice Russian lady”, I collect the letters first, take them to the party, and hand them to Mrs Gouzenko in a private room. The one from Lady Thatcher, hand-delivered by a friend, contains an empty packet of artificial sweetener. It is next to the handwritten note Lady Thatcher put in the envelope herself. She was on a diet at the time.

History is made of such footnotes. Here’s another: a few years later I’m standing by Svetlana Gouzenko’s deathbed. She’s feeble but fully conscious, succumbing with serene dignity to the final stages of pancreatic cancer. Her eldest daughter, Evy Wilson, is aiming a hand-held camera at her mother to record a last revelation the defecting GRU cipher-clerk’s widow has for the West. I’m about to hear for the first time what Svetlana evidently believes to have been the Soviet Union’s most closely guarded secret. When the Georgian cobbler Vissarion Dzugashvili married his washerwoman wife, she was already pregnant. She had worked for some rich people and these things happen. Born in the village of Gori, Georgia, in 1879 as Iosif Vissarionovich Dzugashvili, the evil dictator later known to the world as Joseph Stalin, was half Jewish. Need one say more?

1996 A British court rules that Blake can receive a £90,000 advance for his book No Other Choice from the publisher Jonathan Cape. The ruling demonstrates that values may stagnate but prices are going up. A similar endeavour by a man named J. Iscariot barely fetched thirty pieces of silver 2000 years ago.

George Jonas was born in Hungary in 1935 and migrated to Canada in 1956. He is a journalist who has also written novels, plays and poetry. He has a website at www.georgejonas.ca.

From Inside the Window

The window looks down upon the formal garden.

The garden walls itself off from the climbing meadow.

The meadow comes to a halt at the lowering sky.

The sky confirms the report of approaching weather.

The weather will wear itself out besetting the window.

Knute Skinner
Burning

Massimo translating my burning off poem for the Italians mimed expressively a few twigs added to the fire—ah no. Bloody great windrows raging but if you have never seen them you have never seen them so I don’t get into it there and then—

What I never said I will say now—Matthew would fetch matches and, with a nod at me over the children’s heads, the hoe—for the creatures who had taken up residence in the rows as they seasoned, who would run from the fire too desperately late—

—once—

Quick!—I shouted at him as the fire kicked in with a sound like weltshmerz, bored with doing what it knows how to do so well. What was that?—asked Harvey. A child often asks. Matthew knee-deep in bracken lashing with the merciful hoe. That was a rabbit—I said.

It can’t have been a rabbit. It didn’t have any ears. A child sometimes knows best. Well, I don’t know everything—I said. Matthew strode back grim-white about the mouth—our look held far above where our children were—none of this is nice. Many things are hideous.

And then the necessary fire began to enjoy itself—so primed to burn there was no smoke—a bluish mist of gas dawdling upward over the hell-bent, all shades of orange, red and black engine of a funeral pyre that we had flicked the go button of because we were afraid of fire.

Jennifer Compton

Water Boots

A child again
with water boots on
kicking bare feet
at the ocean’s tug
not kicking air where nothing’s there
and is no fun
but flinging water
that explodes in balls
tiny short-lived universe
before it falls
into its land-locked shape again.

Nana Ollerenshaw
Over more than two decades, David Day’s grand thesis in his book *Menzies & Churchill at War*—that Robert Menzies returned from England in April 1941 after positioning himself to take Churchill’s job—has failed to find support among historians. Nevertheless, it has taken root in popular Australian history. The ABC has even made a documentary based on it. Yet it is an absurd theory—quite unsupported by facts.

Consider Day’s argument in more detail. Its central thesis is that Menzies was an empire man leading Australia at a time when the Second World War was going badly for England. Day argues that Menzies continued to support the appeasement of Germany after the declaration of war, disagreeing with Churchill’s approach, and travelled to Britain in early 1941 to save the empire by replacing Churchill with himself.

This is a bold thesis. It would surely require strong supporting evidence. But Day himself admits in his “Conclusion” that there is precious little evidence. But, he declares, that does not mean it is not correct. He writes on page 252: “the fact that Menzies’ attempt [to become UK prime minister] never amounted to anything public and has left very few traces, does not mean it had no substance”. In the book’s 253 pages Day can do no more than construct a scenario from loose trails which he interprets freely in accord with a Menzies he imagines.

It is significant that the only biographer of Winston Churchill to footnote any of Day’s work on Menzies and Churchill is John Charmley in *Churchill: The End of Glory*. Even so, Charmley does not repeat the Day thesis that Menzies was at any stage challenging Churchill over who should rule Britain—or even that Menzies favoured a negotiated peace.

What we do know is that Menzies left England at the end of April 1941 after engaging Churchill over Britain’s lack of support for the dominions in the Pacific—an engagement that was tense but futile on Menzies’s part. He was not a happy dominion leader in his last days in London, and his views of Churchill’s handling of the war were critical of his style and decisions. But all this was the emotion of a disappointed dominion leader who desperately wanted Britain to look east and not just focus on its survival in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

There is nothing new in this information—Menzies’s biographer Allan Martin has made clear how Menzies carried a love-hate view of Churchill during his stay in London in 1941. Menzies recognised that Churchill had an approach to war that was ruthless. He found this hard at times when Australian soldiers were being sacrificed. Menzies also crossed swords with Churchill during his stay in London over treatment of Australia’s war command and the lack of defence of Singapore.

As the Egyptian campaign went badly, along with Greece where Australian soldiers had been sent with a minimum of consultation with the Australian command, Menzies began to doubt the Churchill line of attack. He would not be alone in questioning Churchill’s view on strategy, however. After the United States entered the war against Hitler in 1942, it likewise opposed Churchill’s obsession with taking northern Africa. Churchill prevailed and was later seen to have been right. Disagreement over command and strategy is part of the war game—ultimately, though, the game is about ends, not tactics. And Day cannot find any evidence that Menzies ever disagreed with Churchill over ultimate ends.

Time after time Day makes assertions that sound bold but then prove to have no visible means of support. On page 2 of *Menzies & Churchill at War*, for instance, he asserts that “Menzies also took to London a continuing commitment to the largely discredited policy of appeasement.” Day offers no evidence to support such a statement. Nor is there evidence for it anywhere else. Menzies was a stalwart supporter of British action from September 1939 until the end of the war.

All Western leaders in the late 1930s had stuck
with a policy of appeasement, even up to the latter part of 1939. But it was Neville Chamberlain and Menzies who eventually declared war on Hitler, at the beginning of September 1939, and it was Menzies who committed Australian troops to the war against Hitler. The Australian Labor Party opposed that commitment until halfway through 1940.

Menzies was no appeaser after September 1939. There is no evidence in private or on the public record to suggest otherwise. Day will have none of this, asserting on page 253 that, “If the peak of Menzies’ ambition was to be found in Downing Street and the purpose was to save the British Empire, the means was to be found in a negotiated peace with Germany.”

On page 7, Day states that Menzies favoured peace in August 1939. Yes, he did, as did just about every Western leader, Roosevelt among them. The horror of the First World War had transfixed the Western world for two decades. The idea of another blood sacrifice of young men was hard to accept. But while Chamberlain and Menzies committed troops to the conflict with Nazi Germany in late 1939, President Roosevelt in the USA promised his citizens, during the 1940 presidential election, that no US soldier would be sent to fight Hitler.

There is evidence, however, that Stanley Melbourne Bruce—Australia’s High Commissioner in London—was of the view that deals could be done with Hitler through Mussolini. Lord Halifax had taken the same view in May 1940 when Churchill, with the British Expeditionary Force trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk, stood up to him and used the outer Cabinet to support his belief that Britain should fight on. But there is no evidence of such activity from Menzies—quite the contrary.

Though the idea of a negotiated settlement continued to circulate in London as the war against Hitler went badly through 1941, and though many of those Menzies met in London could be said to have shared that idea, at no stage was there any sign that Menzies agreed with them. Indeed, as late as April 29, 1941, on the eve of his departure from London, after a cable from the acting Australian Prime Minister, Arthur Fadden, queried to what extent there was support for a compromise peace, Menzies was—as Day admits—startled by the suggestion. He cabled back to Fadden that there was “no section of the United Kingdom Government which has in mind possibility of concluding peace with Germany”. Yet Day ignores the evidence of what this says of Menzies.

On page 59, however, Day is forced to admit that on arrival in London Menzies’s “message was simple and designed to evoke a ready response. Britain, he said, was not alone. The whole Empire was behind her and would go all out to win.” These are not the words of an appeaser.

But what need of evidence or even mere plausibility when the historian can simply imagine for himself what the statesman thought, said, or did?

On page 23, Day asserts that, as Menzies and Churchill disagreed over the need for additional defence support for the Pacific Dominions:

[I]t seemed to Menzies, his [Churchill’s] wildly aggressive policies threatened to destroy not only the Empire but Britain itself. This was then the basis of Menzies’ modern crusade—to rescue the Imperial fortress from the infidel, Churchill, and if need be, come to terms with the enemy at the gates. Firstly, though, Britain would have to be made secure from the imminent threat of invasion.

Not even a footnote from Day supports this assertion. His technique is mockery and simple ridicule. Day set out to paint Menzies as an empire buffoon. The real Menzies, who admired and respected Churchill, even as he disputed Churchill’s war tactics, does not feature here. Day constructs a Menzies who did not exist.

On page 23, Day writes of Bruce pressing for a negotiated settlement in May 1940—one that Halifax would also press for. Day goes on to link Bruce’s moves to Menzies—even as he admits that Martin Gilbert has shown that there was a contrast in the attitudes of Bruce and Menzies at this time. Day rejects Gilbert’s view, saying that Bruce and Menzies were in accord in their view of Britain’s prospects.

Gilbert is right—Menzies and Bruce disagreed on a negotiated settlement but agreed on the deteriorating war scenario for Britain. One was an appeaser to the end (Bruce) while the other was ready to follow Churchill and fight (Menzies). Day offers simply a conspiracy view of Menzies. But first Day has to find a way around the evidence.

On page 36, accordingly, Day admits that Menzies strongly supported Churchill’s decision to fight on, quoting Menzies’s speech in Western Australia on December 19, 1940, where he warned his listeners that any who “indulge in a hope that some temporary compromise may be arrived at are merely being guilty of treason to the cause for which we stand”. But Day then explains away this clear spoken record of Menzies’s sentiments about the Allied war aims and his support for Churchill, offering this conclusion (unfootnoted and, it appears, completely from Day’s imagination):
Menzies’ public utterances cannot necessarily be taken as an accurate guide to his private feelings … It is likely that he still retained a tendency to support, whenever politically possible, a peace that would avoid the looming, total, world conflict and preserve the coherence of the Empire.

This is an outrageous claim made against all evidence to the contrary.

On page 52, Day continues to assert the possibility that Menzies questioned Churchill's war aims:

perhaps, in his mind’s eye, Menzies was even then transferring the death and destruction of war to Europe and counting the cost of Churchill’s policy of total victory. If the sands of North Africa could absorb so much blood and treasure, how much more would be lost if the war was pushed back into Europe? These thoughts may well have begun to occur to Menzies.

Well, maybe; maybe not. Day offers no evidence for this musing, which is simply a projection of his view of Menzies as a sell-out man, even when everything Menzies did and said while on his trip in 1941 was in support of the Allied cause and fighting on.

On page 62, Day jumps from Menzies’s concern at Churchill so easily committing troops to Greece to yet another wild assertion based on his incorrect assumptions about Menzies’s feelings:

Churchill was apparently able to make such decisions. It provides further indication of Menzies’ receptivity to the possibility of a compromise peace that would remove this necessity for difficult and distasteful life and death decisions.

Right from the first day of the war Menzies was never open to a compromise peace—Day just asserts that he was without producing any evidence. Moreover, while Menzies worried about the Australian troops committed to Greece, he also went along with the commitment to Greece in support of Churchill.

By page 78, however, Day is forced to admit that by the beginning of March 1941, Menzies was more and more an admirer of Churchill. He notes that Menzies’s diary for March 31 contains lines that show Menzies now realised Churchill’s strength as war leader. On the same page, however, Day asserts that, in coming weeks, “Menzies would make frantic efforts to extinguish Churchill as Britain’s driving force.” This assertion of what is to come will be built from flimsy moments and chatter, complete with more of Day’s purple prose.

As a dominion leader in London over more than two months, Menzies was a curiosity for the media. He was entitled to attend War Cabinet meetings and he addressed a number of public events. His association with the newspaper magnate and Churchill confidant Lord Beaverbrook also added to his noteworthiness.

As the war intensified, with defeats for the Allies in North Africa and Greece and continued bombing of the south of England, unrest grew among a section of Churchill’s opponents in Conservative ranks and the feeling that his dogmatic style of leadership needed to be challenged. Interestingly, these rumours did not spread among Labour supporters of the government. Labour’s Hugh Dalton, also close to Menzies, continued to support Churchill. But in some Conservative ranks, the talk was that the ageing Lloyd George was ready to make a move against Churchill. Known as “the Welsh Pétain”, Lloyd George was seen as a heavyweight who favoured a negotiated peace. Whether these rumours ever had real depth is questionable. On the only occasion that Lloyd George stood in the House of Commons—on May 7, 1941—to condemn Churchill over the Greek campaign, he received just three votes, compared to 457 in support of Churchill.

From his time as a senior cabinet minister in the Lyons government, Menzies had contacts in London—many of whom had favoured Chamberlain over Churchill. Day uses Menzies’s association with such figures, who were aghast at Churchill’s dictatorial style in a time of crisis, as evidence that Menzies was somehow plotting to challenge Churchill’s leadership. This, however, is a giant step too far.

Menzies had a good visit to the UK, enhancing his standing as an impressive figure and as a dominion leader supporting Britain at a time of great peril. At this stage, in early 1941, there was little hope that the USA would commit troops to the war against Hitler. The Lend Lease legislation passed in Congress and signed into law by President Roosevelt in March 1941 allowed the USA to provide food, oil and materiel to Britain and its allies. The USA also made a tidy profit from this trade, which took Britain many decades to repay.

Although Churchill was working feverishly to woo America, the commitment of US troops seemed impossible at the time. Churchill was said to have slept soundly the night he heard of the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

David Day makes much use of the variety of press reports that praised Menzies’s speeches in the UK. As tensions mounted over the failing Greek
campaign and the losses in North Africa, the Beaverbrook press and a number of journalists who had crossed Menzies’s path used his high profile to campaign for an Imperial War Cabinet.

Menzies himself was keen to have increased dominion representation at Whitehall in the hope of pressuring Churchill to focus on the empire in the Pacific and South-East Asia. But it is one thing to recognise Menzies’s frustration with Churchill over the, at times, insouciant treatment of the Australian command and quite another to suggest—without evidence—that this was a sign of Menzies seeking to become the British prime minister.

To paint his own very different picture David Day has to weave a conspiracy theory. From the outset, he colours his description of Menzies’s leadership in the war as one not entirely supportive of the war itself. That Menzies spoke of his “melancholy duty” in declaring war in September 1939 is for Day not “all out support”. But Menzies’s sentiments were what almost all Australians felt at the time—including those in the Labor Party. No one wanted war—especially after the eagerness of 1914 that had turned into a deadly nightmare.

Day also builds up Lloyd George as a figure of significance in the UK, suggesting he might have been an alternative to Churchill in May 1940 as prime minister. This is not borne out by the evidence and rests on a picture of British politics as it had been more than a decade before.

Quite late in his time in London, Menzies was advised by the Australian businessman W.S. Robinson to visit Lloyd George. He initially rejected this advice. Just days before leaving England, however, Menzies went to visit Lloyd George and recorded a lengthy summary of the points of agreement they had reached on Churchill and his leadership.

Day, however, connects the Menzies–Lloyd George meeting to the press campaign for an Imperial War Cabinet. The suggestion is then made that Menzies was plotting to make a move on the British prime minister. But there is no evidence of any connection—and Day’s conclusion lacks substance (pages 151–53).

About the Lloyd George meeting with Menzies—and having made much use of Menzies’s long summary on Churchill even though it records no suggestion of toppling him—Day can only resort to an imaginative conclusion: “Menzies could sense the possibilities of creating a cabal. Whether the cabal was to be transformed into a Cabinet would now depend on the fall of events.” This is pure conjecture based on Day’s own remarkable powers of speculation.

Again and again, Day translates Menzies’s frustration at Churchill’s dictatorial methods into designs on seizing the reins himself. On page 30, Day links Lloyd George’s waiting-in-the-wings presence with such frustration in Menzies—there is, however, no connection. But Day argues—again with no evidence—the following: “While Lloyd George patiently waited for Churchill to stumble, Menzies’ preoccupation with Churchill’s fitness for office continued to grow.” Why put the two things together when there is no evidence they are connected?

On page 33, Day makes another imaginative leap to an unproven conclusion:

Menzies opposed the creation of any Imperial War Cabinet requiring the constant attendance of Dominion Prime Ministers, though he urged that there should be a conference of Dominion Prime Ministers. Menzies had made his first move in a campaign he intended should take him to the very pinnacle of power in London.

Again, we are given no evidence.

On page 71, Day discusses the regard for Menzies in the Beaverbrook press—which saw him as someone who could make an impact at Westminster. Churchill had relied on Beaverbrook to revamp aircraft production, as Minister for Aircraft Production. Like many, Beaverbrook found it difficult working with Churchill and was looking for a way out by early 1941. He had tried to resign a few months earlier, but Churchill had not let him.

There was every reason for Beaverbrook to find in Menzies a ready figure who might help him stir against the dictatorial ways of Churchill. Beaverbrook was not one to take too many orders either. Menzies continued to meet with Beaverbrook in the hope of getting contracts for Australia to manufacture aircraft for Britain. Beaverbrook strung him along in charming ways, throwing in favourable press reports, while all the time refusing to sign any aircraft deals. In Beaverbrook’s case, Menzies was the bait, not the trapper.

There is also no record of anything by way of a plan to unseat Churchill or to put Menzies forward—in fact the likelihood is nonsense. But using him to stir things up—that was possible. And Menzies himself wanted to stir up Churchill to get defence certainty for Australia.

On page 89, David Day sees great moment in Menzies’s meeting up with media magnate Lord Kemsley for tea at the Ritz. There is no record of their conversation. Nevertheless, Day leaps to the conclusion that it “may well have provided the basis in Menzies’ mind for the idea that it was not beyond
him to make a bid for Downing Street”. Another case of maybe, maybe not. Day’s guesswork is not substantiated by anything more solid.

Kemsley had previously told Menzies he would be good value in Westminster and his Daily Sketch had warmly reported Menzies’s address to more than 200 British MPs. But, in his diary, Menzies laughed at any suggestion that he would be given a seat at Westminster, musing (tongue-in-cheek) that some MPs in London might be wishing he lost at home so he could join them in London. Day becomes obsessed with the idea that every move Menzies makes in the later stages of his visit to the UK is a move to get to Westminster.

On page 95, Day writes that a visit Menzies made to the regions to meet business representatives (as Lyons had done in 1935) “may well have had a double purpose, since it allowed him to take the political temperature outside of London”. Really? Again, maybe, maybe not.

On page 103, Day comments that because Menzies dined with a group of Young Conservatives and discussed the future of the Conservative Party, this suggests that “Menzies may even then have been sounding out his prospects in British politics”. Maybe, maybe not. Maybe they were discussing the future of the Tory party—which mattered a great deal to young Tories at the time.

On page 116, Day comments on Lloyd George showing renewed confidence in the House of Commons and concludes: “The coalescing of the anti-Churchill forces had begun and Menzies and Lloyd George would soon be at their head.” There is no footnote for this except a letter from Lloyd George’s private secretary Frances Stevenson to Liddell Hart noting that Lloyd George had lifted his game in the House.

By page 127, Day is so convinced he has proved that Menzies was plotting to replace Churchill that he starts to question Menzies’s honesty as if to support his thesis. Menzies informed Arthur Fadden on April 14 that Churchill had asked him to prolong his stay in the UK for another fortnight because of the military crisis in the Middle East where the AIF were playing a crucial role. Day asserts that this “is doubtful”—that is, he implies that Menzies was lying to Fadden.

Thus, Day asserts that Menzies is a liar and that there was no reason Churchill might want the Australian prime minister to remain nearer his troops in a crisis—on the basis of no evidence at all, but just to get around obstacles to his thesis.

It goes on like this for many more pages until Day thinks he has clinched it. A note in Australian Secretary of Defence Co-ordination Fred Shedden’s diary towards the end of the trip seems to be a vital clue.

Shedden had been with Menzies by then for three months and was a close associate of UK civil service supremo Maurice Hankey, a Chamberlain supporter who was losing influence under Churchill. At various meetings with Hankey, Shedden had told him of the Australians’ frustrations with Whitehall, and Hankey was doing what he could to suggest ways of influencing outcomes for them.

A note in Shedden’s diary from that time shows that he appraised his boss as a better leader than Churchill or Roosevelt and writes a throwaway musing asking, “Why should not a Dominion statesman lead the Empire in war?” Day uses this diary entry to suggest that this was not just musing by a subordinate but the thought of Robert Menzies himself.

Nothing suggests this has anything to do with Menzies—it is more likely the headiness of a loyal senior officer in private. In a further draft of the diary among Shedden’s papers, he had removed his musing on dominion prime ministers leading the empire. These two versions, as I discovered, can be found among the Shedden collection in the National Library in Canberra.

Shedden had obviously got carried away—and at the time was releasing some of his frustration to his diary. On page 151, however, Day writes:

This frank admission, from within his own camp, of Menzies’ ultimate ambition, reveals the Trojan horse nature of his calls for Australian representation in the War Cabinet. Such representation was the means to a grander end.

So what Shedden thinks is what Menzies thinks! It’s as simple as that. Needless to say, Day provides no evidence.

Finally, in spite of all Day’s imaginative conclusions, he has to admit—on the evidence—that there was no real alternative to Churchill in anyone’s minds at Whitehall in mid-1941. The British Prime Minister was dominant.

It was this dominance that Menzies was trying to get around for wider Australian interests—so much so that he left on bad terms with Churchill after a final confrontation which gave Menzies no further hope that Britain would see the Pacific any differently.

Taking with him a letter from Maurice Hankey to Lord Halifax in Washington, Menzies hoped that Halifax might be able to have some influence over his old rival in Downing Street. Nothing would come of this either.
And what was in the letter? Hankey told Halifax that he could see no leader other than Churchill for Britain but if anything should happen, Halifax would be the alternative. Obviously, there was no move either to oust Churchill or to replace him with a dominion prime minister.

Day offers one final piece of trivia as some sort of proof that there were moves afoot to replace Churchill with Menzies. In his diary, the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King recorded that on May 15, Campbell Stuart, a Canadian and a director of the London Times, had told him that ‘Menzies’ ambition was to be Prime Minister of England, and that there were perhaps in England some who would be prepared to accept him’.

This chatter of Campbell Stuart is pure hearsay from an untrustworthy gossip. Stuart was known in London circles as something of a teller of tall tales who imagined himself more at the centre of things than he ever was. The likelihood that Campbell Stuart’s testimony had any reality is very questionable. Even if it was part of the London chatter it does not prove the case. On the contrary—as we all know, gossip can enlarge, misconstrue and invent. What Campbell Stuart had passed on was full of all that.

As Churchill once said of reports of certain wild talk from Campbell Stuart, “such bruits de malveillance are not evidence”. He might have been speaking of David Day.

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The Sans Souci Reserve

Australians discuss the end of the world wearing straw hats & cotton shorts.

Our festered factories are beyond worry.

The park was once abandoned—so much drugs, rape & robbery. Ten years later they paint the ablutions block & install cameras, there is always money somewhere. Peace lasts six months.

Sitting on the tiny bench I can picture my own renovation, that same energy in defeat. New generations will tan-up on my patched, drought-bitten spine.

The Elvis edifice paves the streets with petrol. Let’s just write about summer, our shade of Blues is Celeste.

Too lazy to hate too much we are saved. Revolution is impulsive, we are not. Resolution builds over years like a lawn.

Most windows are hygienically shut. Even the stubbornest wealth is cured by death.

We have cars & appetite. No worries.

Les Wicks
After the “liberation” of Saigon in 1975, the Whitlam government did little to take in or help Vietnamese refugees. A Gallup poll taken in early May 1975 indicated that 54 per cent of Australians believed Vietnamese refugees should be allowed to enter Australia: 61 per cent of Coalition voters and 51 per cent of Labor voters were in favour.

Singapore’s Prime Minister, Lee Kwan Yew, interviewed on the question of Vietnamese refugees on American television, issued a challenge to Australia to break with the tradition of the White Australia policy:

There’s the great wealthy continent of Australia, and they have a very sympathetic Prime Minister who believes the White Australia policy is most deplorable and damnable, and here is his chance.

In the same month it was announced that Australia would accept refugees for permanent settlement from Hong Kong and Singapore. By the end of June 1975 a total of 524 had been brought from these sources and from Malaysia.

Nancy Viviani, private secretary to Senator Don Willesee, in an account generally highly sympathetic to Labor’s refugee policies, admitted in effect the Whitlam government’s vicious inhumanity:

By August 1975, the Labor government’s refugee effort was virtually over, and in that year a total of 1093 Vietnamese had entered Australia. No refugees with Laotian or Cambodian citizenship were taken in, despite their large numbers and the deplorable conditions … on the evidence it is clear that Australia’s refugee policy in 1975 was made by Whitlam … Not only were numbers restricted. But those with ties to the Saigon regime were avoided by not allowing students’ parents to join them. It seems fair to conclude that Whitlam’s chief motives were a straightforward concern to avoid a new influx of emotional anti-communists into Australian politics, together with a care for the attitudes of Hanoi.

When the Fraser government took power at the end of 1975, it seemed the Vietnamese refugee issue had run its course and Australian political debate was dominated by domestic considerations.

The matter was not a significant election issue. However, on January 21, the new Liberal Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Michael MacKellar, announced that up to 800 refugees would be taken from camps in Thailand and they would be chosen on the basis of family or other links with Australia. An undertaking which had been demanded by the Whitlam government, that Vietnamese refugees could not engage in political activity if admitted to Australia—thus creating an underclass deprived of an essential component of human rights—was cancelled.

Early in 1976, after a long period of planning, Mr Lam Binh, a twenty-three-year-old ice-works manager in what had been South Vietnam, with his brother and three young friends, obtained a leaking and decrepit twenty-three-metre fishing boat, the Kein Giang and put to sea. After a month at sea, navigating with a page torn from a school atlas, they reached Timor. Despite their boat’s perilous condition and their food and fuel being almost exhausted, they pressed on towards Darwin, the boat’s pumps working constantly. They reached Darwin on the night of April 15 and found somewhere to land the next day. As immigration officials stepped on board the Kein Giang its skipper greeted them with the words:

Welcome on my boat. My name in Lam Binh and these are my friends from South Vietnam and we would like permission to stay in Australia.
They were the first “boat people” to survive to reach Australia.

A few days later Fox Butterfield wrote in the New York Times of the New Order now being enforced in Liberated Vietnam. He suggested that many Vietnamese would have strong incentives to flee the country, and neighbouring states might expect political and mortal challenges on questions of offering them help and sanctuary:

People of an entire social class of perhaps a million … have been dispossessed. They have been stripped of their jobs, their state housing, their savings and, if they were disabled or retired, their pensions.

During the next few months other boats arrived on the north coast of Australia, but these arrivals were at first treated as curiosities by the media and aroused little public debate. However, after 1976 the number of refugees leaving Vietnam in boats increased sharply. According to United Nations figures, there were 52,48 in 1976, 15,657 in 1977, and 85,544 in 1978. On top of these figures thousands were escaping overland to Thailand and other neighbouring countries.

A number of factors placed Australia in a position regarding Vietnamese refugees which distinguished it from most of the Asian countries to its north.

• Australia was the only affluent, first-world country in the region, much wealthier and much less densely populated than its neighbours, and with by far the most developed infrastructure and social services, thus making refugee assimilation easier and the initial intake of refugees more affordable.

• Australia had made a commitment to the military defence of the Saigon regime, and many of the escaping Vietnamese were recent comrades-in-arms. They had proved strong anti-communist credentials.

• Some of those Australians who had oppose Australia’s commitment to help the South might regard the escaping South Vietnamese as enemies, particularly if they became assimilated into Australian society and were able to influence policy-making.

• For the “boat people” Australia was the end of the line and the last hope. If the countries further north refused to accept the boats they might still have some hopes. For Australia to reject them would have been to condemn them to certain death.

Australia was the only society in the area with a tradition of accepting large numbers of refugees, though until now these refugees had been from Europe. However, part of the reason for this practice had been to forestall large numbers of Asian immigrants.

• Australia was the only society involved which possessed “Anglomorph” institutions, and the various legacies of the only recently abandoned White Australia policy.

• Australia faced no external or internal threat to its essential stability and institutions.

• Australia alone had a powerful trade union, high-wage culture, to which large numbers of Asian immigrants had historically been seen, and could be portrayed as, a threat.

As 1976 went on, the “boat people” reaching Australia, even when their numbers were still small, turned from a curiosity to a major factor in domestic politics.

It is important to note that the refugees arriving by boat from Vietnam in the 1970s were, for a number of reasons, quite unlike the boat arrivals in recent years. The latter were generally not political refugees, their place of origin was uncertain, and many had cast doubts on their own bona fides by deliberately destroying their identity papers. They were not fleeing an enemy conquest as the Vietnamese boat people were, they were not Australia’s recent military allies, and had travelled through a number of different countries before reaching Australia. It was they, rather than the Vietnamese, who deserved to be called “illegal immigrants”.

The distinction, if not the honour, of making the first attack on Vietnamese boat refugees in an Australian parliament was earned in the Senate on March 22, 1977, by ALP Senator Tony Mulvihill, the shadow minister for immigration. Mulvihill had a long record of anti-anti-communist union activity, accusing an opponent (in this case, apparently, a communist or ex-communist) of indecent exposure and of spreading venereal disease among his secretaries, claiming, “I believe in settling scores.” Senator Mulvihill made accusations against the
Vietnamese which were repeated by various Labor and Left figures over the next few years. The gravamen of these accusations was that the refugees from Vietnam could not be “genuine”. If they had been genuine, they would not have wanted to leave Liberated Vietnam. They must be criminals, fascists, or part of a plot to import cheap labour.

The allegation was to be frequently made that they were pimps and prostitutes, with or without exotic diseases, including leprosy. It would also be suggested that they were an actual threat to Australia (similar allegations had been made by sections of the labour movement regarding Chinese about the turn of the century, leading to the White Australia policy). Mulvihill later referred to the alleged case of one Vietnamese woman with diamonds concealed in her uterus, an allegation which, though made with no evidence, attracted headlines in sections of the populist press.

Despite a disclaimer to the effect that he was not putting it on “any sort of class basis”, Senator Mulvihill was arguing along the lines that the Vietnamese were in fact class enemies:

any rationalisation or distribution of wealth in Asia will result in the merchant class suffering. Without opening old sores, it is my honest opinion that the people in the south did not have the heart to fight.

The peasant, who had nothing to lose but his slavery, was the backbone of the Viet Cong Army. Now that there is to be a re-distribution of wealth, many people are attempting to leave as pseudo-refugees.

He continued by claiming that genuine refugees from communist countries should “line up at the embassy”, a statement betraying either grotesque ignorance of communist methods or deliberate mendacity. Anything else, he argued, was a dishonest trick fit only for “artful dodgers”. This stance ignored the fact that the internationally accepted definition of a refugee was a person who had a well-founded fear of persecution. He referred disapprovingly to the case of a defecting Hungarian army officer in Vietnam who had apparently been allowed into Australia, and compared this with hypothetical Spanish refugees (it was hard to see the sense of this, since Spain at this time was a multi-party democracy which respected human rights). He stated sarcastically that:

If a person wants to get into this country quickly he should not line up at an embassy, he should be one of the artful dodgers. If he is an Army officer he might go into another diplomatic post that we have established … I have been trying for five years to find out how a certain Hungarian Army officer who was a member of the United Nations groups in Vietnam, absconded. He went to our Embassy in Vietnam. He was here a fortnight. A Spanish refugee or a refugee seaman from one of the other countries I could mention would find it very difficult to get into this country, even if he cited the Refugee Seamen’s Convention.

Shocking and disgusting as this statement was, and despite its potential to damage the community’s perception of refugees in a life-or-death situation, it passed with virtually no comment from the media, religious groups, or spokesmen for ALP policy. Nor did the government, at this time, seek to make any answer from what might be called the humanitarian high ground.

In May Michael MacKellar issued a statement setting out the principles underlying refugee policy, in the light of what appeared to be a mass exodus from Vietnam. These were:

1. Australia fully recognised its humanitarian commitment and responsibility to admit refugees for re-settlement;
2. The decision to accept refugees must always remain with the government of Australia;
3. Special assistance will often need to be provided for the involvement of refugees on designated applications or for their re-settlement in Australia;
4. It may not be in the interests of some refugees to settle in Australia. Their interests may be better served by re-settlement elsewhere.

These terms had some ambiguity, points 2 and 4 having the look of escape clauses. However, they plainly gave humanitarian and moral commitments a high priority, as distinct from the earlier (especially pre-1939) priority for “useful” refugees. Point 3, indeed, seemed to specifically abandon the “useful” refugee concept, in favour of humanitarian criteria. I.K. Lindenmayer, First Assistant Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, made this point specifically when speaking on the policy at the Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees held at the Australian National University in July 1979, after the number of “boat people” arrivals had grown into thousands. Lindenmayer said:

Australia recognises that [the refugees’] plight justifies abandoning the normal migrant selection requirements if there is a demonstrated
capacity to settle successfully. Having granted that concession, Australia goes on to acknowledge that refugees who are accepted despite physical, emotional or other disabilities will inevitably require assistance beyond that normally provided to immigrants.

This was a long step beyond John McEwen’s ruthless pre-war policy when even highly qualified Jewish refugees from Nazism were excluded because they had failed to meet certain criteria.

In the Senate in August Senator Mulvihill elaborated on what he held to be the unpleasantness and worthlessness of Vietnamese refugees. In this speech he raised the accusation, which was to be made repeatedly by various spokesmen on the Left despite lack of supporting evidence, that they were brothel-keepers and black-marketeers:

I have never been caught up in the undue sentimentality about South Vietnam. I refer to the Pacific Defence Reporter and an article by Denis Warner, who frankly could have been called a supporter of the former South Vietnamese government. On page 21 of the article he talks about the elite, high government officials who sent their sons and nephews to colleges and universities in Europe and the United States instead of expecting them to serve in the ARVN. In other words they shirked their military obligations when Australian and United States troops were serving in Vietnam. It is not my business to open up old sores about whether Australians should have been there or should not have been there.

He continued in terms that hinted at a Vietnamese right-wing secret army in Australia, similar to the Slav or Croatian Ustasha, a possibility which was later to be raised by the Communist Party of Australia’s newspaper Tribune and in the leftist Nation Review, as well as by left-wing MP Tom Uren of the pro-Hanoi Australia-Vietnam Society, and in the society’s publication Vietnam Today. The refugees, Mulvihill continued contemptuously, had shirked the war and were “skedaddling” again from the task of rebuilding their liberated country. His hatred and contempt for the South Vietnamese was obvious. It was “fair” that they be asked to put something back into Vietnam.

By this he presumably meant forcibly repatriated, as the Cossacks, Vlasovites and others who did not succeed in committing suicide had been forcibly repatriated to Stalin’s tender mercies in 1945. It was in fact the beginning of a campaign for forcible repatriation:

I did receive one news release stating that two more officers had been sent to Thailand to look at the possibility of taking more South Vietnamese. I say respectfully that if it is good enough to have a look at some Eastern European people to see whether they are identified with extremist political groups—I will not mention them specifically because I could include a lot of people—it is good enough to have a look at some of these Vietnamese who perhaps did not fight in the war in their country but who may have been in charge of houses of ill-fame or who may have made a lot of money on the black market.

I think it is fair to ask these people to put something back rather than skedaddle again.

The next day Tasmanian Labor Senator Devitt asked a question of the Minister for Social Security. The thrust of the question was to bracket refugees with “illegal” arrivals and to stress how much they would cost the community.

Senator Devitt’s question did not address the fact that in many circumstances refugee arrivals would inevitably be “illegal”, since refugees were by definition people with a well-founded fear of persecution, who will frequently be unable to obtain passports or visas or otherwise comply with regulations. In liberated Vietnam the very act of applying for exit papers would draw the government’s attention to applicants and expose them to harsh penalties. Further, the right to leave one’s country was enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The UN Convention on the Status of Refugees also considers this problem more specifically. Article 31, “Refugees Unlawfully in Country of Refuge”, states (note that this excludes the illegal immigrants who have attempted to enter Australia in recent years):

The Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened in the sense of Article 1, enter or are present in their territory without authorization, provided they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence.

A whole apparatus of emergency provisions, such as temporary entry permits, has been set up to overcome problems of temporary legality.

Senator Devitt said:

The question probably has some implications for [Senator Guilfoyle’s] own Department of
Social Security. What is the present status of Vietnamese refugees who arrived recently, I understand illegally, in Australia? What is the Government's attitude and policy with regard to these people? Have they been or will they be given Australian citizenship? If they are to remain in Australia where will they be accommodated and what action will be taken to fit them into the Australian community? What sources of income do these people have to sustain them at the present time? What is the government's attitude towards the offers made by some State Governments, as I understand it, and certainly by community organisations, to provide accommodation and sustenance for these refugees? Is there the likelihood of a continued substantial influx from Vietnam? Finally, what would be the position if entry under similar circumstances by people from another country were to occur?

The last part of this question does not indicate what other country Senator Devitt had in mind, or the state of human rights and freedom in it. These points, it might be thought, would assist in a meaningful answer.

Senator Guilfoyle asked that these questions be put on notice and referred to the federal and state governments co-operating to make the settlement of these refugees “as comfortable and secure as possible”. It is possible to surmise from reading Senator Guilfoyle's reply that she had taken Senator Devitt's question as indicating that he believed the government was not doing enough to help the refugees. If this was so, and she was not in fact being disingenous, she would have been disabused by the obviously refugee-hostile implications of the series of questions Senator Devitt asked the following day:

1. What is the present status of refugees who recently arrived illegally in Australia?
2. What is the Government's attitude to these people?
3. Have they been, or will they be, given Australian citizenship?
4. If they are to remain in Australia, where will they be accommodated and what action will be taken to assimilate them into the Australian community?
5. What are the sources of income of these people?
6. What is the Government's attitude towards the offers made by State Governments and community organisations to provide accommodation and sustenance for these refugees?
7. What is the Government's attitude to people from other countries who enter Australia in similar circumstances?

The question, “What are the sources of income of these people?” could be seen as carrying several hostile implications, including that they were penniless mendicants who the community would have to support. Similar questions were asked in the West Australian parliament by Labor members including sometime leader Ron Davies and the Rev. Mr Keith Wilson. This was in the context of Labor attacks on Vietnamese refugees and on their acceptance by Australia, made by future Labor Premier Brian Burke and future Labor Minister Des Dans to the effect that they were not genuine refugees because they possessed money “and in some cases gold in significant quantities”, as well as other attacks from various ALP federal parliamentarians and left-wing unions.

Senator Guilfoyle replied to Senator Devitt's questions on October 6, 1977. The reply included the observations that:

1. The group of 47 Vietnamese refugees who arrived on 12 July, 1977, have been issued with temporary entry permits.
2. The Government's attitude, having established that the people concerned are genuine refugees, is expressed through Australia's international obligations as a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees.

The political question of acceptance of boat-refugees or its only alternatives—pushing the refugees back to sea to perish or forcibly repatriating them to face dire punishments, possibly including execution, in Liberated Vietnam, or somehow conniving with the Vietnamese authorities to prevent their escape—rapidly became a major item of debate in the lead-up to the 1977 federal election campaign. ALP leader Gough Whitlam and other leading ALP figures, including future Prime Minister Bob Hawke, made public stands attacking the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees.

Anti-refugee feelings were also being widely and emphatically expressed in letters to the press and representations to politicians. At the time I was a research and electorate assistant to a federal minister, and logged more than twenty anti-refugee calls in a single day and more than seventy in a week in one period a fortnight before the federal election, a number not remotely approached at any other time. It would be impossible to say how much they indicated genuine community feeling and how much they were the work of a highly-motivated
and possibly organised minority, or how much they affected voting behaviour. Opinion polls gave varying results. Certainly, however, the coalition government was placed under considerable pressure.

Anti-refugee feeling presented the ALP, still battered by the anti-Labor landslide of the 1975 election, with an apparent opportunity which it moved at once to exploit. Hostility to refugees from Vietnam could also be expected from those who had made a political and ideological investment in Hanoi’s victory. Further, as Clyde Cameron’s memoirs indicated, fears may have been abroad that Vietnamese allowed to gain Australian citizenship would not tend to be ALP voters. Most significantly, all the old fears of cheap Asian labour competition which had led to the creation of the White Australia policy and perhaps the ALP itself, with the concomitant and intermingled (if seldom openly expressed) fears of a threat to white racial superiority, were dusted off. Brisbane watersiders would later chant to Vietnamese refugees: “You’re not human!”

On November 21, 1977, Michael MacKellar announced that the federal government was setting up a committee to investigate the claims of refugees. Senator Mulvihill said there might be a justification for “setting rigid quotas”, adding that “Australian … hospitality is at times abused”. He betrayed no interest in the fate of any refugees who, through no fault of their own, might not meet these rigid quotas.

An article in the Weekend Australian of November 26–27, 1977, showed clearly the lines the anti-refugee campaign was taking, with Whitlam quoted as clearly implying that the refugees were “not genuine” and that they were being used as a weapon against Australia:

"We don’t know enough about this sudden influx of South-East Asians,” Mr Whitlam said. “It’s not credible, two and a half years after the end of the Vietnam war, that these refugees should suddenly be coming to Australia.”

Apart from anything else, Whitlam’s comments were irrational. There was no evidence the governments of South-East Asia were sending refugees on to punish Australia rather than for their own internal and cultural reasons and because they could not afford to keep them. Further, it was quite understandable that the South Vietnamese were leaving Vietnam two and a half years after the end of the war. Exhausted and war-weary, they had probably hoped at first that Hanoi’s rule would prove endurable; experience had convinced them that it was not, and that the risk of death at sea was preferable.

Although the Whitlam government had cut the number of the Royal Australian Navy’s patrol boats from fifteen to twelve (HMAS Arrow was wrecked in the Darwin cyclone and not replaced, and two others were given to Indonesia), Mr Whitlam suddenly demanded a new patrol-boat program for the Navy. Patrol boats were needed more than a new frigate and if a Labor government was elected the third frigate then on order would be cancelled and replaced by more patrol boats. (The Whitlam government had scrapped the aircraft-carrier HMAS Sydney which was not suitable for modern combat aircraft but which could still have operated helicopters or piston-engined patrol aircraft. Because Sydney had been laid up for a long time in reserve it was probably in better condition than the heavier but much-worn and repaired HMAS Melbourne.)

In the context the message was that more patrol boats were needed to stop the menace of refugee boats. The small patrol boats would have little other use apart from policing illegal fishing, and possibly rescue operations.

But when an ALP government was elected in 1983, after the boat refugees had ceased to be an issue, the new government actually cut the number of patrol boats, giving a number to Papua New Guinea. Others were later given to Indonesia.

The same issue of the Australian which reported Mr Whitlam’s patrol-boat speech reported a statement by Senator Mulvihill that a future ALP government would reverse the “open door” policy on refugees and “make an example” of them by turning them back under naval escort. He did not elaborate on what methods he expected the Navy to employ should the refugees resist forcible repatriation.

It was reported that Mr Mick Young, the Labor spokesman on Industry and Commerce, said in Darwin—a port with a record of extreme leftist union activity—that refugees had more access to
the port than citizens, and that members of the Darwin Waterside Workers’ Union were “upset” that the refugees were allowed to enter Australia after arriving illegally, while Australians were refused permission to bring in relatives.

On the other hand, the Sydney Morning Herald published a leader on November 23, 1977:

People who detest their communist conquerors should not have to prove persecution to gain our help if they choose to risk death to get away to freedom. Here is a test of our democratic idealism. Let us meet it.

Apparently unmoved by this sentiment, Bob Hawke, president of the ALP and of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, demanded, speaking from Hobart on November 28, 1977, as the refugee boat Song Be 12 approached Darwin, that refugees arriving without government approval should be sent back. It should be made clear, he said, that “this country has laws relating to refugees and they cannot break those laws with impunity”. Hawke’s demand that refugees arriving without government approval should be sent back was absurd given that the refugees had had to escape the communist regime clandestinely: how could such “approvals” be arranged with the Australian government beforehand? He demanded that the government make a clear statement that illegal immigrants had no right to land.

These comments were reported as the front-page lead of the Australian on November 29 under the heavy black headline which took up much of the page: “HAWKE: RETURN BOGUS REFUGEES”. Hawke denied he was lacking in compassion:

Of course we should have compassion, but people who are coming in this way are not the only people who have rights to our compassion.

Any sovereign country has the right to determine how it will exercise its compassion and how it will increase its population.

The reference to population can be seen as linking directly to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fears of Australia being swamped by Asiatic hordes, of the “Yellow Peril” and the White Australia policy. In fact the boatloads of refugees who reached Australia were demographically insignificant.

Statements like Hawke’s could only arouse hostility to refugees when they were in extreme need of humanitarian help. Mr “Curly” Nixon, the President of the Darwin Waterside Workers’ Union (whose record of ideologically-inspired strikes during the Second World War was notorious), claimed the refugees had “pressed trousers” as well as gold, and, in one case, three servants. Whitlam commented:

Any genuine refugee should be accepted, but the Government has a responsibility to ensure they are genuine refugees. It should also see that they don’t get ahead in the queue over people who have been sponsored and are already coming here.

Again, this ran together quite different questions of refugee intake and migrant intake. Further, it took no account of the political conditions, the human rights situation in Indo-China and the recent war in Vietnam. Vietnamese in Liberated Vietnam would demonstrate their loyalty to the new regime until they had a chance to escape. This could be quite literally a matter of life or death and there could be no question of them seeking “sponsorship”. A spokesman for Whitlam was quoted as saying that there should be “some sort of enquiry to determine where the refugees were coming from in such numbers and head them off at the source”.

Where they were coming from in such numbers was Vietnam. Was Whitlam (“These Vietnamese sob-stories do not wring my withers”) pretending not to know this? Or was he trying to raise a doubt in his audience’s mind that it was somehow not Vietnam they were coming from? Whitlam later claimed that he disbelieved all stories of persecution in Vietnam by the communist regime in whose victory he and many of his party had made a psychological and policy investment. The boat people were, apart from anything else, testimony that those who had supported the defence of South Vietnam had been right and those who had opposed it had been wrong.

The more rational view was that the Vietnamese government had engaged in well-documented violations of human rights on a massive scale. Even into the twenty-first century, long after the fall of Soviet communism, it remained a police state without political or religious liberty. The situation moved even Joan Baez to protest, in a full-page advertisement published in four major US newspapers on May 30, 1979, in which she accused the communists of having created a nightmare.

Senator Mulvihill warned that there would be a “hostile ethnic community response” and claimed,
again conflating migrants and refugees, that ethnic community leaders were “rightly indignant” at any dilution of processing. One major newspaper story on the approaching boats was headed, “It’s the Yellow Peril Again”.

On November 27, 1977, two senior Liberal spokesmen, Immigration Minister MacKellar and Health Minister Ralph Hunt, spoke in defence of the refugee intake policy. There would, they said, be no moves to stem the flow of refugees, and rumours of rich businessmen posing as refugees were without foundation. Humane as this statement was, it showed how the anti-refugee Left had been allowed to dictate the terms of debate: given that Vietnam had a revolutionary communist government, rich businessmen would quite likely and legitimately be refugees. Mr MacKellar urged people to keep the boat arrivals in perspective.

A few days later, an ocean-going Vietnamese prawning trawler, the Song Be 12, which had escaped from Ho Chi Minh City when some of its crew overpowered their guards, reached Darwin on November 30, in the midst of the federal election campaign. Though not a large vessel, it was bigger than the tiny boats that had made the voyage previously. Pictures were published in the Australian press cropped to make it look almost the size of an ocean liner. The Secretary of the Northern Territory Trades and Labor Council, Terry Kincade, said: “They’re pirates who have seized a boat from a friendly country. They should all be sent back.” “Pirates” was also the term applied to the Song Be’s crew by the Hanoi government, implying that if they were sent back their fate would not be pleasant. Mr Kincade threatened black bans on any employer who employed Vietnamese refugees.

At this point two religious organisations, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Australian Council of Churches, joined the debate with an open letter. Up to this time any observer might have noticed that the attacks on the Vietnamese refugees came overwhelmingly from a certain political party and its ideological associates. Predictably for anyone who had examined their form, the party the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Australian Council of Churches attacked in bitter and sneering terms for hostility to refugees was the Liberal Party and government:

In Mr MacKellar’s speech to the Parliament on refugee policy (May 24, 1977) the words “humanity” and “humanitarian” occur a number of times, on that occasion the Minister also stated that “in such situations [that is, refugee situations] human beings have human needs which are intensified by conditions of danger and distress”.

We feel we must point out the contrast between such sentiments and the statements which the Minister is reported to have made in response to the arrival of refugee boats on Australia’s north coast (The Australian, 23/11) lest words like “humanity” and “compassion” become devalued through mis-application.

The Minister painted a picture of a beleaguered Australia forced to accept greater numbers of refugees by foreign countries, and he noted with regret that Australia had to be realistic in accepting them.

At best, the Minister’s response is a wholly inadequate one, lacking any real empathy with the human dimension of the situation. At worst, it could be interpreted as an attempt to create a climate of public opinion in which it would be possible for the Australian Government to maintain, or perhaps even reduce, its current “low-profile” to the plight of Indo-Chinese refugees.

The right to take refuge is a fundamental human right. The pictures of refugee boats being turned back [An inexplicable comment, as Australia had turned no boats back] is a scandal and a sore on the world’s conscience. Australia has the capacity for a more generous response in the area of refugee assistance and re-settlement. We believe Australians wish to see that capacity turned into effective action.

Mauro Di Nicola
(National Secretary, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace)
Jean Skuse
(General Secretary, Australian Council of Churches)

This remarkable document contained not one word of rebuke to the ALP and the left-wing unions for their venomous, sustained and shameless attack on Vietnamese refugees.

Hal Colebatch’s two notable recent books are Australia’s Secret War: How Unionists Sabotaged Our Troops in World War II (Quadrant Books), which shared the Prime Minister’s Prize for Australian History last year, and Fragile Flame: The Uniqueness and Vulnerability of Scientific and Technological Civilization (Acashic). The second and final part of this article will appear shortly.
Redback Rocks in Frocks and Other Musicals

Todd McKenney is kissing Simon Burke (that’s new). Rhonda Burchmore is Rhonda Burchmore (that’s fun). Aljin Abella is short, chattering and nimble (a dizzy whirlwind across the stage). Gary Sweet is in a frock (born for the role). Jerry Herman’s *La Cage aux Folles*, the Grand Drag musical about the family problems of a St Tropez gay couple, hasn’t been on a professional stage in Australia since 1985 when Keith Michell played Georges (the straight-acting one), and Jon Ewing, Albin (the drag diva). This time, at Melbourne Arts Centre, it’s McKenney as Albin and Simon Burke as Georges.

In the mid-1980s *La Cage* was the wrong gay play at plague time. When the matinee ladies saw AIDS on the television news and their hairdressers died they stopped humming “The best of times is now … Tomorrow is too far away”. Along Broadway, Mark Steyn saw the removal vans, and hearses: “Fags weren’t funny any more; fags meant disease and death. One minute *La Cage aux Folles* was the biggest homegrown hit of the day; the next it was gone.”

*La Cage* has made a comeback and been adding its glitz to international stages since the early 2000s. This time it’s a vehicle for celebrity gay performers. A million years ago the joke was that Albin, the screaming lead, was not meant to be gay in private life; now the flamboyant, camp role is the property of never-been-in-the-closet performers like John Barrowman and Graham Norton. “As for tomorrow, well, who knows?” says the song. AIDS yesterday, tomorrow Islam—maybe.

Beside the Yarra, *La Cage* plays in a typically lean Production Company version which strips away the inessential and polishes the essential. It’s a skilful treatment that makes old and new musicals shine. With minimal sets, quality costumes, imaginative staging, Orchestra Victoria on stage with the actors, big-name leads and talented young performers, the package made a glittery Christmas treat.

The first-night audience had free champagne and Magnums at interval—courtesy Mrs Production Company Chairman Jeanne Pratt. I wish I’d had what they had. The headline of the Fairfax review was “*La Cage aux Folles* uncages wonderful wit of Simon Burke and Todd McKenney”. McKenney, the bitchy judge at the end of the row on *Dancing with the Stars*, totters down from the stage on high heels and throws lumpy insults in the direction of an elderly lady. The audience laughs. From behind me, far back in the dress circle, a plump female voice screams out: “I love you Todd.” McKenney is as cuddly as a redback. He returns the affection with a poisonous love bite, “F*** you. This is my show and I’ll do what I want to do.” True, and the audience laughs, but the performer has escaped director Dean Bryant’s control and gone from Jerry Herman camp to Christmas panto bawdy.

The onstage stars don’t appear to believe we should be taking any of this too seriously, it’s their celebrity we are here to admire. The showstopper, “I Am What I Am”, doesn’t come across with the expected bang. YouTube is our universal memory—if it’s not on YouTube it never happened. Scratch about and you will find a poorly recorded video, hard sometimes to hear, of Jon Ewing singing that song in the original Australian production. It’s a moment of real musical theatre. A genuine man’s voice, broken and ageing (he was fifty at the time), elbows out of the song and touches far more than this cheerful light-headed performance. The voice from the past had found inside the usual Jerry Herman schmaltz something real and brave, and guaranteed to leave the elderly matinee ladies not shocked but applauding. It’s not brave any more—it’s rather safe except if you are standing outside the

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La *Cage aux Folles* played at the Arts Centre Melbourne from November 21 to December 7.

*Billy Elliot: The Musical* Live and *From Here to Eternity: The Musical* are Universal DVDs.
Lakemba mosque. It has also become a song cut loose from genuine meaning—as Gloria Gaynor so memorably demonstrated.

This gay mainstream musical is built on very un-gay foundations. Jean Poiret’s 1973 play, which the film and this musical are based on, celebrated his twenty-year relationship with Michel Serrault—a writing and acting partnership. They played the leads in the stage production and Serrault carried on the role into the later film. At first in Paris the play—the title translates as The Cage of Poofs—attracted gay hostility before the laughter took over. YouTube snippets of their live performance suggest it was to gay life what black-and-white minstrels were to Black American life. In the beginning, it was a money-making, heterosexual farce about homosexuals—perhaps influenced by Charles Dyer’s earlier play Staircase, which had brought an older gay couple onstage.

Reworking the material for his musical in 1983, Jerry Herman ignored the brash and deliberately confronting sexual politics of the 1970s and early 1980s. He added tunes, frocks and sentimentalité and made his screaming queen Albin as inoffensive, touching and extravagant as his Mame and Dolly had been. And all was well until AIDS did a cutaway to reveal other aspects to gay experience.

Audiences have forgotten the disease, which has not gone away. The fluffy musical fantasy tells of two gay St Tropez drag cabaret owners dealing with their son’s proposed marriage to the daughter of a conservative politician, played by Gary Sweet—who ends up donning a frock and joining the chorus line. What was once a soft-edged appeal for acceptance and tolerance from mainstream audiences is now considered to be saying something serious about gay marriage and families, and evil conservatives. If Poiret’s play had been seen as advocating same-sex marriage in 1973, the theatre would have been burnt down—by gay-rights activists protesting against a play, written and acted by heterosexuals, which was imposing heterosexual conventions of monogamy on free-loving, free-living, sexual outlaws.

The villainous Monsieur Dindon (Gary Sweet), who gets his spangles-and-lace comeuppance, is a fairy-tale conservative French politician. Real-life Georges and Albin might not share the Left politics that dull playwrights distribute to minorities they approve of. They also might not be very impressed with gay marriage, and as caring employers it will fall on them to deal with the tears of distraught drag queens who suddenly realise that a white wedding at the Mairie doesn’t come with a thirty-day free trial and a cancel-anytime monthly contract.

The musical’s cartoonish anti-Right politics have dated badly. French gays are more likely to get a date by joining the National Front than by clicking into Craigslist. A co-founder of French Gaylib made headlines when he quit Sarkozy’s UMP to join the National Front, and the party’s deputy leader, Florian Philippot, was outed by a gossip magazine. As well, several high-profile party staffers have posed for gay magazines and raunchy underwear ads. Under the leadership of Marine Le Pen the National Front has gone blue, white and pink. There was some amusement when the winner of a Mister Gay 2015 competition, conducted by a leading homosexual magazine, was revealed to be a National Front supporter—but the more interesting thing is that the magazine readers knew this when they voted for him. The Left editors of the publication, chests weighed down by Je suis Charlie badges, are changing the rules so that such an embarrassment won’t happen again. The young man himself replied to their criticism saying that he is a person, not just a sexual orientation.

In between the enjoyable song-and-dance routines and the energetic dancing Cagelles, the dialogue and story of La Cage have also aged. Harvey Fierstein’s early 1980s text needs a facelift. A few pricks of reality might help. A start would be to drop the old right-wing politician and welcome a topical new villain. This might work. When son of gay parents wants to marry pretty girl she turns out to be the daughter of local imam. But perhaps matinee ladies, unfazed by two men kissing on stage, might not be ready for the first headless Jerry Herman musical. Just give them time, they’ll come around.

Another day, another musical.

We’re into Act 2 of a Great Big Award Winning British Musical—when performed in Australia it won Helpmann Awards in 2008 and now it’s back in a shiny new DVD case. Onstage it’s the Christmas scene, and a concert is taking place. There are colourful costumes and lots of jokes before the main song is uncorked. It’s classy...
material with music by Sir Elton John and words by Lee Hall (who also wrote War Horse): “Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher / We all celebrate today / ’Cause it’s one day closer to your death”. This goes on for some time with puppets and masks and funny business all around until a group of pretty and very young girls in white frocks and butterfly wings come downstage for the final chorus: “Oh my darling, oh my darling, oh my darling Heseltine / You're a tosser, you're a tosser / And you're just a Tory swine”.

Billy Elliot: The Musical is set during the British miners’ strike in the mid-1980s. That song has become a popular school concert performance—see any of the many school performances uploaded to YouTube. The London production was playing on the day Margaret Thatcher died. Before the performance the audience was asked to vote on whether the song should be performed or not. In the 1400-seat theatre the yelling and cheering audience took part with enthusiasm: only three people voted no.

The worst thing, of course, is that it is exciting, moving and enjoyable musical theatre. This performance was recorded with the 2014 cast at London’s Victoria Palace Theatre. Elliott Hanna as young Billy and Ruthie Henshall as Mrs Wilkinson are standouts.

Also now in a box is a DVD of a new Tim Rice musical, From Here to Eternity. The packaging is splattered with four- and five-star review symbols. Don’t believe them—the musical had a short run. Stay-away audiences (un-audiences?) showed more discernment than the newspaper critics. It’s a traditional book musical from a badly chosen novel. Very sexy, very realistic, very violent, and very boring. It’s a Model T Ford with a tank full of lead-free fuel which stalls onstage. I’m looking for the video stop button long before the Zeros hit Pearl Harbor.

For more theatre without leaving home there is something new. On YouTube, which a new and simply installed attachment allows me to watch on television, are some interesting French “musical spectacles”. It’s a genre of popular theatre which would be worth importing and naturalising, or rebranding and exporting to the huge English-speaking market.

Director’s theatre in Australia encourages over-indulged egos with under-developed talent to destroy classical works by rewriting texts and burying actors under irrelevant show-off flourishes. French “musical spectacles” are a choreographer’s theatre which creates popular entertainment with newly written words and music, vivid dance routines, and theatrical effects. With a big stage, a big cast and big ideas the results can be stunning.

One of the major names in the French productions I’ve been watching is choreographer and director Kamel Ouali. Child of the banlieue, he was born in Paris to Kabyle Algerian parents. He fortunately missed drama school education and was a dancer and choreographer who became well known as the choreographer on the popular television series Star Academy.

There are a range of his shows on YouTube. The story lines are fairly clear and you don’t need a common language to enjoy the production. In Cleopatra the applause when a young Caesar appears is for Chris Stills, an actor and musician descended from the middle bit of Crosby, Stills & Nash. Other Ouali productions have dealt with Dracula, the Sun King, and the French Revolution—the last ends with an emotional reading from The Rights of Man. Autant en emporte le vent (Gone with the Wind) is also worth tasting. In the beginning, Tara is a gorgeous southern Watteau, a frozen stage painting which comes to life as we watch. The familiar story plays out with rapid changes of scene and fast-moving action, though unfortunately without the film music. Atlanta burns nicely and even without a word of French it’s easy to pick who’s who and impossible to miss “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.”
Tail-bones

Wet street, Melbourne storm, outside *Tusk*,
feet go under, tail down,
hit the hard concrete and Snap!

Tail-gated, broken coccyx and sacrum
Yoga back-flips are out
Donuts mean a blow-up cushion

The tattle-tale of a fall-girl,
cracked and grounded
Tail tucked under, not wagging

I always held out for the long-tail,
pony-tail, story-strands that grow and
wave, windy and free

Could high-tail it out of trouble
Leave anyone tagging me, behind
“Metal in her spine,” one said

Some thought I was chasing my tail
to stand up to bullies
I walked in, stated facts,
played tails to heads

Now a fractured fairy-tale
I balance on one buttock
Six weeks to try to repair
Cheek is never enough padding
Against spineless educators

But bottoms up
I will grow back my tail

*Ashley Morgan-Shae*

Briny

Briny, I love to feel, you in my flesh
From foreshore to meet, down under the pier
Laid-back, palming sand, fish-scents to enmesh
Lady of the Sea, hot, stripping, arms sear.

St Kilda Esplanade—tramming up close
Sand between my toes, light shimmering eyes
Wet slap on my cheek. Take life-giving dose,
roll-up, renewing, in rhythm—strong thighs.

Briny, I miss you, I can’t wait to come—
lick salt of your skin, share rocking your bones
Sky-blue of your eyes, stone-curve of your bum
Hear breeze in your voice, as wind picks up moans
Surprising, returning, making so fresh

Briny my Love, I feel you—in my flesh

*Ashley Morgan-Shae*

Inner-City Dawn

A steel squeal of trams.
Then, like richly stitched brocade—
Patterns of bird-song.

The Couple

The couple, elderly, stooped,
Rise from the table—
Portraits of grandeur.

*Rod Moran*
Two great issues trouble our society because they clash with its traditions, particularly as these have been formed by the great world faiths. These two issues are abortion on demand, which has been instituted in an extreme form with the coercion of doctors in the Victorian Abortion Law Reform Act of 2008, and the concept of “homosexual marriage”, which has yet been resisted in Australia. The religious tradition of universal ethics permits neither of these.

In the following, I set out a portion of a discussion which I held with the former Chief Justice of Australia, the Hon. Murray Gleeson, on the judicial system and universal ethics, which focuses on the concept of marriage. This is followed by some thoughts I have gathered as to what might serve as the basis for a constitutional challenge to the Victorian abortion laws. In both cases—abortion on demand (with its Victorian component of coercion upon doctors) and “homosexual marriage”—the only remedy may be an appeal to the God of the Preamble to the Australian Constitution Act, and the religious heritage of this country, which states what the moral will of God is. I trust that this is consistent with the views of the former Chief Justice, who notes that we must look to religious tradition, which is our heritage and national background, to understand what constitutes marriage. So also the prohibition of abortion on demand, or at the least an abhorrence of coercion to participate in it, stems from the same God of the world faiths and the general ethics—known as the “Noahide laws”—which form their common denominator.

Law and universal ethics

Rabbi Shimon Cowen: There is a concept of “universal ethics” which ultimately arbitrates ethical human conduct. This concept is treated both by “natural law” thinking and also by the tradition of the Noahide laws, going back to Sinai, and before that to Abraham and Noah. How does the adjudication and application of “positive” law (law made by judges and by statute) take these universal ethics into account?

The Hon. Murray Gleeson: The idea of a level of justice over and above the positive law is widely accepted, but its practical implementation requires care. The enforcement of the law by courts is subject to an obligation of legitimacy. The law cannot rise above its source. The authority of judges cannot rise above the Constitution pursuant to which they are appointed. Problems in this regard come up from time to time. For example, in Fiji, to take a country in our region, as a result of activities in recent years, judges had to decide whether they would continue to sit in the courts and implement the law—and if so, what law? This was a society in which citizens were complaining that authority had been usurped. The judiciary in Pakistan, to take another example, has had to respond to changes in power, raising questions as to the validity of the appointment of judges and the exercise of judicial authority.

I think the way most Australian judges would approach the question of universal ethics is not that there is some higher law which authorises judges to overthrow a positive law or to refuse to implement a positive law which they do not like, with which they disagree. Most judges would say that if they can’t apply the law according to their consciences they ought to resign.

The approach of judges here is rather how universal ethics inform the content and the practical application of positive law. In our positive law, whether it is judge-made law or statute law enacted by parliament, there are many values from the tradition of universal ethics that inform the law and are taken into account by judges when they interpret and apply the law.

In the implementation of criminal justice, for example, respect for human life informs the content of the criminal law. All societies have a law against homicide. Respect for life and human dignity inform sentencing laws. In some societies the law permits
capital punishment. In our society it does not. In some societies the law permits corporal punishment. Our law does not. But all [civilised] societies have a respect for human life and a respect for human dignity which they implement in practice, perhaps in different ways.

Similarly all [civilised] societies have said that public access to justice is an ideal that ought to be pursued. All societies try to make the civil justice system available to the citizens, for example by minimising cost and delay. All [civilised] societies enact what they regard as appropriate sentencing laws, though they reach different practical conclusions as to what is appropriate.

[With regard to the way universal values inform the application of the law, it could be noted that] the American Declaration of Independence begins with a declaration of universal values, which looks like a statement written by a natural lawyer. We know as a matter of historical fact that the authors of that statement were not believers in natural law. We know that some of the authors of the statement that all men are born equal were men who owned slaves. But they began their Declaration of Independence with an appeal to universal laws because of the nature of the Declaration of Independence. It is framed as an indictment of the King of England. It makes allegations of contraventions of universal principles of law by those who had authority to make positive law. Why did the authors do that? What else could they have done? If you overthrow the legitimate government and you are appealing to the universal public, the world, for recognition and legitimacy, you have to base your legitimacy on something. They based it on a declaration of principles of natural law or universal ethics. It is natural for people to appeal to universal principles to justify what they are doing in the conduct of their positive law.

How do you tell the difference between a good law and a bad law except by appeal to some value or standard outside the law which you are judging? How do you tell the difference between a good tax law and a bad tax law? You might say, one is inefficient, you might say, it doesn’t raise revenue; it discourages incentives. There are pragmatic criteria by which you might distinguish a good from a bad law. But suppose you had a tax law which unfairly discriminates. To what standard of fairness would you be appealing? [It would have to be to a concept of fairness] outside the Income Tax Assessment Act. People could say, a tax is a tax. If it is in accordance with the Income Tax Assessment Act you have to pay it, if not you don’t have to pay it. People complain from time to time that tax laws are unjust laws or unfair laws, and when they do that they can only argue their case by reference to some standard which must exist outside the law.

In conclusion, our positive law is suffused with values and principles that come from universal standards, universal ethics. And whether you find them in natural law, in Noahide law or more recently in declarations of universal human rights you are appealing to some standard outside the positive law. When governments enact statute law, they often appeal to universal principles to demonstrate that the law they are enacting is just law. When courts interpret positive law that stands in need of interpretation or to develop the common law they often appeal to these universal standards to justify their interpretation.

Thus, from the point of view of an Australian judge, universal values, universal ethics of the kind discussed here, are reflected in the content of the law and in the practical implementation of the law. But they are not seen as something justifying a court or a judge overruling the law in refusing to implement the law or bending the law to the will or the moral perceptions of the judge.

Rabbi Shimon Cowen: There are areas of crisis in the values of society. I think of the law in Sweden which allows half-siblings to marry, a case of incest. How do we identify values? In Australia there are legislative attempts to introduce homosexual marriage. How can the law here be related to universal values?

The Hon. Murray Gleeson: Because of the decline of the influence of organised religion, which is the biggest single change in society in my lifetime, people now seek alternative sources for much the same values. G.K. Chesterton said that “when people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing—they believe in anything”. And other religions or quasi-religious beliefs for many people have supplanted [traditional] religion as the source of their values. The human rights movement is the most obvious example. Perhaps the conservation movement is another example.

Canadian writers on jurisprudence have coined a very apt description of the kind of society we live in. They refer to a culture of justification. By that they mean that people are no longer uncritically accepting of authority. They require authority to justify itself, and when people in authority, including judges, justify their exercise of authority, they seek to legitimise their legislation and their judgments; and still the most common way of justifying legislation, decisions, use of power with reference to universal principles.

The common law and statute law enacted by the Parliament[s] of Australia is full of values of the kind that Rabbi Cowen has mentioned and it is amazing
and sometimes alarming to see how little that aspect of the law is appreciated. Rabbi Cowen mentioned a development in Swedish law on marriage. The area of marriage provides a good example of the astonishing lack of reflection upon how and why [the law of marriage] got there. We have a definition in the Marriage Act which defines marriage as the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others voluntarily entered into for life. Where does that come from? There is another provision in the statute which is practically unmentioned. In any discussion about changes of the law with respect to marriage I would have thought it [ought to be mentioned]. The Family Law Act 1975 of the Commonwealth provides that the marriage is an institution, and the courts have the obligation to protect the institution of marriage as the union of a man and woman to the exclusion of all others voluntarily entered into for life. The Commonwealth Parliament in the Marriage Act has declared that marriage is an institution that needs to be preserved and protected. Again, where did that come from? Well, the answer, as a matter of history, is obvious. Until the nineteenth century, family law, the law of divorce and other aspects, was not administered by the ordinary courts. It was the concern of ecclesiastical authorities, the Church court. That definition of marriage and recognition of marriage as an institution came into our law from Rome and it was the Church and the ecclesiastical courts which administered it. The Church took it from the Judaic tradition and the Judeo-Christian approach to marriage. [This] has entered into our law and is now described as an “institution” that needs to be preserved and protected.

How often do you hear reference to that provision of the Family Law Act in the context of proposals to change the definition of marriage in the Marriage Act? One aspect of the definition of marriage in the Marriage Act is that marriage joins a man and a woman exclusively. There are societies in which polygamy is currently practised, and some people from those societies are now coming to Australia. If polygamists were a more active political force, then people would be forced to have another look at the definition of the institution of marriage and to ask where those values come from and what in those values may be threatened and if the nature of the institution is altered. That seems to me to provide a textbook example of a value that has come into law from a universal value, and that has not been widely appreciated. Many of our laws have come from religious sources [and this, like the] respect for human life, is an obvious example.

I append here a note written to me earlier by the Hon. Murray Gleeson on marriage as a legal institution.

The phrase “de facto” has no grammatical function unless, either expressly or by implication, it qualifies a noun. Its antonym is “de jure”. The expression was commonly used in the past to qualify the noun “marriage” (or “husband” or “wife” or “spouse”). Over time, people came to drop explicit reference to the noun, but “my de facto” meant “my de facto (husband or wife)”. It never meant “my de facto friend”, because “husband” or “wife” signified a legal (de jure) status; “friend” did not. A relationship can only be de facto (or de jure) if it is one that has a definable legal status. In the past a man’s de facto wife was a woman he wanted, for practical purposes, to have the status of his wife. The typical reason she would not be his de jure wife was that there was some legal or religious impediment to marriage (such as another subsisting marriage). As divorce became more common, and religious prohibitions were relaxed, impediments to marriage became less frequent. However, relationships between people who might have chosen, for any reason, not to marry, or who might simply not have contemplated marriage, became described as “de facto”. De facto what? Once the concept of a de facto relationship is cut loose from the defined legal status of marriage, what has it become?

As to marriage, if it is not the union of one man and one woman for life, then what is it? So far, the religious idea of marriage has provided our law the conceptual frame of reference by which a status is defined. That status has a host of legal consequences. If the religious idea of marriage is to go, what is to replace it? What will be the de jure status by reference to which our understanding of a de facto relationship is formed?

If marriage ceases to be a status defined by law according to a principle derived from social and religious tradition, and becomes a status people can confer upon themselves by acknowledging a certain commitment, what kind of commitment will suffice? Will exclusivity be a necessary feature of the commitment? Why? Self-evidently, care of children will not. If reproduction and marriage are
unrelated, why should sexual attachment be any more significant than physical or emotional dependence, or commonality of interests? There could be many good reasons, having nothing to do with sex, why people would wish to "share their lives".

The institution of marriage was not devised to cater for sex, but for the consequences of the procreative potential of sex. Specifically, it was a means of obliging males to take responsibility for their offspring. The family unit was considered the optimal environment for the care and nurture of children. If society is to sever, formally, the relationship between procreation and marriage, why should it retain the institution at all?

Dame Leonie Kramer was once reported to have said (with particular reference to the word disinterested) that when the meaning of a word is corrupted, society often loses a value. I can think of no better example than the word marriage.

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God, Ethical Tradition and the Coercion to Abort

Where does the name of God appear in the Constitution? It is found, not in the Constitution itself but in the Preamble to the Act of the United Kingdom Parliament, which enacted the Australian Constitution (Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900). This preamble of course was formulated by the drafters of the Australian Constitution. It states:

Whereas the people of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth ...

Here we have a secular state with a Constitution prefaced by a recognition of God. What does this amount to? Is it just a piety? Or does it have some actual constitutional significance and impact?

The significance of the Preamble to the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act with its reference to God becomes apparent when we look at what the Australian Constitution internally (that is, after its Preamble) cannot rectify. This is a law enacted by the Parliament of Victoria in 2008, which some have called the worst abortion law in the Western world.

The Victorian Abortion Law Reform Act first of all provides for abortion on demand for foetuses up to twenty-four weeks for any reason or for no reason whatsoever. It also facilitates abortion up to birth, where two opinions can be found to support it—something not difficult in contemporary culture and society. It also has a set of extreme further provisions. One is that if a baby is aborted alive, it is left to die. To place a vulnerable born human being in a situation which hastens its death is clearly associated with homicide in Noahide law. But the most egregious evil of this law is that it forces doctors against their conscience to participate in what in Noahide law is forbidden killing, in a circumstance where there is no danger to the mother’s life.

This last point is the content of section 8 (1) of this law, which states that a doctor who does not want to abort, where there are no circumstances threatening the life of the mother, must refer to the client to another doctor whom the first doctor knows has no objection to performing the abortion. Recently a case came up under this law where a couple came to a doctor and said that the wife was pregnant with a foetus which is female, that they did not want a female and wanted the doctor to abort it. The doctor said that he would not abort the baby and would not refer to another doctor: he would not be a party to such an act. By saying that, under the Victorian abortion law he faces arraignment before a medical tribunal and losing his registration to practise as a doctor.

Now this is an incredible situation. The tradition shared and carried forward in their root (where it is known as the teaching of the Noahide laws) by the great faiths, including those which form the social and historical background of our society, prohibits abortion on demand. It is classified with forbidden killing. There are circumstances in which abortion is permitted: where there is danger to the mother’s life; or possibly after rape and incest, if the abortion is performed within forty days of conception, or possibly also where there is a foetal deformity so great that the baby has no prospect of survival beyond birth. But the idea that abortion could be a routine—and that beyond that one can force doctors to be a party to it against their will through the complicity of referral—is clearly forbidden by universal Noahide law.

So we are left with a law which forces doctors to be complicit in acts of killing which Noahide law manifestly forbids, and which various faith communities—Jewish, Christian and Muslim—have all found to be contradictory to their own traditions and have communicated this to the parliament. Not only is the killing wrong, but complicity in it is also wrong. It could be added that while this relates only to abetting a forbidden killing, outright killing of the innocent is something in which Noahide law requires a person to give up his or her life, rather than perform it, even under duress.

How could such a law be permitted by the
Australian Constitution? Yet, when one explores the different avenues that one might take within the Australian Constitution to oppose it, one comes up against one dead-end after another. I wish now to indicate some various thinkable avenues of challenge against this law within the Constitution and to show how each fails; and here we are assisted by a writing of the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, His Honour Justice Robert French, on “Religion and the Constitution”.

Section 116 of the Constitution amongst other things provides that the Commonwealth shall “not make any law ... for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion”. Ostensibly this should protect a doctor, whose religion forbids him or her to carry out abortion on demand, for a reason not justifiable under Noahide law and the faith of most traditional religions. It would seem also to offer protection from coercion to participate in it by referral. But this avenue is blocked by the fact that section 116 protects individuals only from laws enacted by the federal government which infringe the freedom of religious practice by individuals. The abortion law before us was enacted by a state government, to which section 116 does not apply. Nor, as Chief Justice French has said, does it “create an justiciable individual right to the free exercise of religion” which could be exported to a state jurisdiction, but only freedom from federal laws which offend it.

Another possible recourse against the coercion of conscience of doctors by the Victorian abortion law is the fact that Australia is a party or signatory to international treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which in its Article 18 guarantees freedom of conscience and religion. This, one would hope, would provide succour for the Victorian doctor who does not want to violate his or her religious conscience by performing or having any truck (by referral) with an abortion forbidden by religious law. Here again we are foiled by the constitutional rule, that only by enacting a law at a federal level through the “external affairs power” conferred by section 51 of the Constitution can a provision of an international treaty become part of Australian law. Only then, by virtue of section 109 of the Constitution, which specifies that federal law shall override a state law inconsistent with it, could such a federal law (once enacted) embodying the principle of religious freedom impact the anti-conscience clause of the Victorian Abortion Reform Law. Similarly, were the federal government to enact a law disallowing discrimination on religious grounds, by section 109, this could also override a state law which discriminated against doctors (forcing them out of their profession) because of their religious objections to various kinds of supposed grounds or groundlessness for abortion. Yet as the present Chief Justice points out, the Commonwealth has never legislated such a law.

There appears another possible avenue within the Constitution which might assure the Victorian doctor the right to resist forced complicity in an abortion which revolts his conscience. This is in the concept of “implied rights”. “Implied rights” are those rights which can be argued to be implicit in certain provisions of the Constitution. Thus the High Court of Australia has developed (in the Unions NSW v State of NSW case) a doctrine of an implied right of “political communication”. This right was held to be implied by the provision of the Constitution for the election of Houses of Parliament, something which cannot proceed in a democratic manner without the communication of political views. And the High Court further argued that such a right cannot be limited only to federal politics, but must cut through to the state level also. This would be helpful in the case of the Victorian abortion legislation were an implied right of freedom of conscience to be found in the Constitution. The problem here is that the only implied right which has been deduced from the Constitution by a majority decision of the High Court of Australia is that of “political communication”. Others, such as freedom of conscience, have not. In conclusion, therefore, within the Australian Constitution, there seems to be little succour for the doctor who does not want, and yet is forced by these laws, to participate in an abortion, which violates universal (Noahide) law.

Having come to all these dead-ends within in the Constitution, it may be that a solution can be found in the “meta-doctrine” which envelops the Constitution from without. This is to be found in (and perhaps is the significance of) the wording of the Preamble of the Australian Constitution Act which enacts the Constitution. It states that “permission”—a “blessing”—has been presumed to write and promulgate the Constitution. Who gave permission for the Constitution of Australia to be written and promulgated? The answer is in the words

One of the laws of God is the entitlement of a human being to protection of his or her life and the prohibition of killing. As both Noahide law (and Blackstone) state, a liability for killing begins also in relation to pre-natal life.
of the Preamble, “humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God [the states] have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth”. In other words the constitution proceeds upon the humble assumption of, and “reliance” upon, God’s permission—His “blessing”.

One of the great commentators on the law of England, from which our law derives, William Blackstone in the eighteenth century, wrote in his great classic Commentaries on the Laws of England that there are two kinds of laws. There are laws of God, sometimes termed laws of nature, and there are laws enacted by society, known as “positive” law. He states that no positive law can override a law of God, the content of which, Blackstone further writes, is made known in Scripture. In other words nations have sovereignty, but their sovereignty is subordinate to God’s sovereignty and the laws and rights which God bestows upon the peoples of all nations. We have seen this in recent history. The Germans had a sovereign parliament under Hitler, but some of its laws were voided, and the acts performed in accordance with them were punished, as crimes against humanity. Crimes against humanity are in fact crimes against the laws of God. There is a higher sovereignty which voided those laws. This applies also, we could argue, in regard to the Victorian Abortion Law Reform Act.

One of the laws of God is the entitlement of a human being to protection of his or her life and the prohibition of killing. As both Noahide law (and Blackstone) state, a liability for killing begins also in relation to pre-natal life. This law of God informs us that pre-natal life is not freely disposable. It doesn’t mean, as mentioned above, that there are no grounds for abortion. But the law of God, as revealed in Scripture (and expounded in the oral law) is plain that abortion on demand, and the compulsion upon a doctor to participate by referral in abortion on demand (that is, where there is no danger to the life of the mother or other compelling ground) is prohibited.

Indeed the philosophy which upholds this law to the extent of coercing doctors to comply with it, inverts the law of God, by postulating an unfettered right to kill unborn life. Indeed it has been formulated as a so-called “reproductive right” which reduces the child to little more than a corn on its mother’s foot which no one can prevent her from removing and beyond that, which one can force another to remove, as a service to which one is entitled. The foetus becomes, in this view, a mere thing.

The God who prohibits the brazen claim to an unqualified “right” to destroy pre-natal life, the God of the Constitution, is the God of all peoples, not specific to anyone religion. The words “Almighty God” in the Preamble are neutral and universal to all religions. Marion Maddox quotes Archbishop Peter Hollingworth in the 1998 Constitutional Convention, who in turn spoke about a discussion of the term “God” in the 1898 Australian Convention. She writes:

A reference to God also links us to the founders. On Archbishop Hollingworth’s reading,
Sir John Downer [at the 1998 Australian Convention] summed up the debate in these words:
“... that the Christian religion is a portion of the English constitution ... is part of the law of England ... that the Commonwealth will be from the first stage a Christian Commonwealth ...”

Archbishop Hollingworth went on,
“Clearly, that is not the way things have worked out. We cannot claim that Australia is, ever has been or perhaps is ever likely to be—certainly not in our time—a Christian Commonwealth, but that does not imply that we should become a purely secular republic.”

Maddox goes on to demonstrate from the transcripts of the 1998 Convention that the neutral term “God” in the Constitution continued to find a common resonance with major faiths in Australia other than Christianity. Even though most who participated in the framing of the Constitution were Christian, the words are and have proven to be acceptable to Jew, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist alike and they are associated with a set of universal, shared ethics, stemming from the roots of religious tradition in general.

This is not just the view of religious people. Even persons such as the former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who described herself as a non-believer, can also recognise the role of biblical values in our society. My interpretation of this goes along the same lines as Viktor Frankl. He stated that every person is capable of self-transcendence and finding a higher purpose of life. The key ingredient of this self-transcendence is humility—which is to ask whether there something bigger than I and than what I want. Frankl said that to come to this you do not have to be religious. He stated that even the “non-believer” who begins the process of self-transcendence is in fact en route to God, and consequently, I would add, tends to share the same values of the believer, which are God’s laws. I dare say that the humble non-believer is closer to...
God than the arrogant religionist. The gun-toting jihadists talk about God, but when they say that word, they mean themselves. Humility is the road to God. Both the 70 per cent of Australians with a religious affiliation and many non-believers (the humble grass-roots, not the “doctrinaire” ones) have lived with the Preamble to the Australian Constitution and its God. It took its place in 1901 and has been left in place.

In the Preamble is the reference to a God who permitted us to write a Constitution, but not to violate his laws. The anti-conscience clause of the abortion law is particularly abhorrent to all decent and reasonably straight-thinking people, even to the otherwise pro-abortion Age. The Victorian Abortion Law Reform Act works to create a culture in which life is cheap and life is disposable. If the Australian Constitution was based on permission by God, how can a law be promulgated within its ambit which so negates the laws of God? The suggestion that there is an unfettered right to kill pre-natal life is a rebellion against God, who has told us to protect life.

For a good reason God was put into the Preamble of the Constitution, and in a Preamble which is not even part of the Constitution, but a Preamble to the act which enacts the Constitution. Its position teaches us that there is a radical break and a transcendent separation between God and the Constitution. He is not part of it; he is the enveloping condition, within which it has permission to exist. No constitution and no system of government crafted by human beings can guarantee the decency and morality of its “positive” laws. No “bill of rights” is secure against perverted interpretation. Only the knowledge of the laws of the “King of all kings”, the Creator, can guarantee that.

It may be that, as discussed in the preceding discussion with the former Chief Justice of Australia, no judge can disqualify the law of a parliament by reference to universal ethics. A judge can only resign, if the law given to him or her to apply violates conscience. For law-makers, who can remake laws, and for judges who are asked to innovate doctrines not previously in the law, the reference to universal ethics and to God must be real and actual.

Rabbi Shimon Cowen has been Director of the Institute for Judaism and Civilization since its founding in 1998. A footnoted version of this article appears on Quadrant Online.

The Last Bus

The last bus to the city has gone,  
the very last bus.  
We think about that bus as we walk through the village,  
dead leaves scudding across the road.

Soon those of us who remain  
will walk past bare-breasted trees  
to the third village lamp post and back,  
the city a pale recollection.

Soon we’ll bundle in anoraks and greatcoats  
to negotiate footpaths barely scraped clear  
of the drifting snow,  
the city a wind’s breath away.

When the first hesitant shoots  
shine in watery sunlight,  
we’ll gather in tight hopeful knots  
at the village square.

Knute Skinner
Bad Man Dreaming

“I read in the paper,” my husband said, “Javier Gomez died.”

He was the crim who smashed glass to climb into our bedroom and grab my golden wedding ring with a sapphire blue as air. My mother’s too. Never saw them again.

The cops ignored this “minor crime” until I gave them a call, mentioned our friend the chief of police. Jav, it seemed, was a major dealer running heaps of jobs.

The day he came before the court a social worker on the case sat his mother with me. “He no crime,” she wept; “Is my good son.” I patted her trembly hand.

In black leather with hair to match, he rose as each offence was called for breaking, entering, stealing. “Guilty, your honour!” he said 30 times; not looking back at his mother.

The judge awarded ten years. They moved him round a lot: Goulburn Maximum Security; Junee Correctional Centre … Back to Goulburn; he took up books.

One dark time, Easter eve, I sent a letter: bitter, naïve, sort of victim impact thing. Told him what the rings had meant to a grieving orphan woman.

The prisoner wrote from his cell, clever contrite replies: off the drug, feel so free, blah de blah … He sent me his student essays, even tried a reverse-charge call.

Cock and bull, my husband said. The correspondence lapsed, contrition couldn’t stay the course. I was robbed and I was conned. But I worry about his mum for now the black intruder is dead who came to plunder and prey. And I am left lamenting the lack of a sapphire love ring, as if it were a lost soul.

Moonset 6 a.m.

This morning on the front step I had the luck to lift my eyes: swooning there in cloudless skies was a coloured moon, twin of the sun, and stained with the same blood-orange light. Slipping down from a great height, it met the mountains’ rim of blue and woke the moths on the western plains.

Suzanne Edgar
It will be for many, as for this writer, hard to credit that Frank Auerbach is now eighty-four years old. Born in Berlin in 1931, to a prosperous middle-class family, he came to London in 1939, as a child refugee from the brutality of the Nazis, who later killed both of his parents in a concentration camp. This year will see his major retrospective mounted at the Kunstmuseum in Bonn and later at the Tate Gallery in London. It will be the largest and most comprehensive showing of Auerbach’s work ever seen yet and it promises to provide telling insights into the work of this important contemporary “artists’ artist”, who is, since the death of Lucien Freud in 2011, probably the greatest living British painter and now the most distinguished survivor of what was known as the “School of London”. His work is distinguished by a constancy to his craft of painting, pursued for nearly seven decades and quite apart from trends or fashions. He has long been recognised as an artist of dedication and inspired vision. This essay notes the origins and achievements of Frank Auerbach and his significance within the canon of the tradition of Western painting.

Auerbach’s background as a refugee from Nazism is part of the story behind the character of his distinguished body of work, but not too much should be made of this; for, as one of his regular portrait sitters has justly remarked, Auerbach is a “born painter” and his talent would have inevitably shown through, even if he had had an ordinary middle-class upbringing in Sussex or the like. Yet, in addition to a Continental and specifically German Jewish background, Auerbach came to England at such an early stage of his life that his cultural equipment is very much that of an Englishman of his vintage. He has said himself that his very first pictorial influence came from seeing an illustration of Turner’s celebrated painting of *The Fighting Temeraire* which appeared in an *Arthur Mee’s Encyclopaedia* opposite a poem about Turner’s picture by Sir Henry Newbolt! Auerbach’s well-modulated speaking voice is that of a cultivated Englishman of his generation, with only a trace of an accent.

Auerbach’s work is closely linked to his constancy of location; and whether or not his strong adherence to place is an expression of a refugee’s relief at finding a safe haven from an existential threat, it is readily apparent that what has long been Auerbach’s own neighbourhood and its environs, in the Mornington Crescent area in Camden Town in North London, is the central focus of what he depicts, in addition to his portrait work of a retinue of sitters drawn from friends and family, regularly attending there. Even the entrance to his studios in Albert Street, where has worked for decades, became the *motif* for a series of works featuring the humble but significant signage, “To the Studios”.

Auerbach’s son Jake Auerbach and Hannah Rothschild produced in 2001 a superb film, *To the Studio*, about Auerbach and his works, which is now available on DVD. Auerbach has always been rather reticent about interviews and the like and had mainly limited himself over the years to brief biographical material appearing in exhibition catalogues. He co-operated for this film, but chose to say little about his private life and interests beyond his work, preferring to let the works speak for themselves, whilst being happy to answer some questions about them.

One notable feature of Auerbach’s career as an artist is the tenacity with which he has stuck to the development of his craft as a painter and etcher. He rose slowly, from selling his pictures from the London pavements and railings as a teenager in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to become an artist of major international repute. By his persistence, he has outlived and, in the view of many, has outclassed the “New York School” which so dominated art in the Western world from the 1960s onwards. It must seem, to anyone with a serious interest in painting and who came of age in the 1970s, that he has always been there, as a hovering presence, glimpsed in lavish exhibition catalogues prepared by his London dealers Marlborough Fine Art Galleries.
or looking out at us, rather humbly but matter-of-factly, from photographs like the famous one of him taken in his studio by Lord Snowdon in about 1980. Significantly, he was featured in that special book of Snowdon photographs Private View (1965), a sturdy, handsome, dark-haired German immigrant, planted in postwar London. Since then, and for fifty years, it has been the very same studio, with its accretions of paint splatterings on the floor and walls, and upon the sparse furniture, which has been the powerhouse of his oeuvre.

Auerbach’s work features in many major public and private collections internationally. We in Australia are fortunate that significant works in oils and many of his etchings are in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia and other public collections in this country. For anyone not familiar with Auerbach’s work and his style of painting, there are readily accessible websites showing in colour a good selection of his works. What is seen there gives an immediate impression of the distilled strength and single-minded dedication which Frank Auerbach has always put into his paintings.

The collection at the NGA in Canberra includes notably the important example of one of his very colourful Primrose Hill paintings, View from Primrose Hill (1962). In the National Gallery of Victoria are Oxford Street Building Site II (1960) and some various etchings. Examples of his work are also found in various other state public collections, including those of New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia. This level of representation in Australia is in itself a measure of the international significance of his artworks, and especially so given the high prices his works now command (and have for some time commanded) on the international art market. In any event we are fortunate to have these examples—especially the major oils in the NGA and NGV collections.

As a result of the thoughtful early initiatives of Australian dealerships such as the Villiers Fine Art Gallery and Toorak Gallery in the 1970s and later, on several exhibition occasions, the Rex Irwin Gallery in Sydney, there should also by now be a fair representation of Auerbach’s paintings in some major Australian private collections, even though he is not an artist whose works have an immediately wide appeal. Auerbach is one of those whose works show that the collector in question is a distinctly serious devotee of contemporary painting.

Auerbach’s art has by now generated a substantial literature despite his personal reluctance to engage in self-promotion. There have been a multitude of exhibition catalogues with essays on Frank Auerbach, and some monographs, the most important of which are Robert Hughes’s Frank Auerbach (1992) and William Feaver’s Frank Auerbach (2009) with its very extensive array of colour plates. The catalogue for the upcoming major retrospective exhibition should be a definitive tour de force and the exhibition itself is likely to stimulate further works on Auerbach.

Robert Hughes’s 1992 book is one of Hughes’s best, and by his own assessment it was his first serious monograph on a major modern artist of international renown. Hughes in his text referred to Auerbach’s personal background and art training and explored the central themes in the artist’s work. Significantly, and in my view rightly, Hughes started with a discussion of Auerbach as observed in his longtime studio at Camden Town, the location which is of such key importance to, and in, Auerbach’s oeuvre. Hughes not only interviewed Auerbach there, but sat for a very telling portrait. Others may write more on Auerbach and his studio, but the insights Hughes provides about the importance of this studio to Auerbach as an artist are unlikely to be bettered, yet Hughes’s book is now out of print.

Feaver’s book has a detailed discussion of Auerbach’s work, and with its generous array of high-quality colour plates it is likewise indispensable. It is alike to Feaver’s excellent book on Auerbach’s friend Lucien Freud.

Like all people of solid achievement, Frank Auerbach has his detractors. These dissenters include the redoubtable Brian Sewell, art critic of the London Evening Standard, who in 2009 said of Auerbach:

his latest selling exhibition demonstrated yet again the falling-off in power and originality that was already obvious at least a quarter of a century ago … Put very simply, after the first short burst of originality, Auerbach relinquished the business of painting portraits and townscapes for the easier discipline of painting Auerbachs of Auerbachs.

This type of verbal joke is a favourite of Sewell’s: he once spoke of “a copy of a copy of a bust of Michelangelo”. Sewell is almost an exact contemporary of Auerbach, having been also born in 1931, but in England. Yet one must say, with due respect to Sewell’s usual acuity of observation and assessment, that in this instance he does an injustice to Auerbach and his enormous achievement as a painter. That achievement has come about by dint of a long and dedicated path he has taken since the 1940s and 1950s and from which he has not
deviated. Moreover, if the drift of Sewell’s criticism is that Auerbach has suffered the familiar kind of “falling off” in quality by an established and long-standing painter, then that seems to me simply not so in Auerbach’s case. One has merely to consider the evidence and follow the trajectory of the artist’s work, as shown in the books by Hughes and Feaver, to see that there is a constancy of observation and of execution which is remarkable.

The major retrospective exhibition to be shown in Bonn and London in 2015 will be another occasion to test Sewell’s assertions.

Auerbach had difficulties in his private life in the 1950s, which were later resolved and which were in any event related to his commitment to work. In film interviews, his long-term sitters, including his wife Julia and his sometime lover Stella West, remarked that Auerbach’s commitment to his work was astounding and that, at the relevant periods at least, he habitually took only one single day off from his studio work each year, travelling with Stella West for a “day out” at the seaside resort of Brighton. He was a long-time close friend in London of his fellow artist Lucien Freud (1922–2011) who was also a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany and who led a colourful life in London art circles. However, Auerbach’s marital break-up, later repaired, was by no means comparable to Freud’s particularly complex private life, although both artists have consistently displayed a fierce devotion to their work. Auerbach’s personality and his painting style are reflected in the character “Max Ferber” in W.G. Sebald’s novel The Emigrants (1992).

Frank Auerbach has been a naturalised British citizen since 1947. He studied at St Martin’s School of Art from 1948 to 1952, then at the Royal College of Art from 1952 to 1955. He also took additional classes at the Borough Polytechnic in London where he and fellow student Leon Kossoff were taught by David Bomberg (1890–1957) from 1947 to 1953. Bomberg became a major influence on Auerbach, a fact that is immediately apparent from many of Auerbach’s early London cityscapes.

After various teaching posts, notably at Camberwell art school in London from 1958 to 1965, Auerbach steadily developed his style. In 1978 there was a major retrospective at Hayward Gallery in London followed by his Venice Biennale showing in 1986 and in the exhibition Eight Figurative Painters at Yale Center for British Art in 1981 alongside Michael Andrews, Francis Bacon, Sir William Coldstream, Lucien Freud, Patrick George, Leon Kossoff and Euan Uglow. A major exhibition of Auerbach’s etchings and drypoints was held at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge; and of course, over the decades since his first solo exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery London in 1956, Auerbach has held regular selling exhibitions at Marlborough Fine Art London and Marlborough Gallery in New York. He has also exhibited in Germany, Holland and Spain.

Auerbach’s works can be divided roughly into the following main categories: the early London cityscapes, often of bombed-out sites being dug out and “redeveloped” in the 1950s and 1960s; town and streetscapes observed in the vicinity of his Camden Town studio and particularly of Mornington Crescent; the “Primrose Hill” series of landscapes with figures set in parkland; and of course the distinctive series of portraits done in his studio. Auerbach regards one of his early London cityscapes, Summer Building Site, done in 1952, as his “breakthrough picture”. He has noted that early in his career, his palette was restricted to the basic colours of black, white and browns (with only a few others sparingly used), the cheaper colours the struggling artist could afford, but that as he became better known and started selling more works, he was able to move into stronger and more vibrant colours, including reds and oranges, such as appear in the “Primrose Hill” series of which one brilliantly coloured example is in the NGA at Canberra. He painted a series of works showing views of his studio building, many incorporating the homely sign pointing “To the Studios”; the 2001 documentary, To the Studio, takes its title from this series. The cityscapes and street scenes are strongly reminiscent of the influence of David Bomberg, whose remarkable “figurative-expressionist” landscapes such as those done at Cuenca in Spain during his middle to later periods are of a similar style.

It is clear, however, that as commentators have said, Auerbach is not an “expressionist” painter as such. He is essentially a figurative painter, as is shown by his strong focus on human portraiture and on townscape. One of the most conspicuous
features of Auerbach’s paintings is the thickness of the paint applied, largely the product of the intensity of his painting methods, which also involve frequent “scrapings off” of paint and the addition of further layers to better develop images. To borrow and adapt a phrase of Robert Hughes’s, Auerbach was “nothing if not self-critical” and his portrait sitters speak of lengthy multiple sittings and of many self-critical revisions and scrapings-off. As well, his portraits include many of the same sitter observed over the years and in some cases, decades. Indeed, there is in his work something of the intensity seen in Giorgio Morandi’s celebrated and closely-observed studio still-life series, of objects arranged on a table or shelf. However, in truth, the greater resemblance is that Auerbach’s cityscapes can be compared to Morandi’s superb very early landscapes. In this, we are back in the territory of Bomberg’s dry, precise landscapes such as those he did in Jerusalem in the 1920s. However, Auerbach is by no means “dry” or reserved—his works are of great vivacity, even verve. One is reminded of that phrase of Cézanne, doing Nature “after Poussin”.

It has been somewhat overworked in art literature, but it is very true of the manner in which Auerbach makes all this forceful landscape pictures.

As for Auerbach’s many portraits of those in the small circle of sitters drawn from friends and family in London, some of whom have visited his studio on particular days of the week for years, or even over decades, they are powerful and to some tastes disconcerting works when first encountered. However, on examination and after duly considering them over time, one comes to see just how singular they are. Some of them evoke memories of images by Chaim Soutine (1893–1943) and the apparent brevity and rapidity of the main brushstrokes might suggest very rapid execution, but more often than not, quite the opposite is the case, Auerbach having taken a long time to fix the image and then to develop his intentions to arrive at the final version. Also, these pictures, or at least most of them, come in several series. Certain of them, such as the Portrait of JYM II (Juliet Yardley Mills) chosen for the cover illustration for Robert Hughes’s monograph, bid fair to achieve a place amongst the great classic portrait images in oils in the Western tradition.

This brings us to another and very important aspect of Auerbach and his work—namely, the extent to which his work is influenced by, and in a sense continues, the great Western tradition of figurative painting. As informed observers, and most particularly Colin Wiggins of the National Gallery in London, have pointed out, Auerbach has for decades made it a regular practice to visit the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square and to take in the Old Masters and their techniques and imagery, which have informed his practice as a painter to a higher degree than is the case for most contemporary artists.

In an article on Auerbach for the art quarterly Modern Painters, Wiggins quotes what the artist had to say in 1990 about his views of the Old Masters:

I have slowly lost the luxury of hating any great masters. I used to hate Hals and I used to hate Leonardo da Vinci but I’ve gradually grown around to them. I think that the people that one is constantly told are the great masters, very usually one finds that they are.

Again, when commenting specifically on the developments over time in his own response to artists of the Venetian School, Auerbach had this to say:

The sequence of preference was: when I was 20, Tintoretto for swagger and blatantly brilliant composition; 35, Titian for involvement, subtlety, completeness, humanity (I still think him, as everybody does, the best); 45, Veronese for stoicism, dignity and undramatised intelligence—sadness. The women in Veronese are superb although the first impression is quiet, as is the first impression of superb women in life!

This gradual progress to humility before the Masters is of a piece with Auerbach’s reclusive reticence. He declined the offer of a knighthood in 2003. Given his contribution to British art, he deserves the Companion of Honour.

Writing in the admittedly somewhat different context of Lucien Freud’s portraiture works, Martin Gayford has noted:

The modernist critic Clement Greenberg once pronounced that it was impossible nowadays for an “advanced” artist to paint a portrait. Lucien Freud, however, spent his entire long career doing nothing else. Indeed, he expanded the notion of portraiture beyond its historical boundaries. As Freud interpreted the idiom, a portrait was not just a depiction of a specific individual human being. Anything, absolutely anything at all—an egg, a leaf, a floorboard, a chair—was, when he painted it, an example of portraiture … Every single thing that an artist’s eye might encounter was individual. And what
you might call the individuality of individuals was his true subject: their faces, their bodies, their personalities, their moods.

In Auerbach’s case, the focus was primarily upon the person depicted and less upon any external features, although Auerbach’s habitual wooden studio chair would often appear. Auerbach’s portraits differ from Freud’s in that Auerbach’s are generally even more “expressionist” in appearance than many of his cityscapes—and they end up taking on a special life and appeal of their own, capturing the essence of the sitter in a manner of painterly execution that at first seems glancing, but is in fact the product of long and careful deliberation. There is another quality to the best of these portraits—and it is again reminiscent of certain of Soutine’s paintings—namely, that the thick paint has an “opalescent” effect and a careful variety of colours are chosen and used to achieve an image reflecting the personality depicted. This is very apparent, for instance, in the JYM portrait mentioned earlier.

However, it has been the very thickness of his painting that has attracted criticism. In 1956, an unsigned review in the Manchester Guardian (once famously called “that prudish Manchester newspaper”) opined that Auerbach’s technique in oils was “so fantastically obtrusive that it is some time before one penetrates to the intentions that should justify this grotesque method”. Some journalists, ever chasing for notions of the absurd with which to appeal to readerships eschewing “modern art”, have written about paint so thick that it falls off canvases.

In the 1980s (when one might have expected that nothing at all could any longer shock an art critic) Auerbach was denounced by a critic for his adherence to an (alleged) “conservatism as if it were a religion”, and this appears to have been on some basis that Auerbach lacked any sense of “irony”, which of course gets close to a cultural stereotyping. It seems that nothing will please many of the people who write art criticism; and this was against a background of changes in the art world much more dramatic and downright bizarre than the fondness for laying oils on thick.

What really seems to have annoyed some of these people was the fact that Auerbach had been true to his own convictions and practice for a very long time indeed—and it may be that this also lies behind the rather jaundiced views of Brian Sewell noted above.

All this has been “water off a duck’s back” to Auerbach, who has lived up to the latter half of his surname, by simply getting on with his work and turning out marvellous pictures, which are in increasingly high demand on the international market and which collectively show him to be the leading and most esteemed survivor of the London School. It is clear, from his brief appearances in the film To the Studio, that in contradistinction to many artists today, Auerbach does not affect any arrogant pretensions of “artistic theory” or “philosophic meanings” in his work, but that he regards his works in much the same light that Sir Denis Mahon described as simply “opere fatto per mano”—artworks made by hand—rather than manifestations of any aggressive philosophising.

Further, and despite his humble start as a teenage refugee and émigré in London in the late 1940s, Auerbach is not a bohemian figure in the manner of, say, Augustus John. Indeed, he appears to lead a quotidian existence in Camden Town, working hard there and occasionally visiting the National Gallery. He rarely travels and says that he goes out to the theatre twice a year and to the cinema about once a month when he is tired. It is clear that Frank Auerbach is a very intelligent and well-read man; his appearance and courteously but reticent demeanour and his manner of speech are all consistent with a personality of depth and rich compassion, with no illusions about the world and no interest in the ephemeral fashions of cultural “happenings”.

Few artists in London or for that matter anywhere in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century could (or can) point to a more dogged, faithful and persistent commitment to their work as Frank Auerbach has shown to his painting, as it has developed over much more than half a century. Despite the usual stylistic developments, the subject matter and the basic “mode” of his painting have changed very little over the decades from about the time of his “breakthrough” with Summer Building Site in 1952.

If there is perhaps something “Brechtian” in Auerbach’s works, he is certainly not a noisy propagandist. The spirit of his work is more like that of
Samuel Beckett—a certain sparseness, strangeness and a sense of some foreboding. He is certainly a “driven” artist, and he has said himself that he is keenly aware of the passage of time, as in the maxim *ars longa vita brevis*.

He has said that painting is indeed a “mystery” and some years ago turned down a request that he participate in a film seeking to “de-mystify” painting, remarking that it is no good making out that artists are just “approachable blokes who happen to paint”. Traditionally, a master craftsman was obliged by deed to instruct his apprentice in the “art, craft and mystery” of the relevant calling, trade or craft. It is in this sense that Auerbach has referred to the great “mystery” of the painter’s art. It is not something achieved simply by training, but neither is it a wholly innate skill or “inspiration” which does not need or benefit from sound instruction and experience in the fundamentals of its manual practice. It is of particular note that Auerbach regards the daily regularity of that practice, whether in the studio or before an outdoor motif, as vital to what he has achieved.

Overall, Auerbach can be placed in art historical terms as one of the world’s leading contemporary painters; and along with Leon Kossoff, he is in that line of artists who were influenced by London’s Borough Group centred around David Bomberg (whose importance to the development of Modernism in art is now recognised, but perhaps still not to the high degree which he deserves) and through Bomberg, back to Walter Sickert and Sargent and to the French Masters and the Dutch Old Masters. Auerbach’s 2015 retrospective will undoubtedly confirm this.

Dr Douglas Hassall is a frequent contributor to *Quadrant* on art, most recently on Arthur Boyd in the January-February issue. More of his contributions will appear shortly.

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The Clearing

someone has already said *Miss Havisham*
yes, there’s dust
someone has already said
*we’ll need to get our Marigolds on*
bags of cleaning products line up like an army
we wait for orders
one—*it’s too soon, he’s not even buried yet*
another—*just enough so it won’t upset his mum*
the third—*let’s put the kettle on*
we talk of different kinds of tidying
agree some things could, possibly, go to the garage
others can be picked up, dusted and replaced
put into piles for later
*let’s write it all down, in case anyone asks*
is my suggestion typically
touching notepad and pen like a talisman
we melt into silence, each to our chosen rooms
the child, open-mouthed, fetches and carries on command
receipts from Tesco’s, used stamps, birthday cards
images from magazines, bits of wool, grass, shells with holes
theatre tickets, gallery tickets, programmes
Virgin Marys, owls, candles, unopened books still bagged
what seem like gifts already bought for a Christmas he wouldn’t see
a buried letter sent from me

*Victoria Field*
Art is a commodity, despite the delusions, self and other deceptions to the contrary of aesthetes, museum directors, art historians, art teachers and even artists and art dealers themselves. There are few artists who, given the choice, would prefer absinthe and life in a garret to the fame and fortune that critical acclaim bestows. It has always been that way.

Because art is a commodity, it has just as much been the subject of disputation and litigation, as a cargo of corn or a used car. This has been so even in cases of art much less portable than a fine canvas, which can be taken from its stretcher, rolled up, inserted in a cardboard cylinder, and whisked across a border in a suitcase. The Elgin Marbles are a case in point. Value was given for them (whether to the lawful owner or otherwise is debatable) at the time, and their removal from Athens was a public spectacle. Centuries later, Greece maintains its claim to them, conveniently overlooking the fact that had they remained in situ, they would by now have probably been ground into dust, or otherwise sadly and irreparably defaced. The British Museum has proved a good and safe sanctuary for them, as it has for the Rosetta stone and many other fine and valuable relics disregarded by the successors of their creators.

In Australia at present, the media have expanded the controversy attaching to the innocent purchase by the National Gallery of Australia of eleventh- and twelfth-century Indian Shiva bronzes, probably stolen or, at least, illegally exported to this country. It may be easier to accept—certainly I would find it easier to accept—that there can never be unimpeachable title for the recipient of stolen goods, than is the case with respect to items sold, granted or given, however naively, centuries before, and now the subject of a new-found cultural revisionism. Almost all countries now have legislation restricting the export of items of cultural or artistic significance.

The leading Australian case under the relevant Commonwealth legislation (Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986) is Waterhouse v Minister for the Arts and Territories (1993) 43 FCR 175. The article of cultural significance in question was an 1837 oil painting by John Glover, The Bath of Diana, Van Diemen’s Land. Glover had come to Australia to settle when he was an old man and had already had a large measure of success in England. He brought with him a considerable fortune. He continued to paint in Tasmania, where he built a substantial residence and recorded the original landscape, as well as some of the activities of the indigenous inhabitants. The Bath of Diana was, by 1993, a well-known and much admired painting. Indeed, it was said of Glover that he was the first of the European artists to understand how the vegetation of this country differed from the vegetation of Europe. If you look up from the ground into the foliage of almost any eucalypt, you will see the blue sky above, and the landscape in the distance through it, discernments you do not have through the dense foliage of most European trees. Glover understood this first and painted the ubiquitous eucalypt accordingly.

The Bath of Diana was owned by a member of the Waterhouse family, better known perhaps for their bookmaking than for aesthetic sensibility. The painting was sold to an overseas buyer. It was rumoured at the time that a famous pop star or composer was the true and ultimate purchaser. In any event, the painting could be taken from the country only if an approval under the relevant legislation for its export were granted by the minister. Approval was refused, and ultimately the question whether it could be exported came via the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to the Full Federal Court. The named buyer, for $1.7 million, was an art dealer in Los Angeles acting probably on behalf of a client. In their reasons for judgment, the Full Court (Black CJ, Lockhart and Gummow JJ) referred to English cases decided under similar legislation there and in New Zealand.
The precise questions posed for the court were whether the minister’s decision constituted an acquisition for the purposes of s 51 (xxxi) of the Constitution, and if it did, whether the acquisition was on just terms. The applicant’s argument was that the Commonwealth had acquired the right, a valuable right, to ensure that the painting remained in the Commonwealth. The facts of the case provided a clear example of the proposition that in addition to its other qualities, a great or rare work of art is an international commodity.

It will be recalled that the Tasmanian Dam Case had been decided some ten years earlier. It would be raking over old embers for me to express my emphatic disagreement with the outcome of the case on the acquisition point, and my preference for the clearly correct dissent on that issue of Deane J. The majority acknowledged the correctness of the entirely orthodox proposition that in order for there to be an acquisition by the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth must acquire an interest in property, however slight and insubstantial. But then they went on to hold that the effective control that the Tasmanian Dam legislation afforded the Commonwealth did not amount to an acquisition. Deane J’s answer to that was that, what the Commonwealth acquired in Tasmania was a valuable restrictive covenant, a right to determine the use of a substantial tract of Tasmania, whether by sterilising or diminishing it, or otherwise. By parity of reasoning, the Commonwealth in the case of a cultural object meeting the criteria of the legislation, acquires a (statutory) restrictive covenant precluding its sale outside this country and therefore reduces and controls its value. Obviously, the more restricted any market is, the less valuable an object for sale in it will be.

My personal view is that legislation in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, which prevents the sale of a relevant item to a buyer outside the country, only if a buyer for it cannot be found from the exporting country at the bona fide sale price within a specific time sufficient to enable the money to be raised by an institution, or otherwise, for its purchase, is preferable.

A year or so ago, I saw an exhibition at the National Gallery in London of fakes. Several features of that exhibition were intriguing. It was remarkable how some of the works had been attributed, de-attributed or denounced and re-attributed down through the centuries. Sometimes, the fakes were displayed beside signature works of the artists who were being imitated. It was easy to see how even a keen and educated eye might have formed a different view of the authenticity or otherwise of the fake. You will see in London a major extension of a public museum called the Duveen Gallery. Joseph Duveen was the most famous art dealer of the twentieth century, with commercial galleries in London, Paris and New York. He was the dealer to whom the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century magnates of the United States turned when they built their grand houses, and set out to adorn them with antiques, artefacts and fine art. It was said that Duveen “purchased” his title by making the gift of the gallery, and perhaps providing other gifts when Ramsay MacDonald was the Prime Minister.

Many, many hundreds, perhaps thousands of works, from medieval to modern, passed through Duveen’s hands. Few acknowledged Renaissance painters signed their works. Wily ruthless American millionaires hesitated to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars on Duveen’s word alone. His practice was to seek a certificate of authenticity from the American scholar Bernard Berenson, who had studied at Harvard and took up residence outside Siena. He became the acknowledged expert on Renaissance art. After he died his executors found among his papers a more accurate set of accounts than those he used for his apparent business dealings with Duveen. The second set of books revealed that Duveen regularly paid him a secret commission for authentication. How many, it may be asked, of the best paintings of the past gracing the museums of North America, can be guaranteed to be under the hands of the artists to whom they are attributed? The problem of uncertainty is compounded by the fact that most great artists had their own workshops with apprentices, and, as their fame increased, there grew up around them schools of followers highly adept and willing to imitate the successful.

I came close to some personal litigation once in relation to a painting. In the early 1970s I had bought a picture in London, a small oil sketch, a cloud study, as a probable Constable. I decided to sell it at an auction a couple of decades later. It was first catalogued as a Constable, and then denounced as such. Had it simply been offered as a school of, or a possible Constable, its prospects would have been better than a denounced one. I challenged
the denunciation. Fortunately, as it turned out, my challenge was emphatic and in writing. It was rejected. The painting sold for less than $1000. A year later, an acquaintance of mine in the art world drew my attention to a catalogue of another auction house for a sale of important English paintings in London. There, in all its glory, was my Constable, fully authenticated by the leading Constable expert in the world and with a long provenance, omitting reference only to my ownership. The painting sold in London for about $20,000.

During the 1930s and the Second World War, the Nazis indulged in a ruthless and sometimes covert form of extortion. Wealthy Jewish people were their special target. Many were connoisseurs. Their works of art were routinely seized. Goering was a major culprit. It was little known (until the recent film The Monuments Men) that the United States recruited a special unit of art experts to follow closely behind the allies as they advanced towards Berlin in order to find and protect art treasures that had been seized and hidden by the Germans. In 2009, the United Kingdom enacted the Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Act. That Act makes provision for an advisory panel called the Spoliation Panel, chaired usually by a High Court judge, to make recommendations and to advise with respect to the return of art stolen or extorted during the Nazi era defined as the period from 1938 to 1945.

The powers of the Spoliation Panel are limited. It considers claims in respect of objects in the possession of public collections and makes recommendations based upon relevant circumstances as to whether those public collections should relinquish extorted works to the successors of those from whom they have been taken, and also upon what terms that might happen. I became interested in this topic when I read of the Spoliation Panel in Apollo art magazine some years ago, sufficiently so to make a case before it a central pivot of a plot in my novel The Russian Master. The Panel proceeds upon the basis of the principles established by the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets in 1998.

Two recent cases before the Panel are worth recounting. One related to drawings in the possession of the Smith Courtauld Trust, the other to fourteen clocks in the possession of the British Museum. The claimants, descendants of the Nazi-era Jewish owners, failed on the narrow ground in each case that the relevant sales in 1939 had not been made at an undervalue, although causation by way of Nazi persecution was a factor in the making of the sale. A similar conclusion was reached on like grounds in respect of the drawings.

Unsurprisingly, the standards of proof are relaxed, and sympathetic views on causation are readily taken. What is surprising however is how much circumstantial evidence can still be found. Many archives, expert appraisals, catalogues and art relics, all valuable sources, survived the war. Most of the works have far increased in value since the Nazi-era owners parted with them, in excess in most cases of the inflated value of currency. Good art can be a good investment.

I should not conclude this rather diffuse paper without acknowledging the depredations, contributions almost, of some of the most successful forgers of the twentieth century, Hans van Meegeren and Tom Keating. Both were charged, van Meegeren immediately after the Second World War and Keating in the 1980s. Van Meegeren was convicted by a Dutch court, not of the more serious offence of having sold a Dutch National Treasure to the Nazis, but rather, of forgery. His claim that he had forged this treasure and other works was met with disbelief, dispelled only when, in the presence of a Commission of Experts, he painted a new Vermeer.

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effectively reinvented an entire seventh- to tenth-century Indian culture. He produced innumerable ceramics for sale all over North America, including to knowledgeable museum curators. He was charged in 1974 with illegally smuggling heritage treasures out of Mexico. His defence, like Van Meegeren’s, was that the objects were fakes, although he preferred to call them originals and not heritage. Sentenced to ten years, he served only seven months. On release he was employed as a restorer and maker of replicas by a university, with the blessing of the National Museum of Mexico.

The Greenhalgh family lived in Bolton, Lancashire, all ostensibly on social security for many years. Their sixteen-year-old son Shaun was an accomplished painter and sculptor in stone. Like Keating, he did not qualify for art school. An early effort was a fake Gauguin sculpture for which the family contrived a convincing provenance, so much so that it was embraced for sale by Sotheby’s. Antiquities, stone sculptures, watercolours and art were all within his range. His mother Olive was the person who usually approached the auction houses and the museums. The family’s activities were brought to light when an astute curator at the British Museum noticed an anachronism in the harness of an Assyrian stone horse group offered by Olive. Shaun, then in early middle age, was sentenced to four years and eight months. His parents, in their eighties, were given suspended sentences. It is speculated that more than 3000 objects were produced in the family workshop or, more aptly perhaps, family studio.

Let me suggest possible reasons for these seemingly disproportionately light sentences or terms of imprisonment actually served. The art establishment, artists, curators, art critics and dealers have a reputation, often deserved, for being precious and arrogant. The people defrauded tend to be such people, or people who have acquired great wealth quickly, art being merely, for some of them, a necessary accessory of that wealth. Art, especially what is fashionable, appears to many people to be overvalued relative to life’s necessities.

It is not always easy to distinguish a well-executed forgery, a watercolour perhaps, on eighteenth-century paper, from an original, inevitably faded and discoloured by time. If it is good enough to be indistinguishable, then why, some people would ask, should it be worth less? The truth is that if at first the novel is resisted but soon extolled by the market, many in the general community are sceptical. To do something differently is not necessarily to do it better.

Great forgers do attract respect. They have in effect beaten the art establishment at its own game.

Ian Callinan AC, a Justice of the High Court of Australia from 1998 to 2007, presented this speech in Paris last year.

Water for Worship
Osaka, Japan

At Hozen Temple
a stooped Japanese man is
working the handle
of a cast iron pump, which is
spouting water to
a plastic bucket in which
it will be carried,
sloshing, ten paces then poured
in a granite pot
from which it will be scooped with
a tin-cupped ladle
and tossed over a life-size

statue of Fudo,
the god of fire and wisdom,
covered now in moss
sustained by countless dousings
across the decades
from hopeful petitioners
like this very man
who is puffing while pumping
water for worship
as I write where I began
this poem at Hozen Temple.

Andrew Lansdown
The district of Sutton Grange in central Victoria cannot be classed as a major tourist destination. There is a community hall and a church, an abandoned school, a small cemetery, a few houses, and, of course, a Soldiers Memorial. Indeed, unless you are particularly attentive, you could speed through the place without realising that it existed. There were far more people living there one hundred years ago than there are today. Nonetheless, for the locals still living there, Sutton Grange is the centre of the habitable earth—the Omphalos. And that’s how it should be. When pressed for evidence, they will start by giving you some version of that universal truth first recorded by Homer:

And I for one, know of no sweeter sight for a man’s eye than his own country ... So true it is that a man’s fatherland and his parents are what he holds sweetest, even though he has settled far away from his people in some rich home in foreign lands.

After that, they will become more specific and might point to a couple of noteworthy local achievements or events. They will tell you how Thomas Walker, following in the footsteps of Major Mitchell, came through the district in 1838 and recorded in his journal: “I have not seen finer sheep land nor country more pleasing since I commenced my tour ... we considered it worthy of the name of Australia Felix.” Then they might mention the invention of the sheep-drafting race in 1848 by William Lockhart Morton, an overseer on the Sutton Grange sheep run. For those unacquainted with sheep farming, I should explain that the drafting race enables a single person (with the aid of a good dog) to separate a mob of sheep into desired categories or types—ewes and lambs, fat lambs and “store” lambs, and so on. Fancy versions utilise two gates and allow a three-way separation, but you need good co-ordination.

For the locals though, perhaps the most significant piece of history associated with Sutton Grange revolves about a particular schoolteacher at the little granite school, Albert Cox. He taught at the school from 1920 until 1961. As far as I am aware, this record has been topped by only one other Victorian schoolteacher. Mind you, in other trades the service records can be far more impressive. There is a story about a local man up here who started at an engineering works when he was fifteen and was given his gold watch and heavy handshake fifty years later. Angry at his forced retirement, he began his farewell address with these words: “Had I known that this bloody job was only temporary, I would never have taken it in the first place.”

But it was not just his length of service at the little school that made Cox a remarkable schoolteacher. It was what he taught his students. In addition to the “three R’s”, the children learned a great deal of natural history, because Albert Cox was himself a keen amateur naturalist. Each day, the children were encouraged to make a note of what birds or other animal and plant life they had seen on the way to school. These observations were then written into the Observations Book, under the careful eye of the teacher. Records were entered into this book from 1926 through until 1960, with a break during the war years only. The following entry, made by Cox himself, tells its own story of the man’s love of the natural world about him and, more especially, of the way he saw the relationship between wild creatures and humans:

On the morning of the 26th September 1951 the thrush that had been for such a long period a friend of all at the Sutton Grange School was found dead beside the residence garden. This bird was well over thirty years old and had nested around the school residence all these years, many seasons being spent in an old billy hanging under the verandah. The bird had died of old age, being found lying with an insect still in its beak. It died in the middle of the nesting season leaving a mate to hatch out and rear a family.

Here was a man recording the death of an old friend. This friend and close neighbour had died at
work. It had performed its duty as a parent right to the very last. The whole thing is intensely anthropomorphic, and modern animal behaviour experts would scoff at it. Birds, they will say, do not form these sorts of relationships with humans. It’s all down to “anti-predator strategy” or “territorial spacing behaviour” or some such. Doubtless, too, if Cox’s bird was the English song thrush, he would be castigated for harbouring a non-indigenous species.

That’s the sort of world we live in now. Magpies do not carol in the mornings because they are happy to see the sun rise. It’s simply a vocalisation to reinforce territorial rights. And kookaburras do not signal the end of the day to all the other creatures by giving their last laugh just at that moment when dusk turns to darkness. They, again, are simply letting neighbouring kookaburras know who is in control of the local territory. Creatures respond to external stimuli, or hormones, under a strict system of genetic coding. It’s the territorial imperative or the selfish gene, as popularised by Robert Ardrey and Richard Dawkins, although to be fair, Descartes started the whole idea of the mechanical animal hundreds of years earlier. Animals are just glorified CD players where you shove in DNA instead of a disc. Faced with this sort of bleakness, you can sympathise with Wordsworth:

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not.—Great God! I’d rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn. 

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea, 
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn; 
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea; 
Or hear old Triton blow his wreatheèd horn.

And Wordsworth is right. We have progressively isolated ourselves from the rest of the natural world. Even as little as fifty years ago, when Albert Cox was teaching at his little school, we had a far closer feel for the natural world than we do today. And that’s despite all sorts of recent proclamations such as “ecologically sustainable development”, “maintenance of biodiversity”, “clean and green” and all those other modern mantras.

Have you ever wondered why Sir David Attenborough speaks in a whisper when he is describing the lives of creatures? It’s because he is on the outside looking in, and it is almost embarrassing. He is a bit like a 

voyeur peeping through the keyhole. And you will note, if you listen to his commentary carefully, that everything is down to scientific principles of behaviourism and genetics. All is neatly packaged as cause and effect. His animals are glorified machines to be marvelled at like the intricate, jewelled workings of a Swiss watch. Granted, there is some sense of wonder, but that wonder is built on the complexity of things, not simply on the existence of things. Even Disney’s outrageously contrived world of nature was better. His animals in the early television nature shows, all decent, God-fearing American citizens circa 1960, at least had some sense of not being pre-programmed.

It’s almost as if the Fall of Man is still going on. Christians tend to read the account of the Fall in Genesis as an historical event. But part of it may not be. One of the consequences of the Fall was a destruction of that harmony which previously existed between humans and all other life on earth. Perhaps the process of estrangement is a long-term business and we are not at the end of it yet. When you examine history, that proposition certainly seems to carry some weight.

Since we started this discussion with a quotation concerning a dead thrush, let us stick to the world of birds and to the history of their interactions with humans. There is a name for that interaction. It is called birdlore.

For us in the West, the place to start is the Greece of Homer’s time. Anything earlier is mere conjecture and anything later runs a poor second to the richness of Homer’s descriptions. For him, birds are not only closely associated with humans, certain of them are also particular favourites of the gods. The scene at Calypso’s cave will suffice to make the point:

The cave was sheltered by a copse of alders and fragrant cypresses, which was the roosting place of wide-winged birds, horned owls and falcons and cormorants with long tongues, birds of the coast, whose business takes them down to the sea ... It was indeed a spot where even an immortal visitor must pause to gaze in wonder and delight.

There is something of a parallel here with the situation for the Aranda Aborigines in Central Australia, early last century. In their account of the Aranda (formerly known as Arunta), Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen indicate that the sacred sites where the Spirit Ancestors live (the Ertnatulunga)
are a haven for all sorts of wild animals, including birds. Spencer and Gillen would want us to believe that the birds and animals cluster around the sacred sites because they are not hunted at or near those spots. The Aranda would regard this as ridiculous. The birds and animals are there simply because the sites are sacred—richness of fauna is one of the manifestations of sacrality.

But, going back to ancient Greece, the most important relation between birds and humans is one of language. Humans who can understand the language of birds are seers. The birds have important things to tell us. Indeed, one of the Greek words for divination is oionopia or ornithomanteia—“bird language” or augury. Both Pliny the Elder and Aelian tell us that the seers or augurs are not just skilled at interpreting the language or the actions of birds, they are also skilled in natural history. So, for instance, Aelian says:

I have heard that some people practise divination by birds and devote themselves to their study and scrutinise their flight and quarters of the sky where they appear. And seers like Teiresias, Polydamas, Polyiedus, Theoclymenus and many another are celebrated for their knowledge of this art ...

[On the Animals VIII.5]

Now, before you dismiss augury as so much nonsense, it pays to remember that this and other forms of divination were of the utmost importance to both the Greek and the Roman empires at the height of their respective powers. For instance, Pliny gives us this account of the importance of poultry in imperial Rome:

These are the birds that give the Most-Favourable Omens; these birds daily control our officers of state, and shut or open to them their own homes; these send forward or hold back the Roman rods of office and order or forbid battle formation, being the auspices of all our victories won all over the world; these hold supreme empire over the empire of the world, being as acceptable to the gods with even their inward parts and vitals as are the costliest victims.

[Natural History. Book X xxiv 49]

But we should not suppose that divination of this sort was regarded as some species of magic or that it was necessarily divinely inspired. Pausanias’s (second century AD) view of Greek religious practice is that of a “moderate realist”. That is to say, his criteria for what to believe and what not to believe concerning these matters certainly involved a notion of religious faith, but they largely involved human observation and human reason:

This poetry [that of Iophon of Knossos on Amphiaraos, the famous seer] of his had an intoxicating attraction to common people, but in fact apart from those who suffered Apollonian madness none of the soothsayers in antiquity was a prophet; they were good at exegesis of dreams, the diagnosis of flights of birds, the scrying of holy entrails.

Pausanias clearly believes that true prophecy is very limited and he makes a clear distinction between inspiration and exegesis. For him, there is no “magic” or divine intervention in the case of augury—it is simply a matter of correct diagnosis. I should mention in passing that Pausanias himself was a great bird lover. In his old age he took to bird watching and travelled far and wide to catch sight of different species. No doubt he kept a bird list like any modern ornithologist.

Mind you, in order to make the correct diagnosis, you need to understand the birds, and the granting of that power is a much trickier business for us to understand. For one thing, in ancient Greece, that power seems to have been often mediated by snakes! The famous seer Melampus saved the young of two dead snakes. Later, when he was asleep, these young snakes licked his ears. When he awoke, he found he could understand the language of birds. Snakes also licked the ears of Kassandra and Helenos, giving them the power of the seer.

In other cases, the gift of understanding birds seems to come by direct association with the gods. Thus, Parnassos, the inventor of divination by birds, had the nymph Kleodora for his mother and Poseidon as his father. Likewise, Teiresias was the son of the nymph Chariklo, and Phineus, another blind seer, was also the son of Poseidon. One could quote many other examples from the ancient literature.

But why should birds be important as bringers of knowledge? Part of the answer may have to do with their ancestry. In ancient Greek mythology, birds often begin as humans transformed by gods. Perhaps the most famous example is Alcyone. She was the daughter of Aeolus (king of the winds) who found her husband, Ceyx, drowned and, overcome with grief, cast herself into the sea where she drowned. The gods rewarded her devotion by turning her into a kingfisher, and Aeolus (or, perhaps, Zeus) forbade the winds to blow during the “Halcyon Days”, the seven days before and the seven after the winter solstice, when legend has it
that the kingfisher lays its eggs. Pliny gives us a detailed account:

They breed at midwinter, on what are called “the kingfisher days”, during which the sea is calm and navigable, especially in the neighbourhood of Sicily. They make their nests a week before the shortest day, and lay a week after it. Their nests are admired for their shape, that of a ball slightly projecting with a very narrow mouth, resembling a very large sponge; they cannot be cut with a knife, but break at a strong blow, like dry sea foam; and it cannot be discovered of what they are constructed ... They lay five eggs. [Pliny, Natural History, X.xlv.90-91]

Ceyx was also changed into a bird, but the love between the two remained. As far as I can ascertain, taxonomists still recognise both the genus Halcyon and the genus Ceyx amongst our kingfishers. In Australia, bird books still list Ceyx azureus as the Azure Kingfisher but our Sacred Kingfisher is no longer in the genus Halcyon. In ancient times members of the two genera were commonly thought to fly together. The story of Alcyone led both Henry Purcell and Eric Coates to write musical pieces (Halcyon Days) on the theme. Perhaps we can take this as proof that birds continue to inspire us!

This early Greek notion of the human origin of many bird species has close parallels in other cultures. The totemic spirit ancestors of the Aborigines, for instance, were often bird-men. In their study of the Aranda, Spencer and Gillen report that the spirit ancestors are so intimately associated with plants and animals, the name of which they bear, that an Alcheringa (Dreamtime or primordial time) man of say, the emu totem, may be spoken of either as a man-emu or emu-man. One can begin to understand from this just how close was the relationship between the Aborigines and the world of nature around them.

By the time we get to Plato (circa 400 BC), city folk are already losing interest in the bush and its denizens. As far as we know from Plato’s account, Socrates only went voluntarily outside the city wall on one occasion, and even then it was not to admire the birds (Phaedrus). He seemed a lot more interested in a young boy (interestingly, Sixty Minutes has not followed up on this case). When he is asked about the spirits of nature, he gives this reply:

Desiring to fulfil your wishes, dearest friend, I decided to paint the dove ... and by a picture to instruct the minds of simple folk, so that what the intellect of the simple folk could scarcely comprehend with the mind’s eye, it might at least discern with the physical eye; and what their hearing could scarcely perceive, their sight...
might do so. I wished not only to paint the dove physically, but also to outline it verbally, so that by the text, I may represent a picture; for instance, whom the simplicity of the picture would not please, at least the moral teaching of the text might do so.

In the Aviarium, some thirty bird species are presented and, for each, certain biological information is used to draw an analogy to the proper conduct of a Christian life. Thus, for instance, part of the entry for “The Goose” reads:

There are two varieties of geese, that is to say, the tame and the wild. The wild ones fly aloft and in an order, and denote those who, far from worldly affairs, preserve an order of righteous living. The domestic ones, however, live in villages; they cry out frequently; they tear at themselves with their beaks. They signify those who, even though they love the monastery, have time nevertheless for loquaciousness and slander.

Whether these moralising allegories had the effect of giving heightened respect for animals is a difficult question. Certainly, many of the species chosen were farm animals, routinely slaughtered for food. It is difficult to imagine, however, that such a reverse anthropomorphism did not lead to some special consideration for the species involved. When the medieval peasants saw, in the great cathedral or church, an image of the pelican (representing Christ—the pelican was thought to nourish its young with its own blood), it is hard to imagine that they could not have some lingering association when the real pelican was sighted on the lake.

In another sense, we know that the sort of associations given in these moralising accounts went deeper than mere allegory. Even in this writer’s memory of living in a small rural community in Victoria, it was considered improper (bringing bad luck at the very least) to destroy the nests of swallows, even when such nests on house walls caused a good deal of fouling with faecal remains. For a more powerful example, we need look no further than Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, where the killing of an albatross has truly terrifying consequences. Nor is this mere poetic fancy. In Melville’s Moby Dick, the author gives us (in a footnote) his actual experience on first sighting an albatross at close quarters:

I remember the first albatross I ever saw ... I saw a regal, feathery thing of unspotted whiteness, and with a hooked, Roman bill sublime. At intervals, it arched forth its vast archangel wings, as if to embrace some holy ark. Wondrous flutterings and throbblings shook it. Though bodily unharmed, it uttered cries, as some king’s ghost in supernatural distress. Through its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God ... I cannot tell, can only hint, the things that darted through me then.

What Melville attempts to express here is an experience of the Numinous—what Professor Rudolph Otto calls the ganz andere—the “totally other”. We should not suppose that such experiences came only with Enlightenment learning or Romanticism. It is much more likely that close encounters with living, wild animals have evoked these sorts of responses from time immemorial.

Not long ago, I read of a new report on the state of the environment in Australia. The outlook is not good. It is forecast that, by the end of this century, Australia may have lost about half of the species of birds known to have existed at the time of European settlement.

No doubt, all sorts of valid scientific reasons will be put forward in support of this bleak forecast. Equally, the sorts of solutions proposed will be scientific solutions—ecosystem rehabilitation, and the like. I cannot help but wonder, though, whether the first requirement might simply be a return to that earlier sense of awe that we had for the feathered world. Birds were not just sophisticated bio-mechanical machines whose behaviour was genetically controlled.

In my youth, the black-faced cuckoo shrike was called the “summer bird”, because when it appeared, you knew that summer had set in. Its appearance was a matter of good fortune, not of blind mechanical necessity. Likewise, the pallid cuckoo was the welcome harbinger of spring. It need not have come. Indeed, spring need not have come. And birds sang (these days they only vocalise) because they were happy or sad, or grateful, not because of some theory of B.F. Skinner or E.O. Wilson.

Like the ancient Greeks, we did feel that birds had something to tell us. I suspect that, until we get back to such an understanding, none of the proposed scientific solutions will encourage the birds to return.

B.J. Coman’s next book, Against the Spirit of the Age, will be published by Connor Court later this year. He dedicates this article to the memory of Jack Gray, the Homer of Sutton Grange.
Her Brother is Dead

She has only now heard that her brother is dead. Her breath is falling about. *He's dead he can't be he can't be dead*. Her husband holds her as if she is made of finely cut glass. He says practical things, and they go, into the week of clutching and silence. The funeral is out past Canowindra. Her family have filled the pews, the rest of us stand around outside like a lynch mob. When everyone is there, the service is sown to the trees and the sky. God arrives, fashionably late, but no one has much to say to him. He has his place among the prayers. Afterwards at the wake, he shuffles around like a divorcee. He does not stay long, there is the future to get on with. Later she texts us, saying *To walk out of that church and see u all under that kurrajong tree meant the world to me.* When she walked out of the church and stood beneath the portal cross, it was as if she were searching for her brother, as if he would be late for his own funeral. The cross should be sharpened, I thought, like a stake. It should go deep into the earth. How else, I thought, could it carry a man?

*John Foulcher*

**Your Own Words**

*For Jane*

Your father
is a small, withered thing
in the hospital sheets.
He scavenges in his lungs for another breath,
finds the husk of a breath.
*Am I dying?* he says.
Yes, Dad, you are. *Your poor old body*
is giving in.
The minutes click and grind
away talk,
the air convulses and no one knows anything.
*It's alright, Dad. You can go now.*
And he does.
You hold your sisters
and they fold
into you. You call and let me know
it’s over, I can come.
Already, arrangements for the funeral
are stiffening up.
*They've asked me to speak
and I will.*
You will speak for everyone
but not your own words.
*It's alright, Dad. You can go now. You can go.*
I went with my sister to a reading by Wendy Cope. We had to pay the best part of £10 to get in and the large room was so packed we couldn’t claim our seats in the front. That’s how big Wendy Cope is in British poetry. Her *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis* has so far sold 185,000 copies! Good on her. The reading proved to be, not as I had thought, the launch of another book of show-stopping poems. *Life, Love and the Archers* is prose, published and unpublished, and very good it was. Her style is ineffable, her content always interesting. *The Archers*, by the way is a radio soap about farmers. Larkin listened to it too. It has recently gone off rather and is now a radio *Home and Away*.

Wendy Cope had occasion to say some things about the definition of poetry, both from the book and in the question-and-answer session afterwards. What she said was wise and considered. Much of it was true. She said you shouldn’t write poetry for money. Chance would be a fine thing. She said that a good poem was always an honest poem, and she quoted Schubert: “I give to the world what I have in my heart and that is the end of it.” I nodded internally and thought, “How true!” But then it came to me that Schubert had to write down the musical notes as well. They were not in his heart, were they? He had had to learn them. And anyway that is not how I write poems and if she and Schubert were right, then my poems must be wrong.

One thing she did not say was that art comes out of unhappiness. Paraphrasing Henry Ford (or almost) she had been unhappy and now she was happy, and happy was better. And it didn’t stop you writing poems. I expect she would agree with her cocoatee, Kingsley Amis, who wrote a long short story about this.

“Dear Illusion” is about the poet Ted Potter, old and famous, who is about to publish what proves to be his last book. In an interview he says that it is only through writing poems that he has been able momentarily to conquer the fear and ennui that rule his life. The poems give him the strength to carry on. But does that mean they are any good, or just a superior sort of occupational therapy? Are his poems, objectively, any good at all? Critics say so, but they are sheep and how do they know? So Potter devises a test. His last book is deliberate rubbish. Potter writes down the first things that come into his head, and the critics all say it is wonderful. Potter has proved to himself that his poems never were any good. So he commits suicide.

I don’t know whether Amis knew about Ern Malley, the fictional Australian poet. I do know that he was very anti-Dylan Thomas, and Dylan Thomas was the poet the two authors of the Malley hoax wanted most to undermine.

Ern Malley was created in 1943 by James McAuley and Harold Stewart while they were in the Army. Their intention was to deceive Max Harris, who edited a modernist magazine called *Angry Penguins* of which both disapproved. They succeeded utterly. Harris brought out an Ern Malley number with a fine front cover by Sidney Nolan and Ern’s nineteen poems inside. Then they blew the gaffe. Poor Harris and his Penguins never recovered.

I found a short history of this in an entertaining book called *Telling Tales: A History of Literary Hoaxes* by Melissa Katsoulis. I also read Peter Carey’s strange, almost supernatural novel, *My Life as a Fake*, where Ern’s avatar, as it were, takes up his bed and walks, becomes, like Christ, the word made flesh and walks out of the pages into real life, or at least into another book, and it was from the poem quoted there that I took most of my own Malleyisms.

Melissa Katsoulis has a progressive Penguins perspective which rather vitiates her account. She characterises McAuley (*Quadrant’s* founding editor) as “a formal poet who loathed bohemians, loved jazz, smoked and drank like a machine, and was obsessed by the sanctity of Christian marriage”. She suggests breezily that his own poetry is not much good. And that Stewart, “a composer of old-
fashioned, whimsical verse” is not much good either.

She is wrong. Stewart’s poems are good and McAuley’s better, but in a traditional way that they feared in the 1940s was to be consigned for ever to the scrapheap by the likes of Dylan Thomas. In fact that did not happen. The great poet of the rest of the century was Philip Larkin, and most of the hairy New Apocalypse fellows ruling the roost then are forgotten.

Except for Dylan Thomas. Larkin and his good friend Amis thought he was a fake. There is a strong whiff of fakery about Thomas. But so there is about Blake, who conversed with angels at the bottom of his garden, and Yeats with his gyres and so forth. But it doesn’t matter. The poems are there. They remain.

Robert Graves wrote, “Dylan Thomas was drunk with melody, and what the words were he cared not. He was eloquent, and what cause he was pleading, he cared not. He kept musical control of the reader without troubling about the sense.” Can you really write poetry like that?

Of course you can take the view of Larkin, Amis, McAuley and Stewart that Thomas was a fraud. But why, in that case, does “Fern Hill” reduce me to tears, as Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode” did to Larkin, almost causing him to crash when he heard it recited unexpectedly on the car radio. And that is the true test of poetry according to another great poet, A.E. Housman. It didn’t cause him to crash his car (he didn’t have one), but it did stop him shoving because of the way his skin bristled. That would be Latin poetry, Horace probably.

Larkin thought (I paraphrase) that a poem was a little word machine which would bring to you just what the poet felt and thought whenever you recited it. Wendy Cope thought and thinks (as it did Yeats) because we are not like that at all.

So what do I think? I think most succinctly that a poem is an arrangement of words, that it is not about what is in your heart, that it doesn’t really matter what is in your heart. A poem is not personal in that way.

Ern Malley’s poems were as bad as McAuley and Stewart could make them. They claimed to have written them over one weekend. They were rubbish, like Ted Potter’s.

And yet there are words, phrases, sentences which have resonance. Why is that? One view is that the unconscious was at work producing images better than any McAuley and Stewart ever produced consciously. Or perhaps, however badly they tried to write they couldn’t help achieving sonorities, as it were, by accident. Accident has its place in poetry.

Auden found a fine line, And the ports have names for the sea. Ports was actually a misprint for poets but he let it stand because it was better.

Larkin described his own method more than once. He began writing quite slowly, “leading the reader by the hand”, as he said, and then, somewhere around the middle of the poem he suddenly saw how it must end, something he hadn’t known when he set sail in his poetic boat. Then it was just a matter of filling in.

Where did that ending come from? Sheer genius, said Larkin, winking. It was not sheer genius, it was what we call the Poetic Muse, not inside the poet, but outside.

How did I write my Ern Malley poem? I found some phrases of Ern’s. What do they mean? I don’t know. But I put them down and other phrases came, phrases that might have come from him, if he had existed. Rhyme and metre did the rest, another thing entirely outside the poet.

Let me quote the Japanese professor Nitta Daisaku in How to Write Chinese Poetry (something a lot of Japanese want to do, apparently):

You must never get the idea that you’ll just try expressing your own private thoughts … in Chinese characters. I’ll say it again: all inner demand for self-expression, all things related to … modern poetics, are forbidden.

So who or what exactly is going to write the poem? Why, “the words will, of course … Listen to what they have to say.”

Or to put it another way:

I wanted to write poetry in the beginning because I had fallen in love with words. The first poems I knew were nursery rhymes and before I could read them for myself I had come to love the words of them. The words alone. What the words stood for was of a very secondary importance.

And who said that? It was Dylan Thomas.

“Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.” These words are quoted in newspaper letters, columns and blogs too numerous to mention. Writers of a leftist persuasion, when they wish to mock expressions of patriotism, national pride and love of country, often reach for Samuel Johnson’s aphorism to give a veneer of literary and cultural respectability to their jeering.

I had long suspected that the Johnson quotation, if genuine, had been taken out of context. Johnson was, after all, a devout Anglican, a committed Tory, a friend and admirer of Edmund Burke, and in many respects the quintessential Englishman of his age.

So how could a man with such deep attachment to his country and its institutions express such a sentiment? I made the effort to track down the source of the quotation and discover the context.

The quotation does not appear, so far as I know, in any of Johnson’s published writings, which were voluminous enough, but may be found in Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*. Johnson’s statement was a remark made in casual conversation and was not necessarily his considered view.

Boswell records a dinner conversation that occurred at the Literary Club on April 7, 1775. Present were Johnson, Boswell, Joshua Reynolds (the painter) and several others. The conversation ranged over various topics, until it came to this:

Patriotism having become one of our topicks [sic], Johnson suddenly uttered, in a strong determined tone, an apophthegm, at which many will start: “Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel”. But let it be considered, that he did not mean a real and generous love of our country, but that pretended patriotism which so many, in all ages and countries, have made a cloak for self-interest. I maintain, that certainly not all patriots were scoundrels. Being urged (not by Johnson) to name an exception, I mentioned an eminent person [Edmund Burke], whom we all greatly admired.

So, we have Boswell’s assurance that Johnson was not disparaging patriotism *per se*, but rather the pretended patriotism adopted by certain others for ulterior motives. Exactly who Johnson was referring to as “pretended patriots” is not explained in the text, although they no doubt included certain British politicians of the period. However it is worth noting that by 1775 the American Revolution—which Johnson strongly opposed—had begun. At that time many of the revolutionaries styled themselves as Patriots (with a capital P) and their movement was sometimes referred to as Patriotism. It is therefore possible, although Boswell doesn’t mention it, that Johnson also had in mind the rebellious colonists as examples of “pretended patriots”.

In any case, there can be no doubt that Johnson was keen to distinguish true patriotism from the false version. In 1774, a year before his dinner at the Literary Club, Johnson had published a 3300-word pamphlet titled, curiously enough, *The Patriot*. Throughout this pamphlet Johnson praises the true patriot and denies the impostor:

It ought to be deeply impressed on the minds of all who have voices in this national deliberation [the 1774 general election], that no man can deserve a seat in parliament, who is not a patriot. No other man will protect our rights: no other man can merit our confidence.

A patriot is he whose publick [sic] conduct is regulated by one single motive, the love of his country; who, as an agent in parliament, has, for himself, neither hope nor fear, neither kindness nor resentment, but refers everything to the common interest ... Let us take a patriot, where we can meet him; and, that we may not flatter...
ourselves by false appearances, distinguish those marks which are certain, from those which may deceive; for a man may have the external appearance of a patriot, without the constituent qualities; as false coins have often lustre, though they want weight ...

It is the quality of patriotism to be jealous and watchful, to observe all secret machinations, and to see publick dangers at a distance. The true lover of his country is ready to communicate his fears, and to sound the alarm, whenever he perceives the approach of mischief. But he sounds no alarm, when there is no enemy; he never terrifies his countrymen till he is terrified himself. The patriotism, therefore, may be justly doubted of him, who professes to be disturbed by incredibilities ...

Still less does the true patriot circulate opinions which he knows to be false. No man, who loves his country, fills the nation with clamorous complaints ...

A patriot is always ready to countenance the just claims, and animate the reasonable hopes of the people; he reminds them, frequently, of their rights, and stimulates them to resent encroachments, and to multiply securities.

But all this may be done in appearance, without real patriotism. He that raises false hopes to serve a present purpose, only makes a way for disappointment and discontent. He who promises to endeavour, what he knows his endeavours unable to effect, means only to delude his followers by an empty clamour of ineffectual zeal.

A true patriot is no lavish promiser: he undertakes not to shorten parliaments; to repeal laws; or to change the mode of representation, transmitted by our ancestors; he knows that futurity is not in his power, and that all times are not alike favourable to change.

And so forth.

Samuel Johnson was a literary giant of his time. He is remembered for his literary criticism (Lives of the Poets and Prefaces to Shakespeare), his definitive, corrected edition of The Plays of William Shakespeare, plus poetry, essays, pamphlets and a novella. Perhaps his greatest achievement was his monumental Dictionary of the English Language, which he single-handedly compiled over nine years and which became the standard reference work for over 150 years.

It is a sad irony of history that Johnson’s best-remembered statement is nothing that he wrote himself, but a remark he made at a dinner table, and one which has been so misunderstood as to now have the exact opposite meaning to the one he intended. To restore Johnson’s aphorism to its true meaning, I suggest that on all future occasions we take a small liberty with the text and render it as he would have wished:

Pretended patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.

Chris Walder lives in rural New South Wales.

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**Tension**

a tightrope that might go slack
the touch-and-go hum of machines in intensive care
brakes you hope will halt the car just in time
words as yet unspoken that must be said
a creaking tree about to snap
the silent phone you know will ring
frantic searching for what has surely gone
the trying-to-remember of a forgotten song
a throat that clenches before you speak
handwriting on the letter that never comes

Victoria Field
A strange thing overtook me yesterday evening. I broke down. This has never been my custom, for I believe my genes and my experience provide me with resilient emotional fibre. But “break down” is the verb accurate for my behaviour, and since this event I puzzle at why I did so.

In the first instance an event took place. The ABC News announced Jim Murphy had died and I felt a sorrow well in me at this information. Very soon I needed to quit the room and hide my wailing from witnesses.

But Jim was not close to me. I knew him as a burly, charitable presence about town, stalwart in a political party for which I have never yet voted. I may have seen him twice in the decades since the Poets’ Lunches he organised at ANU’s Staff Club between roughly 1976 and 1986. Furthermore, even as I grizzled, I guessed it was not Jim’s decease caused my strangeness to myself. I’m self-aware enough to know how emotions transfer, and how dispiriting are the crowd of glooms that attend my writing life at present, how opportunely these attach to convenient substance in my mental marketplace and set up clamour there. What are these glooms?

Disliking quarrel, I have clashed with a colleague over “conflict of interest” issues on a committee where we serve, then, observing the collusive allegiances of my co-panelists in the matter, had my unrepentance on the issue hardened. Why must feral egotism intrude so inevitably on literary fellowship?

Meanwhile the bruises accumulate. My picaresque novel MS, The Poets’ Stairwell, bounces back from Text Publishers with egregious praise for its “disreputable energy” tralala. Simultaneously Salt, my nerveless English publisher, tell me they must remainder Folk Times on account of its limp sales, this at a time I cannot obtain copies from the Australian distributor for consumer needs here. And other reverses, other slights.

Dismal catalogue! How practised are these publisher reactions, flattery that tries to disarm relegation, sloth disguised as rationalisation. And under this disaffection, knowledge of how authors teem, MSS deluge, editors in consequence grow coarse or lazy in the face of this spate.

But have I not in the past borne these reversals as they arrived? They cause bitterness, but have never roused histrionics in my person. Now ABC News tells me burly Jim Murphy has died, and I must hide my convulsions from witness, first in the bathroom, then on our wintry hill, indeed anywhere private, anywhere a black treeline might accord with my state of ragged unhappiness. For I am not a Modern when it comes to the display of sorrow. If I must wail, I will first come to terms with the business of wailing before I allow it to belong to anyone else.

I shambled in the dark along the bridle path, jerked by fresh squalls of grief. When had this last happened to me? Was it not, aged seven, when Gouldilocks had owned a Davy Crockett coonskin hat? Oh he had been so, so proud of this furry headwear, so deep in the jocular, heroic Davy Crockett dream, and then on an ordinary English evening some playmate had impulsively yanked off its furry tail and Reality was irretrievably spoiled. Yes, ridiculous self-regard, I was able to think now and subversively, even as I shambled and grizzled.

To say this reaction took me by surprise understates how deeply it reached my sense of self. In time I regained self-control, though simple memory of the event makes me wonder if I have not yet regained self-possession. I came down from the black hillside, re-entered my house, allowed myself to be seen again and ponder what had happened.

Those lunches organised by Jim Murphy had been occasions of fine fellowship among poets and their listeners. I was a poet among colleagues. Some of these poets were venerable, some with but a first book imminent. Nonetheless, young and old, around Jim’s table we recognised a simple equality,
that poetry claimed us because, beside its claim, nothing else in life was quite as considerable. And our host, in thus feting us, showed he had a sense of this numinous condition, and that the provision of an annual banquet was a proper recognition by the prosaic world for our poetic calling.

Prior to the event, Bob Brissenden enlisted us, Hope, Dobson, Campbell, Page, Rowland, Grundy, Gould, any handy poet-visitor. Our job was to compose some light verse to be interleaved with the ANU Staff Centre’s Christmas wine list, then recite this during the lunch. In return we got good tucker and flavoursome wines served in genteel order at the Centre’s arcadian precinct, then were sent wobbling home with a bottle of port. All this courtesy of Jim Murphy esquire, ex-rugby player who had come late to a liking for poetry and poets. Invariably the event attracted generous performances from non-poets; in particular I recall the ANU Scholar Jim Griffin exercising his magnificent voice on “Danny Boy”. And Jim Murphy’s quality as host consisted of a watchful kindness, tactful managerial efficiency and a certain quiet deference when he spoke of how it pleased him to honour “his” poets.

Each year the tables multiplied, and the good-humoured iambics dedicated to JM esq flowed from the pens of Hope, Brissenden et al. Then Jim left the Staff Club, became a vintner and Canberra philanthropist, Campbell, Rowland, Brissenden, Grundy in turn died and a spirit of generous, equable, natural fellowship converted to a polyglot, fancy dress hoopla when the lunches were revived in the ‘90s. Now Jim has died on us and several charities in our city have been voicing their tributes to him.

Yet the world also included a burly ex-rugby player who decided in middle life that he liked poetry and poets, and would use his entrepreneurial skills to give them their place in the world once a year.

The night wind blew from the Pole, a possum trotted along the wires. Good things in the world got abruptly cancelled, ego ravened upon the chance for profile. Works of craft and painstaking got fobbed off by glib or harried editors. Yet the world also included a burly ex-rugby player who decided in middle life that he liked poetry and poets, and would use his entrepreneurial skills to give them their place in the world once a year. All these things had attended my wails, or rather, the dynamic of their encounter, chain-reacting like some rare convention of molecules.

30/12/11 Wannabe

For us there is only the trying. The rest is not our business,” wrote T.S. Eliot. Spot on, you Old Pernickety!

Intentness upon the making of a literary work can still botch it, but the integrity of the trying means that the emergent piece will suffer from being either makeshift or, more grievously, mis-shapen or misconceived. It will not be inherently mediocre.

Intentness upon being a writer must always result in something distracted and therefore inferior to an artist’s botch-up because it overlays the trying with a pretension to status.

Sure, Gouldilocks, but apply this observation to the authors you know and the membrane dividing where one kind of intentness ends and the other begins. A rather difficult point of crossover, is it not?

14/1/12 A fishnet stocking in our garden

When we moved to our hillside I expected snakes. But for five years I have roamed our slopes by paths and pathless, and not sighted a one. Like Adam in the Garden, I considerately scan before I make a footfall lest I tread on some twig that recoils in a fury. Now twice in three days I have encountered eastern browns, reputedly the deadliest serpent on the planet.

The first creature I all but trod on. A three-foot, youngish snake, it evaded with a whip’s fluidity where I had intended my footfall on the bridle path behind our houses. In the blink of that encounter, what would my memo be to Adam? O Ur-father, one consequence of your Fall is the adrenalin spurt that will deflect a descending footfall sideways at a millisecond’s forewarning—humans recovering the dragonfly dance that hides in their nature.
Then today son George called me to say we had a snake in our garden. Here was a reckoning for me deep as babyhood. From thirteen years old when I lived in Singapore with its krait, cobras and shoelace snakes, whole continents of my mental life have devised how to discourage snake neighbourliness. But I went out to discover a four-foot brown with its head grotesquely distended and the torso of a healthy bluetongue lizard protruding from its mouth, gradually vanishing in small convulsive movements.

I was struck by the ordinariness of the spectacle. Was this lizard, no doubt thoroughly enamoured, still alive at this juncture? What then might it perceive? Something of how routine the digestion of itself was? Might such an idea of the ordinary intrude on the mental landscape of some poor victim bowing for the headsman or showing patience for the hangman’s adjustments? Our serpent remained under our linden tree for a long while, its body like Wurst wrapped in fishnet stocking, curled about its digestive task, presumably aware of the four humans who had gathered to watch. And watch we did, took photographs with a mobile phone, saw our visitor recover its small, deadly head, then slowly ease itself under a paling into the neighbour yard.

Snakes hold our minds at the place where terror and fascination knot together. Genesis, the Pelagian Ophiolatry, and so on through Cleopatra, D.H. Lawrence and the snake-charmers of Cunard liners.

Place a possum at my compost bin or kangaroo droppings on my lawn, and I look directly for the material explanation of such presents. Put a snake under my linden tree and I am removed from garden to Garden. Only later does the material explanation follow, of recent mouse-and-rat plague etcetera, and this only because a material explanation exerts its obscure pressure upon the bald fact that my thought had enchanted this creature from the levels of myth to bring new stantlement to the everyday.

But good luck to that dangerous enchantment. Snakes, you shy creatures lacking a shoulder girdle, long may you resist all the trawls of reductionism to keep our human imagining and observation within one whole and intelligent décorum.

19/1/12 So, extinction

So, extinction. The material world requires no further progress for my being and recycles me.

Is my superfluity true of whatever Reality includes, this material world being but one of its features? How so, when even from our own tiny perspective, so much is irresolved—of value, of justice—and immaterial matters like these appear so energised? Yes, how so, when all that we know of Reality is its tendency towards the whole story?

1/12/13 Discontent

Haiku, tanka and renga; why does one feel wearied after an afternoon of these, whether recited or read?

They overcharge us with sensibility and short-change us on experience.

8/12/13 Gravity field

Can we suppose that the Universe, if it unfolds toward a completeness, will include all that might have happened but did not, as well as all that did, in order to have its full expression as Universe? How is a story to be experienced as a wholeness if not as the balance of its illuminated matter and its dark matter, the events reflecting light and the possibilities that give actuality its gravity field?

14/12/13 Persuaded by the poetic language

My rascally handyman mate Bernard was offering a “mate’s rate” to provide and fit a bidet. We sat in an evening circle, barbecue fumes in our nostrils, eating good food, drinking good wines. Beside me, Annie had become attentive.

“Why would anyone want a bidet,” a voice from our circle spoke in the dark.

“Well, imagine this,” rejoined Bernard immediately. “A lump of smooth peanut butter has been trodden into a valuable shag-pile carpet, and you are trying to clean it with paper that disintegrates in your hand…”

“I’ll buy one,” interposed my darling, alert, cheerful.

“Done,” rejoined Bern with equal alertness, and by the following afternoon the device had been fitted at a most fair “mate’s rate”.

For myself, I eye the new tech and remain a sceptic. It has a hygienic switch. Turned one way, it sluices our parts as designed. Turned the other, it directs the water to clean itself as circumstances require. On first trying the thing and requiring the latter function, I twiddled the control and was shot squarely in the chest by a powerful jet of water. My reaction was in curt prose.

4/1/14 When his fabric became my fabric

The work of Joseph Conrad has enchanted me since I was fifteen when two of his novels — Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes—were set for my
(UK) O Level exams.

On first encounter they flummoxed me. How impenetrable seemed the prose, how ungraspable the story, how very perversely was a curriculum that set this dense matter, English Literature written by a Pole, for me to make sense of in the most critical examinations of my life!

But exams are exams, one must prepare. So I packed the two novels in my valise for the Christmas vacation of 1964–65, flew out to my family in Singapore, put my nose to the Conradian page and did not leave it until I was happy I had understood completely what I had read. And by this application at fifteen, I emerged an enchanted being.

Why so? It was because my idea as to how mind receives and organises experience had grown inalterably. The age of fifteen is a good age for this to happen; I became a Conrad fan, which is to say sufficiently alert to a sensibility to know how that monocled spirit might raise his Polish eyebrow upon hearing such a newfangled notion that he possessed anything so vulgar as “fans”. And today I have listened once more to Sibelius’s “Karelia Suite”. Is the anthem that breaks so lucidly from the suite’s matrix of other orchestral activity Finland’s national anthem? I don’t know. But listening to it with a memory of that account of the Winter War, my reaction is this: Of course they won! Imbalance in troop numbers has nothing to do with triumph when an anthem like this is the nucleus of your effort.

21/2/14 Ur-music

Years ago I read a book called The Winter War about the Russian invasion of Finland in 1939 and the fierce Finnish resistance that attained a military supremacy only to have the consequent peace treaty subvert this in an arrangement of restored stability, if not peace. The book marvelled at the shrewdness, resilience, heroism of the Finn resistance, the win against the odds.

And today I have listened once more to Sibelius’s “Karelia Suite”. Is the anthem that breaks so lucidly from the suite’s matrix of other orchestral activity Finland’s national anthem? I don’t know. But listening to it with a memory of that account of the Winter War, my reaction is this: Of course they won! Imbalance in troop numbers has nothing to do with triumph when an anthem like this is the nucleus of your effort.

20/3/14 The disbelief factor

How can I tell when a poem I have composed has been effective? When I can’t quite believe it was petit moi who wrote it.

29/3/14 After rain, the slapping

The torrents have come to our hillside and the bullants swarm around their inundated cities. They are in their millions, they blacken whole sections of our fawn-coloured path. Impossible not to tread on them.

And for this clumsy footwork I must pay. I arrive home to sit at my ease, but suddenly am nipped, and nipped, and nipped in unreachable places, instep, crotch, belly, calf. How many crowded onto my sandals as I gingerly hopped past their inundated cities, to arrive here at my dry house? Hardy little boat people, instinct with resource for the serendipity.

“Ouch!” protests Anne, dropping her book and slapping her leg. “Now they’re on me.”

This is the seventeenth in Alan Gould’s series of “Short Takes”, which began in the September 2004 issue. His essay collection Joinery and Scrollwork: A Writer’s Workbench is published by Quadrant Books. He wrote about David Campbell in the December issue.
It must have been the heyday of radio. In any case, we had radios all over the house. There were crystal-sets that brought in incredible music from all over the Orient. And we had radios ranging from two-valve sets all the way up to superheterodynes. I was never quite sure what a superheterodyne was but it brought in broadcasts from practically all over the world and the sound was of an incredible quality.

All of our radios were hand-crafted in own workshop. That was what we called it—our workshop. In fact, our workshop was simply a part of our house. It took up a good half of our big breakfast room, totally disrupting the use of that room for breakfast or any other meal. None of these radios was elegantly enclosed in a sleek wooden cabinet like the bought ones with prominent Stromberg-Carlson labels. Our radios were always in the process of development and this could mean that at any given moment there was not even one radio in operating mode. This was something our mother could never understand. She would often exclaim: “So many radios in the house and not one of them works!”

The culprit responsible for this state of affairs was my elder brother, who pursued radio as if in quest of some inexplicable interstellar means of communication. It was he who showed me how to build and operate a crystal-set with the most limited resources. Soon after, I actually made one all by myself and proudly kept it right beside my bed so that I could listen to exotic music broadcast from places like India until I fell asleep with my earphones still on. More than once my mother came to take them off. She would give me a kiss and leave me to dream about other worlds far away.

Radio brought us in touch not only with music and languages we did not understand. It took us half a world away from Dalby in outback Queensland all the way to London and the news from the British Broadcasting Corporation. We believed every word the BBC sent out across the ether. We heard Neville Chamberlain giving his speech declaring that Britain was at war with Germany and we listened to Winston Churchill telling the British people they faced “blood, sweat and tears”. We felt we were hearing important messages bringing the latest news from the other side of the world. It was as if the news was riding on magical waves we could not see but waves that were as real as anything we could feel or imagine.

In those days we always had a long antenna strung outside the house. At one time, we had one hooked to the windmill tower. We happened to have a windmill in our backyard, for pumping up sub-artesian water for our vegetable garden, a luxury not everyone in our town enjoyed. Most people depended on storing rainwater for drinking, bathing or gardening.

Having a windmill just outside our house was a mixed blessing. Sudden storms sent the windmill blades into a frenzy that could not be stopped because once that happened it was impossible to tie it down. It was like a fierce dragon spewing out a stream of sparks that flew in every direction. In any case, we all agreed it was a bit dangerous to have a radio antenna tied to the windmill because, if lightning struck, it might jump to the house along the antenna. A decision was therefore made to dispense with the one from the windmill and to rely on another one strung from a corner of the house to a nearby fence. These were serious considerations when the quality of reception on our latest and best radio was concerned.

Our mother was never entirely enchanted with radio. She said our radios still under construction took up space all over the house and just cluttered up the tables where we had lunch or dinner. She must have been fed up with having radios everywhere and when there were important news broadcasts to be heard she was often vexed by the time some of us spent listening to what was happening in the world. It was the middle of the Great Depression and one day she blurted out: “The news won’t feed

David Fulton

The Golden Days of Radio
and clothe you!” She was right but my father and I kept listening to regular news broadcasts that always began with: “This is London calling”.

It was not long before the magic of radio turned into the magic of making money. Radio licences were granted to smart entrepreneurs and advertising became a part of daily life. Audiences had to be created and announcers and scriptwriters were in strong demand. In the process, they brought us some charming radio serials as well as some dreary ones while, on the other hand, we had the opportunity to hear superb concerts live from some of the world’s great centres of music.

Radio was everywhere and everyone had a set in their living room. You did not have to spend vast sums of money to have a radio even if you insisted on one in a fine wooden cabinet with the manufacturer’s name on display.

Radio serials had their drawbacks because many people had the habit of regurgitating the episode broadcast the night before and almost coming to blows about the incidents or the acting or the voices or whatever they hotly defended or frankly disliked. Heated discussions of what happened in last night’s chapter of a serial was a poor way to enjoy radio when it had so many other delightful benefits to offer.

Radio had a magic all its own and even changed people’s lives. I once heard about a young man who fell in love with the voice of a radio announcer and made up his mind to marry her. He listened to her broadcasts as often as he could and every time he heard her voice his desire to meet her became stronger and stronger. One evening, quite by chance, he found himself at the same party as she was and he decided that somehow he would speak to her. It happened to be a New Year’s party and on the stroke of midnight everyone would kiss everybody else and wish them a happy new year. He was a rather shy young man but just as the clock struck midnight he drew himself together and went over to the young announcer and gave her the warmest kiss he could muster.

There was nothing very strange about this, but he did not stop at one midnight kiss. He kept going back to give her just one more kiss until at a rough count by others at the party he must have kissed her about twenty-eight times.

He did not leave things there but boldly asked if he might see her again. Her answer was simple. “Call me,” she said, “at the radio station.” Call her he did, and not long after that they were married and lived a long and wonderful life together, thanks to that voice on the radio.

David Fulton is a documentary film-maker now living in Barcelona.

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Petals Scattering

i
Not long airborne—
the cherry petals so quick
to leave the tree.

ii
Giddying along—
the cherry petals heading
towards the gutter.

iii
Following after—
fallen petals floating on
the spilling water.

iv
Hopes of freedom—
the springtime cherry petals
gone with the wind.

Andrew Lansdown
Last spring we called a firm in to remove three Norway spruces that had been in our northern Strasbourg garden from the time we acquired the keys to the house in October 1994, when both the trees and our two children were small. But our children had become adults and left home, and the trees—which I suspect had been lifted as seedlings from the Rhine forest at the end of our road by the previous owner (and should never have been in a suburban garden in the first place)—had become giants, were undermining my wife’s potagers with their roots, and keeping our increasingly disgruntled neighbours in the shade.

It is no small thing to cut down large trees. Well, you might think it would be no small thing, but the three gardeners who came from a German firm across the border with petrol-driven chainsaws and tree spurs had lopped all the branches off the spruces, which were over twenty metres high, and felled the three trunks within an hour. The rest of their work-day was spent collecting the debris and digging out the roots with a small hydraulic excavator which they somehow managed to drive over the fence on an aluminium pontoon and into the garden. Extracting the roots was as tough as its dental equivalent. The spectacle of our garden suddenly desolate and in disarray made me think of the warning signs that are common in the Rhine forest these days, as the municipal authorities attempt to restore it to something resembling its primordial floodplain ecology: "Abattage d’arbres." As in English, it’s the same noun as describes the felling or slaughter of animals, an indication of just how serious a business forestry is.

Seeing trees being worked on in French cities is a common site in late autumn, when the municipality sends out its workers in trucks with telescopic ladders to lop and prune (élagage) the branches of the plane trees back to pollarded crowns. Strasbourg’s municipal works department employs sixty élagueurs to trim the 23,500 roadside trees (and there are at least twice that number in schools, cemeteries and other public grounds). Pruning trees shortens their lifespan considerably, from several centuries to about fifty years. That is the price to pay for having an aesthetically pleasing city: you can’t have rows of massive chestnut trees—which are spectacularly beautiful in spring with their red-and-white blossom-sprays—adorning a city street without having to trim off branches and prune back dangerous overhangs.

While I’ve never been terribly fond of formal French gardens, with their insistence on a display of mastery over nature (“Show a French gardener a tree and he will reach for his pruning saw,” writes Hugh Johnson), I do like their allées, those long cathedral naves of plane trees, or the famous roadside arbres d’alignement which once thrilled Cyril Connolly as he drove past them on his way to the Midi. And although the plane tree goes a long way back in French culture—being introduced in the mid-sixteenth century by the naturalist Pierre Belon, who also brought the cork oak, cedar and lilac with him from his travels in Asia Minor—for about twenty years the French have been proceeding with a wholesale abattage of these magnificent plane trees, on the pretext that their slant of light and shade plays havoc with the steering abilities of hapless motorists (which was how Albert Camus died with his publisher Michel Gallimard in 1960). A recent experiment in Norfolk has in fact shown that planted intelligently, with a kind of staggered narrowing of the distance between each tree, along with a tapering of the alley’s width at the approach to a town, it is possible to create a stroboscopic visual effect that makes drivers reduce their speed involuntarily.

There were reputedly three million of these arbres d’alignement in France at the end of the nineteenth century; these days they number a few hundred thousand. I was surprised to notice a French allée in Scotland recently. Driving my hired car back to Edinburgh airport recently from my mother’s house in Kirriemuir, I took a shortcut to Perth and
realised that I was being guided along an avenue of what appeared to be alternate oaks and maples standing like sentinels along the Meigle road, south of Alyth. These magnificent trees must have been planted over a century beforehand by somebody who wanted to introduce the French effect to what is one of Scotland's most fertile (and protected) areas. Dundee and its hinterland are dotted with arboreal projects.

Sara Maitland suggested recently in the periodical the Author that “writers of both poetry and prose seem to have a strangely deep affinity with trees”. She’s not mistaken; you can find writers leaning on trees almost anywhere you care to look. Fresh in Paris as a young man from the provinces, Stendhal felt fortunate that his cousin’s patronage had procured him a desk job at the Ministry of War. It was a dull job, although the bureaucratic habits he acquired were to see him through employment under two regimes. He became fond of two pollarded lime trees at the bottom of the ministry garden, against which his fellow workers liked to urinate. “They were the first friends I made in Paris,” he writes, “and I felt sorry for them, clipped as they were.” He contrasted them with the limes of Claix on his father’s estate in the mountains, although he had no wish to return to Grenoble solely on account of the lindens.

Stendhal maintained an interest in trees all his life. In his Souvenirs d’Egotisme he mentions visiting the trees at Richmond: “Nothing equals this fresh greenery in England and the beauty of these trees: to cut them down would be a crime and a dishonour.” He commended the respectful attitude of the British to such wonders of nature and lamented that a French landowner would, at the drop of a hat, order the logging of five or six large and ancient oaks on his estate for the sake of extra revenue. And he would surely have deplored the scene in Goethe’s novella where an additional torment for the suicidal young Werther is the arrival from the city in his little town of Wahlheim of the new parson’s wife, who has “pretensions to scholarship” and orders the felling of the ancient walnut trees in the manse garden so that she can have more light to read the latest works of Bible criticism.

Mikhail Chekhov relates that when his brother Anton moved to his estate at Melikhovo, he planted many trees which he tended “as though they were his children. Like Colonel Vershinin in his Three Sisters, as he looked at them he dreamed of what they would be like in three or four hundred years.” Walt Whitman asked himself in Song of the Open Road: “Why are there trees I never walk under but large and melodious thoughts descend upon me?” And a more recent line in Karl Ove Knausgaard’s My Struggle carries the same sentiment: “These motionless, foliage-laden, air-bathing beings with their boundless abundance of leaves … For whenever I caught sight of them I was filled with happiness.” Trees aren’t always associated with this sense of openness and happiness. Indeed, it is the argument of the Stanford literary critic Robert Pogue Harrison in his book-length essay on the place of the human in nature, Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation, that, at a subconscious level, we resent trees for their antiquity, their antecedence to human consciousness, their brooding presence on the edge of settlement. Drawing from the genetic psychology of the eighteenth-century Italian philosopher and historian Giambattista Vico, Harrison traces the human dread of forests—massed ranks of trees in other words—to the origin myths of the classical sky-god who ruled Greece as Zeus and Rome as Jupiter, and whose announcement to aboriginal humanity was a lightning bolt directed into the canopy in order to produce a clearing, and open up the “mute closure of foliage”. It was only then that humans could see the overarching sky as a medium and source of revelatory messages about our origins and destiny, and worship its blueness (and this idea of the clearing was an important one for the most influential of twentieth-century philosophers, Martin Heidegger). For religious and secular authorities alike, the tent-poles of the biosphere have been objects to abominate, rather than consecrate. The governing institutions of the West from the family to the law, Harrison contends, “originally established themselves in opposition to the forests, which in this respect have been the first and last victims of civic expansion”.

Vico’s association is anthropologically sound. In central Sumatra, there is an indigenous hunter-gatherer tribe known as Orang Rimba, which lives in the remaining forests of northern Jambi province: until about twenty years ago, when loggers and land-grabbers intruded on their tropical forest, these people had had no contact with the outside world known to them as Terang—“The Light”. In the Old Testament, Yahweh commands the
Hebrews to burn down sacred groves wherever they find them, perhaps recalling the decisive role that two trees in a garden played in the events of Genesis 3. The word for forest is, as in Isaiah 21, synonymous with “uncultivated places”. For Dante, living in a Europe that would soon be cutting down its trees to build caravels and carracks, the forest was demon-haunted and evil, an underworld out of which his protagonist has to extricate himself; for Descartes, it was the very embodiment of confusion, a maze of custom grown up any-old-how that needed to be lit by the rectilinear beams of reason.

Walking with my wife in the Black Forest—just across the Rhine from Strasbourg—I was reminded that dense woodland actually offers a refuge and reprieve for people in crisis as we walked past a birch tree in the forest above Bad Petersal that bore the date 17 May 1945 on a widened scar in its bark. That was just ten days after the unconditional surrender of German forces after six years of a terrible war. Perhaps it had been carved by a villager seeking safety in the forest. The forest constantly figures in the accounts of persons who escaped their villages in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and survived there, beyond the reach of the Wehrmacht or local militias. Under those circumstances, the forest stood for safety and tradition; it was the modernity of the century outside that was terrifyingly suspect.

In our dealings with trees, it seems that they too are subject to a dialectic that plays between their nature as individual beings—the longest living on the planet—and as a massed force, the former having something of a personality and the latter being the lair of forces which continually threaten human civilisation; unless of course the said civilisation makes urban life untenable, in which event forests offer something of the primitive nurturing protection they always have. Perhaps their figuring in the earliest biblical story about the acquisition of knowledge is a reminder that the tree was just as important as its fruit: they were created on the third day, before animal and human life on the fifth and sixth days of Creation. The learned Simeon of Frankfurt even calculated that there would be eight hundred species of marvellous and odorous trees in Paradise, among which number would doubtless be the Tree of Life itself.

In the excavations left by the uprooting of the spruces in our garden, we planted a young pear tree and a quince. When I looked yesterday, the quince tree, hardly a metre high, was developing fruit, little golden light-bulbs with the faintest hint of fluff, only a year after being put in the earth. The quince, I recall, was something else that thrilled the generally unimpressible Cyril Connolly.

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I Never Found Those Lips Again

I never found those lips again
my final preference for her kiss
I never thought that I could bend
when she had gone it felt the end
sorrow broke open an abyss
I never found those lips again
kind words from a few mutual friends
who didn’t vanish into mist
I never thought that I could bend

some lovers with a soft pretend
their touch somehow always amiss
I never found those lips again
the helpful advice that offends
(there still too much I won’t dismiss)
I never thought that I could bend
an almost heal but never mend
the unannounced recall of bliss
I never found those lips again
I never thought that I could bend.

Joe Dolce
American Sniper is probably the most reviled box-office success in recent American film history. It is not that Clint Eastwood’s film is one of those big bad enjoyable movies like the Cecil B. De Mille epics many of us rather shame-facedly enjoyed in the 1950s. Discussion of this bio-pic about the late Chris Kyle—the deadliest sniper in US military history—has turned into a bitter debate over the Iraq War and the character of Kyle himself.

The furore over American Sniper is similar to the agitation in the anti-war community when John Wayne made The Green Berets in the late 1960s. Made quite explicitly by its director-star to support America’s involvement in the Vietnam War, The Green Berets provoked demonstrations at afternoon sessions at the Regent Theatre in Sydney by members of the moratorium, contemptuous reviews by most of the critics—and great box office.

For opponents of the Iraq invasion American Sniper is far worse than The Green Berets was for the anti-Vietnam War activists. The Wayne film was easy to discredit. John Wayne was never more than competent as a director, and The Green Berets was filled with preposterous errors. For many supporters of the Vietnam War it was an embarrassment. Critics of America’s involvement in Iraq, however, see American Sniper as revisionism of the worst kind; an attempt to use the experiences of a national hero to justify a war that should never have been fought in the first place. The problem for them is that Clint Eastwood at eighty-four is still one the world’s great directors, and American Sniper shows him at the height of his powers.

Although the film was shot partly in Morocco and on a set specially constructed in Los Angeles, it recreates wartime Iraq with disturbing accuracy—the distinguished cinematographer and video journalist David Brill, who has reported on Iraq since the 1990s, thought at first that American Sniper had been filmed on location. So is American Sniper brilliantly made propaganda for a thoroughly disreputable cause?

Certainly there is good reason to object to the autobiography Chris Kyle wrote with Jim DeFelice and Scott McEwen on which the film is based. The first half is an account of his four tours of duty in Iraq, during which he claims to have personally killed 280 people; officially there were 160 confirmed kills. Kyle describes the insurgents as savages or bad guys, frankly admits that he longed for action and found the experience “fun—we were just slaughtering them”. It is as well a celebration of the macho culture of the US Navy SEALs, their brutal hazings, criminally dangerous training exercises and heavy drinking. None of the figures described in the book even attempts to understand that ordinary Iraqis might object to being invaded. “I don’t give a flying f*** about the Iraqis,” Kyle writes. After all, the SEALs are defending America.

The passages describing Kyle’s time home between enlistments where contributions from his wife, Taya, are juxtaposed with his narrative are very different. The style is more measured, and beneath the bravado the reader senses Kyle is a deeply troubled man scarred by his war service. The use of the telescopic lens makes sniping a horribly immediate form of killing, and even though Kyle always insisted he could justify every shot he made this does not mean he felt no guilt. Like so many ex-servicemen he was clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress when he finally returned from Iraq. It is this disturbed, anguished man screenwriter Jason Hall and Clint Eastwood have chosen to portray.

In the black-and-white morality and super-patriotism of the autobiography Eastwood and Hall find many shades of grey. The moral ambiguity is established in the opening sequence. We see a massive American tank at the head of a column of marines moving through the rubble of a deserted
Iraqi town. Kyle is on the roof of a building providing overwatch—protecting the troops. A woman and a boy emerge from a building. She produces a grenade from her robe and hands it to the boy. Kyle shoots the boy, then the woman when she takes the grenade herself and throws it at the marines. Unlike Kyle, who wrote about the proud marines he was protecting, Eastwood does not take sides. The woman and boy could be heroes resisting the invader, or Kyle might just be doing his duty, or both could be true. The film leaves us with the ambiguity. Hall and Eastwood have combined two incidents from the book to create this sequence. It segues into a flashback showing how Kyle came to be in Iraq.

The scenes showing Kyle as a boy killing a deer and being instructed in simplistic moral values by his stern father are in some ways equally disturbing. America’s gun culture, particularly when it involves children, is frightening. Again Eastwood does not take sides.

He is just as even-handed in his treatment of the fictional duel between Kyle and a brilliant Iraqi sniper. Reportedly the idea came from Steven Spielberg. The device provides a link between the different action scenes, providing a dramatically satisfying explanation of why Kyle keeps re-enlisting despite his wife and children. He can only return to her when he has defeated this formidable adversary. If this sounds like a western, I’m certain it was entirely intentional. In addition, the various engagements were deliberately structured by Eastwood to evoke memories of the western—a form he understands better than any living director. He does not use just his own films. I saw echoes of Anthony Mann’s shoot-outs in Winchester ’73 and Man of the West.

Predictably, these sequences are superbly staged. Eastwood has lost none of his talent for creating exciting action and a strong narrative. According to David Brill, the director’s regular collaborator, cinematographer Tom Stern, has recreated a distinctive Iraqi light that is indistinguishable from the real thing. The designers, Charisse Cardenas and James Murakami, create a chillingly believable Iraq of rooftops and rubble.

Again, Eastwood’s treatment of the duel between the snipers is even-handed. The Iraqi is shown as supported by his community. A girl reaches into her robe for a mobile phone to reveal Kyle’s movements. It is also clearly indicated that in 2006 the Americans were losing. (This was just before the surge.) As well the film includes some American blunders. “You didn’t secure the battlefield,” Kyle barks at his officer after they have failed to protect an Iraqi ally and his family.

The sequences when Kyle returns to his family and discovers a new purpose in helping returned servicemen could easily have seemed bland after the richly textured battle scenes. They work as well as they do because of Bradley Cooper’s extraordinarily detailed performance as Chris Kyle and Sienna Miller’s sensitive embodiment of his wife, Taya. To the credit of Taya Kyle, she appears to have been open with Miller about the problems in the marriage, and this enriches the film.

Understandably, American Sniper does not portray the circumstances of Kyle’s murder by a troubled soldier he was trying to help. A hypothetical staging of the events would prejudice any hope of fairness in the trial, which opened in Texas last month.

There could eventually be an In Cold Blood-type story juxtaposing the experiences of the two men, as is demonstrated by Nicholas Schmidle’s article “In the Crosshairs” published in the New Yorker in June 2013. For the moment the insights into the tragedy of Iraq by a great film-maker will have to be enough.
The last quarter of 1942 was a turning point in the Second World War. At the start of October, Rommel threatened the Suez Canal; it seemed that the Germans might take Stalingrad, and closer to home, the outcome of the Kokoda campaign was uncertain.

By December, the German position in Africa was threatened from East and West, the German Sixth Army was encircled and starving at Stalingrad, and the Japanese were in defence on the north coast of Papua.

Earlier, defeat seemed possible, but now the war could be won.

Lieutenant McLean watched the last of the unpainted houses flicker past the window of his train, the 3.45 p.m. from Toowong station. The houses shabby, the gardens running wild; footpaths overgrown with paspalum. Three years of war, he thought, nobody here to look after things. Neglect—like my bloody career.

Again he patted his top tunic pocket to feel the crinkle of his leave pass—still there. This time, he took it out, smoothed it and read it: HQ 18th Aust. Inf. Brigade, Milne Bay. QX 23632 Lieut H. T. McLean—Annual leave 28 days ending 27th October 1942 at 1600 hours. To report to G.D.D. Brisbane.

As the train slowed down towards Indooroopilly station he folded the leave pass, pushed it into his top tunic pocket and buttoned the flap carefully. What immense bloody luck, he thought. A few weeks ago in what then seemed his world forever, waiting at Milne Bay in the rain for terror and war. Then it was on, with all the noise and the shouting; too many jobs to do for a proper brooding about fear. He had to decide what his company commander wanted, making sure his platoon did what he told them. What anyone could hear in the bloody noise, that was. He was looking across the Number Three airstrip at Milne Bay again, seeing the blur of Japanese figures through the smoke.

Nights without sleep, not enough tucker, stinking, rainy swamp of a place, days and nights of noise. Then, all of a sudden it was over, and leave and a lift in a DC3. He walked from the station and onto Clarence Road.

Walking up the hill and towards the river, he was astounded to find everything still there. The smell of train smoke, sparrows hopping around manure piles, dogs barking their boredom; cassias blooming and the smoke and scent from garden fires. People strolling on unimportant errands.

Long grass brushed his legs on the footpath where houses were close to the road. From one he heard a wireless playing “Elmer’s Tune”—the tune that cocky air force corporal was singing when they got on the plane. From a house further on he heard a wireless playing a march, then This is London calling in the overseas service of the BBC.
Here is the news. He stopped, put his hand on the hot fence. At El Alamein 70 miles west of Alexandria, the British 8th Army is awaiting an assault from the German Afrika Korps; German forces have launched another attack on the Volga city of Stalingrad. He walked on. They're too good for us. The British have another new general, Montgomery. But he'll make a balls of it like all the others. They'll take Cairo and the Canal before long, and that Stalingrad place, the poor bloody Russians are up that creek without a paddle.

Our blokes fighting them up in the Owen Stanleys somewhere—they're probably going to be pushed back on their arses to Moresby. New Guinea's gone, for certain.

Even at this end, he thought, although we've towelled them up at Milne Bay—first time they've been stopped—the bastards could come back and try again, twice as many.

So, when's it all going to end, I'd like to know. More than anything I want it to end and us to win it. But everything is getting worse. It's getting hopeless.

I know it—we're going to lose the bloody war. Over in England, they'll have a hundred years of German rule. But here, you can hardly think of what they'll do to us. Life won't be worth living.

All the bad news is even making me feel crook. What the hell's wrong with me, anyway?

I was feeling good; I was cheerful, optimistic. Now I'm not enjoying anything much. Truth is there's nothing to look forward to. No hope we'll ever win it and get it over.

I guess this is what they call despair and I don't think much of this walking up hills. Stop here a bit.

It seemed a good idea to sit down on the footpath in the shade of a camphor laurel. Cooler here; cooler—a breeze blew from the north-east. He suddenly disliked it. Another gust, along his calf, where the trouser leg was up. Then it blew on his chest. He did up his top shirt button. Now he wanted the wind to stop. He felt cold. His arms and shoulders jerked. His body tensed. His legs shook. God almighty, he was shivering! Like the cold showers there on the Downs, boarding. The shivering became violent. He bent over to his left and vomited. There goes the salmon. He tried to wrap his arms around himself but had to let go as the shivering took charge. He vomited again. The headache which he had felt only faintly, now crashing and beating. A house across the street was blurred.

“They picked him up in a street—a place called ‘Inpilly’ or something, late yesterday afternoon sir,” said Captain Edmonds. “And the Path reported malaria parasites in a blood smear. We couldn't rouse him and it looked like cerebral malaria. His leave pass is from Milne Bay a week ago.”

“Yes, I think it is cerebral malaria,” said the Major. “The sudden severe temperature rise and the big spleen certainly look like malaria. What's more, we've had a lot of cerebrals from Milne Bay. But, you know, I can't help worrying about his still being unconscious, and about his neck rigidity. Would you mind lumbar puncturing him, Jack? And, yes, another ampoule of quinine, I think.”

Lieut. McLean woke to a powerful stench of onions; raised and irritable voices; an ugly woman in uniform slumping past behind a food trolley. He looked down and saw the end of a bed and sheets. “I'm bloody here,” he said aloud, “and this is bloody hospital!”

“Yes,” a voice came from beside his head, “and bloody McLean's back!”

On his right side, a man held his wrist, a man whose round face was split by a smile. This looked like a face McLean had been seeing on and off in dreams.

“Who the bloody hell are you?”

“I don't know about bloody hell, but I'm Jack Edmonds, junior dogsbody captain—
your ward doctor.”
“But what’s this place? What am I in here for?”
“You’re in the 112th Army Hospital. You’re here for cerebral malaria and a heap of complications.”
“Well, I’m just back from Milne Bay, you see, after we had the battle.”
“Oh, not quite! It’s not quite ‘just back’ you know. We’ve had you here three weeks and this is the first day you’ve talked sense. Which will please quite a few people.”
McLean was silent while his blood pressure was taken, notes made.
“Will I be sent back to my unit at Milne Bay?”
“Look, you’ve been pretty sick. It’ll be a few months before you’re fighting fit. But there’s something else. We had to remove your spleen. And you can’t go where there’s malaria if you don’t have a spleen—you’d have no resistance. Unless it moves to the Antarctic, your war’s over. Sorry, but I have to get to Ward Three in a hurry. Tell you more later.”
Left to himself, McLean tried to work things out. Only a few weeks after the Milne Bay action was over, say in the middle of September, his leave came through. Lucky ride home in a DC3. Then with the family, and a duty visit to dear old Aunt Emily at Indooroopilly—actually her birthday—22nd October. Got in the train at Central and then what?
That’s it! McLean remembered. On the way to Aunt Emily’s. But, there was something gloomy, something dire about it. It must have been bad news. Something had brought on a terrible pessimism, not usual for him. The bloody war!
How long did the doc say? Three weeks! And the war all going to hell! Everywhere. He wanted, as soon as he could, to confirm the dreadful outcomes, but he went to sleep.
Edmonds was beside his bed again. “Look, Doc,” said McLean, “don’t worry about me a moment. What’s happened in the war? Did they take the Canal?”
“What canal are you talking about?”
“Oh I see! You were out to it. No, they didn’t. A few weeks ago—that would be a few days after you came in—we had an enormous win at a place called El Alamein. The Germans have been pushed back into Libya, and still going.”
“Was that the new general? Montgomery, was it?”
“Yes, everybody’s calling him ‘Monty’ now—a national hero. Bit of a character. Day after the battle, he said on the news: ‘We’ve hit Rommel for a six!’ What’s more, there’s been a hell of a big landing by British and the Yanks in Morocco and Algeria a few days ago. The Germans are going to be squashed out of Africa.”
“What about the Russians? Did the Germans take that Stalingrad place?”
“No, the Germans have been banging and banging away there for weeks and weeks and getting nowhere. Now it looks as if they’re running out of steam. Some bloke on the wireless reckons the Russians have brought up a hell of a lot of reserves and might have a go at cutting the German army off.”
“And our blokes in New Guinea?”
“Well, we’ve just taken the village of Kokoda, and the Japs are being pushed down to the north coast of Papua.”
McLean was silent for a while. He felt wonderful relief. Face lit up, he startled the patients around him with peals of loud laughter.
“Tell me, Doc. Is a man allowed to have a beer in this place?”

Daniel Hart, a retired ophthalmologist, served with the AIF as a medical officer in the Second World War. He lives in Brisbane.
Here’s the thing about reality television: it has very little to do with reality. But if the whole concept is an exercise in delusion, it has a real-world reflection in present-day Moscow, according to this entertaining, disturbing book.

Pomerantsev is a British journalist of Russian heritage who relocated to the Russian capital in 2002, as—of course—a reality television producer, although he later worked on the news side. So much has changed so quickly that it is difficult to remember Moscow as the stagnant city of the Soviet era. It is now a city of beautiful women in stilettos, over-dressed gangsters in limousines, and endless parties in glitzy nightclubs. And construction sites: Pomerantsev notes that historic buildings are regularly torn down to be replaced by replicas of themselves, as plush apartments with as many mod cons as the newly rich want to buy.

And money, money, money everywhere, with spectacular business successes and equally spectacular failures. Everything is possible.

In the background is always “the President”. Putin himself is seldom named but, like Godot, it is him around which the whole show ultimately revolves. Pomerantsev quickly realised that the television network for which he worked, TNT, took its lead from the Kremlin on everything. Most people in Russia get their news from television—there are some newspapers but they are also dominated by the President’s circle—so control of the airwaves is critical. But it is not just about control of the news. The aim is to set the tone, manipulate the atmospherics, massage the image until it looks not just natural but inevitable.

At first glance, the Moscow scene looks like capitalism on fast-forward. Half of the models on the catwalks of Paris and Milan are Russian, according to Pomerantsev. Moscow women can take classes on how to find rich men for whom they can be mistresses, and openly advertise their services. One of the programs on which Pomerantsev worked was called How to Marry a Millionaire. The Putin era has been good for the sex-for-sale sector.

But just below the surface there is a different picture. Very few people in business succeed entirely due to their own efforts: there usually seems to be a political connection somewhere in the mix. And those who make a success on their merits often find themselves drawing the attention of the authorities. Charging entrepreneurs with tax evasion is a popular weapon, and so is the retrospective application of laws just passed. In some cases, even spurious breaches of fire-safety regulations have been cited. A spell in jail is usually enough to provide the right lesson but if someone insists on fighting the matter in court there are much stronger options available. And Pomerantsev points out that “99 per cent of people charged in Russia receive guilty verdicts”.

Because it is the process that is the point: a lesson as to who is in charge here. It makes a certain type of sense given Russia’s recent history, says Pomerantsev. In his early days, Putin was faced with a phalanx of oligarchs who had grabbed as much wealth and power during the chaotic Yeltsin days as they could get. The possibility of Russia becoming a state run by people who looked a lot like Mafia bosses was quite real. Through ruthless manipulation of the levers of state power, Putin brought them to heel, and those who did not join him went under. The view must have formed in Putin’s mind that no rival source of power could be tolerated. Best to cut it down before it gets too big to handle.

This also explains the Kremlin’s obsession with control of the media. Some people forget that when Putin first came to power he was virtually unknown, and was criticised by media organisations and journalists who were stretching their democratic muscles. Some people might forget that but Putin, clearly, has not. Russian leaders have long memories.

Pomerantsev acknowledges that it took him a while to understand how Russian politics works. The mechanics of democracy appear to be there: there are opposition parties, there is a parliament, there are elections and debates, there is a justice system. Except that it is all as fake as a Potemkin village. Putin dominates the opposition parties as much as he dominates his own. In election campaigns, media organisations do as the President’s office directs, and if that does not work then there is the fallback of rigging the actual count. If there is any criticism of the President in the parliament or other political forums, it seldom reaches the public.

It is not entirely clear whether the Russian people believe that this is how democracy really operates or if they know that it is all a facade and accept it nevertheless. Pomerantsev finds people on both sides of that question, but they all agree that in the end it doesn’t really matter.
Of course, most Russians have little control over their lives at all. The number of mega-rich is quite small, and while some wealth has trickled down political freedom has not. Pomerantsev finds that when he mentions this the response is usually a shrug. There is, at least, entertainment on the screen and a vague sense that someone up there knows what they are doing. There was a saying in the Soviet era: “We pretend to work, they pretend to pay us.” The Putin-era version might be: “We pretend to vote, they pretend to act as if they are elected.”

Over the course of his book, as Pomerantsev becomes increasingly disillusioned he comes into contact with characters who are ever more bizarre. One is Vladislav Surkov, who runs Putin’s PR operation. It is hard to get a grip on him, as he seems to slide between identities. He writes essays on modern art but loves American gangsta rap, he oozes sophistication but there is an undercurrent of threat. Perhaps his influence explains how the Putin regime can so easily switch gears, in one breath arguing that it is a democratic regime and in the next applauding itself for its level of control over, well, everything.

Things get even weirder when Pomerantsev encounters Vitali Dyomochka, a Siberian hoodlum who turned his hand to television. He believed that the crime dramas being produced for Russian television were “too fake”, and started to make his own programs. But this reality series was real, with real guns and real blood and real bodies—although there was always a happy ending. Pomerantsev cites rumours that Dyomochka got the series broadcast by threatening the television station owners but he is not sure that they are true. The owners would have known a hit when they saw one—and, of course, the series turned out to be hugely popular.

At first, Pomerantsev thought that dangerous oddballs like Dyomochka were outsiders but eventually he realised that they were part of the Kremlin meta-narrative. It represents a blurring of the line between fiction and reality: the process of government as a television show, complete with macho heroes and comedy relief. We might be as tough as the old communist regime but we will never be boring.

So much of the Putin era comes back to television, and it does not seem to be merely Pomerantsev’s connection with the business. Why is there such an obsession with control of every program, every image, every word? Pomerantsev notes that only positive news stories are allowed, nothing that might show the regime to be less than omniscient and omnipotent. When Moscow was covered in smog from peat-bog fires, journalists were not allowed to discuss it, even though anyone could see the problem by looking out a window. Nothing is true.

Nor is it clear why Putin seeks to project such a particular image, endlessly shooting wildlife and riding horses through forests. Pomerantsev believes that Putin is popular with most of the public and would surely win a fair election. So why does he try so hard to present himself in terms that are not just political but heroic? Is it just the knee-jerk tendency for authoritarianism as a bulwark against chaos? Or is there something deeper at work?

After all, there does not seem to be any grand plan or theme to the Putin regime. Having established itself as the centre of everything, it does not seem to go anywhere. While there are some recurring motifs in the government’s announcements—Holy Russia against the atheistic West, especially over the Ukraine mess, is a favourite—they do not seem to add up to much, especially as Putin is likely to reverse the rhetoric the next day.

Pomerantsev asks the question, although he does not really offer an answer. But maybe the solution can be found in the method. Perhaps Putin puts such great effort into his image of leadership because he does not, really, believe in any ideology at all. Not capitalism, not communism, no vision, just a picture of himself permanently ensconced in the largest office in the country. In this sense, the intense personalisation of the regime, down to the shots of the leader’s well-muscled chest, makes sense. It is because there is nothing else.

Pomerantsev might have delved into these issues further. At first, he admires the capacity of Russians to adapt to any political environment. Later, he begins to see it as mere passivity, part of the problem. But he does not attempt to fit this into a cohesive overview. As a result _Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible_ is effectively a series of anecdotes and vignettes, some absurd, some comical and some tragic, essays without a framework. This is not to say it is a bad book, because it is not. But it seems somehow incomplete.

Neither does Pomerantsev look towards the future. Russia’s recent burst of wealth was largely tied to a commodities boom, particularly the high price of oil and gas. But now prices are declining, and so is Russia’s currency (its government bonds were recently downgraded to junk status). Will this undermine Putin’s claim to be the only one who can lead Russia into a prosperous future? Or has he consolidated his position so completely that no economic disaster will touch him?

Pomerantsev was glad to leave the looking-glass world of Moscow after ten years there. When he returned to London, he produced a television series called _Meet the Russians_, about the activities...
and excesses of the sons and daughters of Russia’s super-wealthy elite in the UK. They come across as an unpleasant bunch, equal parts of arrogance and irresponsibility, secure in their belief that the rules do not apply to them. Perhaps one should not be surprised by such an attitude. They are, after all, the children of Vladimir.

Derek Parker is a freelance writer, reviewer and novelist. His novel *This Tattooed Land* was recently published by Connor Court.

**PETER COSTELLO**

*Memoirs of a Slow Learner*

(new expanded edition)
by Peter Coleman
Connor Court, 2015, 190 pages, $29.95

When I launched the first edition of this book, in 1994, I mostly dwelt on the journey of the author. He describes his early life as “growing up radical”. His father, who worked in advertising, was “an apostle of modernity”. It was not just any old kind of modernism either. Peter Coleman’s father Stanley once worked for a newspaper—the *Age*. After divorce, he settled in Sydney, where Peter joined him. The household was peppered with radical booklets and pamphlets. Peter went on to set a record in selling badges in the “Sheepskins for Russia” campaign.

At Sydney University—in the immediate post-war period—Peter Coleman was taken up with the prevailing leftist zeitgeist. He came under the influence of the ex- and anti-communist Professor John Anderson—which probably saved him from the excesses of student Marxism. By all accounts Anderson was a huge figure of influence on the university and the city at the time. At the launch of the first edition I described this memoir as a:

journey through bohemianism and radicalism in post-war Sydney, through universities in Sydney, London and Canberra, and in and out of the lives of Australians of literary and artistic achievement like Robert Hughes, Bruce Beresford and Barry Humphries. In the background great intellectual wars were raging. There was the war against Stalinism and the struggle for the mind of post-war Europe—a story told by Peter in his book *The Liberal Conspiracy*—internationally led by Arthur Koestler, Irving Kristol and Raymond Aron. There was the war against the Australian disciples of Stalinism waged stout-heartedly by European émigrés such as Richard Krygier, Frank Knopflmacher, Heinz Arndt and others. There was the literary war over the Ern Malley hoax and the academic war over Sydney Sparkes Orr.

It is worth reading this book just to get a feel for who was doing what back in those days of the Cold War. It is a description of a world that younger Australians will find hard to believe, how a ruthless dictatorial ideology held sway over many people who regarded themselves as the “intelligentsia”. It would take forty years for the ideology to collapse in failure. As we walk through the world of arts and letters and bohemianism in Australia in the 1940s and 1950s we get an intriguing snapshot of emerging Australian writers and artists.

Today I want to focus more on the aftermath of that journey which the author leaves off at the start of the 1960s. He has an air of pessimism. The icons of his youth are beginning to topple. His academic hero, John Anderson, is playing to undergraduate populism, the church is losing to modernism and unable to explain its concerns in any coherent way. The principal defender of conservatism in Sydney is Warwick Fairfax in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. No wonder there was defeatism in the air if our best hope of defending traditional values was the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

This new edition of *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* includes an appendix written in 2006 titled “Leaves from the Diary of a Madman”, which takes up the story. Coleman finds a new purpose, embarking on a parliamentary career in both state and Commonwealth parliaments. He declares: “I am a Liberal Party liberal because I think the Liberal Party is the best expression of Australian liberalism…”

He is defeated at the state level and loses his seat. But that is followed by resurrection and eventual retirement at the Commonwealth level. It is not a bad record. Enoch Powell observed that “All political careers end in failure.” To get out before the voters finally lay you to rest is as good as one can hope for. Coleman comes to believe that politics is a virus that infects a person and renders them delirious. It cannot be cured, only managed. In times of remiss, temporary sanity prevails and opens an opportunity to get out of the full-time parliamentary life on one’s own terms.

Although he leaves politics as a full-time paid career, the author is still infected by the political virus. Now at the age of eighty-six he writes much-read columns for *Spectator Australia* and *Quadrant*. 
He is a judge on the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards. Recently he entered the lion’s den of the ABC’s Q&A program.

He regards himself as a secular liberal. Of course there are great schisms within this group. On one hand there are the progressives, interventionists and liberationists. On the other there are sceptics, individualists and traditionalists. Coleman is in the latter camp.

But let me return to Peter Coleman’s 1960s. The church wanted to make a stand against moral relativism which it knew, instinctively, was hostile to the notion of revelation and moral absolutes. Academics were courting popularity and the *Sydney Morning Herald* was the bastion of conservatism.

Things are much worse today. The church no longer wants to engage against moral relativism, instead it largely echoes it. It does not think its relevance comes from opposing popular fads; it thinks it comes from being in the vanguard of them.

At the recent synod of the Melbourne Anglican Church, the delegates adjourned to be photographed under the banner that hangs from their cathedral that says, “Let’s Fully Welcome Refugees”. It does not have a banner declaring “Support for the Christians being crucified in Syria” or “Solidarity with the Churches being exterminated in Baghdad”. It would consider that divisive or offensive to the multicultural multi-faith view it takes of the world. In contrast, it would see taking on the government over refugees as a unifying cause. It means standing together with all those who read the *Age* and listen to the ABC, just like them.

After being photographed under the refugee banner the synod reconvened to decide how it could reduce its shareholding in fossil fuel companies. There was no discernible difference in the media coverage given to the Anglican synod compared to that of the Greens’ state convention.

These days, far from being the defenders of traditional or conservative values, the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* lead the fight against them. The church knows it will be attacked by the papers if it takes a traditional position, and widely praised if it gets “progressive”. To use modern parlance, this is a no-brainer. If you think positive media coverage is a mark of relevance and success you should get with the program.

Back in the 1960s academics were courting celebrity from undergraduate audiences. But the universities didn’t have press offices and marketing managers as they do today. We now have universities taking huge billboard display advertising to publicise their marketing slogans. Universities take out radio advertising and hire super-boxes at sport stadiums to promote themselves and promote enrolment. They go to enormous effort to recruit overseas students because they can charge them higher fees and generate more revenue for their huge enterprises. They (correctly) describe this as earning export income. Celebrity academics are a wonderful way of promoting a university and its profile. This is a media-obsessed world, this world of Twitter and Facebook. Hits and traffic can be used to measure success more quantitatively than things like rigour and independence.

I hope there is still a place for conscientious academics who think their most important role is to open up inquiring minds, just as there are still faithful clergy who think it is their purpose to minister to souls without being distracted by the obvious failures of organised religion. There are people who still like to think a university should be a place of learning rather than an export industry. This goes to values. Values are deeper than politics.

Secular liberalism may well be an organising principle for public life, but can it speak to and explain our deepest values about learning and art, or our deepest questions about life and death? Peter Coleman knows that the credo of secular liberalism is not as robust as he once thought it was. He is, he says, still in conversation about it.

Peter Coleman’s fellow *Quadrant* editor and great mentor, the poet James McAuley, thought that the whole edifice of secular liberalism was unsustainable. He put his faith in God. Back in the 1960s Peter Coleman told us he was only one step ahead of the Hound of Heaven. It would be interesting to know if he is still on the run. One last chapter is still to be written about this!

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*The Hon. Peter Costello, who is Peter Coleman’s son-in-law, was Commonwealth Treasurer from 1996 to 2007. This is an edited version of the speech he delivered to launch the new edition of *Memoirs of a Slow Learner* in Melbourne last month.*

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**PATRICK MORGAN**

**Not So Marvellous Melbourne**

*Wild Bleak Bohemia*

by Michael Wilding

Australian Scholarly, 2014, 580 pages, $39.95

In the second half of the nineteenth century Melbourne was the place to be, heady from the gold-rush years, bustling with energy and settling...
Marcus Clarke wrote burlesque plays, but, obscured by the surface joviality, a literary disaster was being enacted, which lacked its contemporary tragedian. Now 150 years later Michael Wilding has resurrected that tragedy, with the script written in the words of the authors of the time.

The book is a kaleidoscope, not a panorama: we are presented with minute details of life seen from the inside, and built upwards from below. It’s a story told from a street-level perspective—we’re always looking down into the mess of things, there’s never a horizon in sight.

Michael Wilding first came to prominence around 1970 as a young academic all-rounder from England at the University of Sydney’s English Department, producing literary criticism, writing fiction, and founding the publishing house Wild & Woolley, whose name gives a hint of his own bohemian leanings at the time, in common with fellow writers like Frank Moorhouse and Howard Jacobson. After a successful career in which he became a Professor of English, he co-edited in 2009 a biography of Marcus Clarke written by Clarke’s school friend Cyril Hopkins, brother of Gerard Manley. That venture may have led to the present book.

With Wilding’s new way of approaching the three authors, we see clearly for the first time their similarities and differences. All affected a bohemian lifestyle while trying to live off part-time journalism in Melbourne. Kendall and Gordon were primarily poets and so less adept as journalists than the prose writer Clarke. Kendall was an Australian-born New South Welshman who came to Melbourne for only a short (and disastrous) period of this life, 1869 to 1870. In contrast Clarke and Gordon arrived from England and were removed from Melbourne only by their early deaths. They descended from wealthy professional backgrounds in the upper gentry in England, and suffered a marked decline in status here, whereas Kendall was working-class and making his way in the world until he came to Melbourne and fell among thieves. His son Frederick recalled: “He was not, like some other poets, a hearty, unashamed Bacchanalian.” Kendall, who was guileless and likeable, had one talent, poetry. Gordon had two drives, horse riding and ballads, which gradually coalesced as “Galloping Rhymes”. He launched himself into life with a blinkered gusto which suited steeplechasing, but melted in the face of the more subtle challenges of life.

Clarke, the mercurial centre of this book, was a far more complex case—by turns magnetic, talented, hard-bitten and manipulative—with a variety of avocations: journalist, editor, librarian, bon vivant, chronicler of Australia’s early days, fiction writer and librarian, at all of which he was a gifted amateur with too many balls in the air at any one time. Clarke almost succeeded as a great man of last achievements, but collapsed and fell approaching the post due to certain self-destructive character flaws. His personality, which remains elusive, was perhaps best described by himself in a confessional letter to Cyril Hopkins:

I have a fatal facility for adapting myself to my company and am in hourly terror lest I fall into that most degrading of all states, the state of the man “who can be a gentleman when he likes”. The consequence of this state of things is that my mind is becoming cynical. I say bitter things, laugh uproariously and sigh despondingly … I am cool in manner, partly natural and partly artificial. I am egotistical because I see no one that I like better than myself.

Clarke had a chance to return to England with an offer of a London newspaper post, and Gordon had a chance to claim an ancestral Scottish property, but they had neither the money nor the will-power to make the break. Kendall had an easy means of escape from his Melbourne madness, back to Sydney and rural New South Wales to recover, but he remained permanently damaged by his bohemian stint which he bitterly regretted.

Wilding displays a wide range of reference, and a light touch. When the Western District squatter Learmonth appears on the scene, Wilding notes he shares a surname and an old Scots ancestry with the Russian writer Lermontov. Gordon’s Penola friendship with Fr Julian Tenison Woods means Wilding catches Mother Mary MacKillop in his capacious net. Myriad linkages of detail of this kind give his material a lattice-like density. Wilding has an eye for the telling anecdote which captures
the flavour of scandalous Melbourne. Victoria’s Chief Commissioner of Police, Captain Standish, was a louche former Catholic bachelor living at the Melbourne Club. On one occasion he arranged a formal dinner for his cronies where naked ladies were seated on chairs of black velvet background in order to highlight the whiteness of their skin.

Through neat connections a huge cast of friends and supporting characters are assembled around the three principal writers. Among them are George Gordon McCrae, Dr. J.E. Neild, James Smith, George Walstab (who co-authored a novel with Clarke), Henry Gyles Turner, Sir Redmond Barry, J.J. Shillinglaw, Richard Birnie and Dr Patrick Moloney. For each of them Wilding provides a brief biography and character sketch. A full social tapestry is created, but from a different social stratum than that in Martin Boyd’s Langton novels.

The daily routine of the three principal characters was to work at their writing, mainly journalism, in the morning, then to go into town to hand in their copy at newspaper offices and look up material for further articles. In late afternoon the long evening’s revelry began by repairing to the Yorick Club or the Cave of Adullam (both founded by Clarke), dinner perhaps at the Café de Paris, attendance at a theatre, and descent into the demi-monde. They often then staggered home in the small hours, woozy with grog and drugs, to their lodgings outside the city’s centre. The human constitution couldn’t keep up this daily pattern—a permanent weariness set in.

Social life was based on clubs, particularly the Yorick, which in our age amalgamated with the Savage Club in 1966. Clarke’s flat-mate Arthur Telo brought back from New Caledonia for the Yorick “an enormous assortment of clubs, bows and savage weapons of war”, which are presumably those which decorate the main room of the Savage Club today. The clubmen enjoyed juvenile pranks, like removing business signs and brass door-knockers in the dead of night. It’s hard for us to realise the three writers were so young, in their late twenties or early thirties in the 1870s. Wilding might have mined Clarke’s novel ‘Twixt Shadow and Shine more thoroughly, as its characters are thinly disguised portraits of Clarke’s club-land cronies.

Such people were part of Upper Bohemia, the part-time leisure occupation of the better-off classes, in contrast to Lower Bohemia, the involuntary scramble for existence of the destitute, which Clarke wrote about so memorably in the press, and into which the three writers themselves descended at times. In writing on this theme Clarke was, as Wilding wisely suggests, “writing as much for himself as for his audience, warning himself of his own possible fate”.

Clarke’s best journalism has been collected in the volume A Colonial City, edited by Laurie Hergenhan. Wilding’s book appeared at the same time as an exhibition on Melbourne Bohemia at the State Library of Victoria, where Clarke was deputy librarian.

The fulcrum on which Wild Bleak Bohemia turns occurs halfway through—Gordon’s death in June 1870 at the age of thirty-six on the day his Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes was to be published. Kendall left Melbourne a few months later. Gordon walked into the coastal scrub and sand dunes at Brighton beach and shot himself through the head. One immediate reason was he couldn’t pay the printing bill. From this time on things get worse and the reader, put through the wringer in tandem with the victims, wilts as the agony is piled on.

The three were all very gifted but fragile personalities, so bohemia was not the answer to their troubles. Australia’s culture was too young and thin to buoy them up. Clarke lamented in a letter home: “I was sent to the land of radicals and mob-law. I was fond of art and literature; I came where both are unknown.” For a while bonhomie kept up a front, but as the poet Robert Lowell, himself no stranger to these problems, memorably wrote of certain mental patients: “These victorious figures of bravado ossified young.”

The three writers declined because of the combined effects of addiction (alcohol and readily available drugs), poverty, an inability to manage their lives and pay their bills, and depressive temperaments sometimes close to madness, noticeable also in their parents. Gordon had many premonitions of his eventual suicide. They borrowed money from their friends, which demolished their self-respect, and often didn’t pay it back, which in turn deepened their guilt. They weren’t people who were comfortable in their own skins, as we now say. Clarke died at thirty-five, mired in debt after two bankruptcies and suffering a complete bodily collapse.

In a timeless critique of the bohemian way of life, George Orwell wrote in a book review of a typical English literary layabout enjoying life in the south of France between the wars:

Before long he is drinking, cadging and lechering exactly like the rest of them, and on the last page he is left gazing at the world through a mist of Pernod but dimly feeling that his present degradation is better than respectable life in England.

Similarly, Frank Moorhouse published a short story in Quadrant in 1974 titled “The Commune Does
NOT WANT YOU”, in which the bohemian counter-culture of the time is revealed as authoritarian as the mainstream society it despises.

The three writers married lower-class wives much younger than themselves, some in their late teens, to whom literary circles were foreign. They were helpmates, nurses and comforters to their husbands, long-suffering and admirable backstops, who have our sympathy, but they remained understandably helpless in the face of terrible events, like the death of the Kendalls’ young daughter, caused partly by starvation. The wives were not strong enough in personality to stand up as equals to their husbands, and to have an effective say. But these writers were never going to marry strong impressive women of the stamp of Annie Baxter Dawbin or Caroline Chisholm, preferring to while away their time in the male world of the club.

Australian colonial literature has been on the back burner for quite a while as the critical literacy brigade have foregrounded their contemporary fixations. Lovers of older literature like Laurie Hergenhan, John Barnes and Victor Crittenden have valiantly soldiered on against the tide. In history Geoffrey Blainey, Paul de Serville and many others have kept the nineteenth century alive for us. This outstanding, original documentary created by Michael Wilding might revive interest in our more distant literary heritage.

Patrick Morgan has contributed to Quadrant on literary and political matters since the 1960s.

Reflections on the subject of a recurring dream

You wrote how a native cat left paw prints
in the dust beneath your window,
of new insights gained about yearnings from years ago,
much like when a sudden light upon the land
transfigures the trivial into a beautiful thing.

Here at McMahons Point the fragrance of the jacarandas
exceeds our expectations,
and along the foreshore a flock of white ibis gathers,
indifferent to our presence, their black eyes glazed
as if they share a vision beyond our understanding.

In a recurring dream you found your cure for doubt,
a process anchored in the unconditional love from another,
where you believed personal faith trumped fear,
guiding those strong of heart who clashed by night
with the darkest of armies.

I look for daily inspiration during my walks along an old train track,
where a tunnel painted with graffiti has a formidable beauty of its own,
suggesting perhaps cave paintings from the Paleolithic,
four black bulls in motion like ancient aurochs,
the visual depth achieved both remarkable and yet primitive in form.

May your dreams continue to be marked by peace
rather than whispers as to what once might have been,
with the moth owl, so intimate with your bush-covered hills,
calling above the din of the crickets,
and summoning only the best of possibilities.

Dan Guenther
In high civilisation’s sophisticated art of the “deadly putdown”, do Australians tend to be high scorers? Or are we amateurs still struggling to rise from some disregarded league in the suburbs?

To illustrate the nature of the “deadly putdown”, let me briefly recount a true moment in the life of Winston Churchill. Walking with a friend one evening near the Commons, the two passed closely by the haughty Labour leader Sir Stafford Cripps. Murmured Churchill, audibly in the evening: “There, but for the grace of God, goes God.” You’ll agree, such a remark is the verbal equivalent of a sudden punch in the solar plexus; who of us can return a calmly-phrased retort to trump the exchange in a split second? That’s all the time human nature allows; anything slower falls flat, a limp anti-climax. Tough? Yes.

I should be pleased to think that in this very minor department of civilised public life, Australians were at least holding their own. But I have doubts; too many raw and recent echoes in my ears of:

“Aw, come off it, mate. What would you know about English Property Law?”

“Siddown, mug. You think we got all day to sit around listening to you?”

“Sure, and pigs might fly, too, mightn’t they?”

The whole notion of any actual international standard for repartee is, of course, absurd, but any spectacle of sharply competitive individual discourse is my favourite spectator sport. Duellists with fine steel rapier or stiletto provide no more thrilling combat than worthy adversaries wielding only their fresh-forged words, and I intend to introduce you to one of the best of them.

He was my superior officer (I held very junior rank) in two separate units during the Second World War in the Pacific. I can assure you that there was vastly, vastly more to him than words. I respected him (and still respect him) as much as any man I ever knew. His name was George Wilfred Lambert Townsend, one of the most legendary of the famous New Guinea district officers, widely known to Europeans throughout the Pacific Islands by his nickname, “Kassa”.

In the First World War, Kassa saw active service in France and Belgium with our own AIF, returning to Australia in 1919. In 1921, the Australian Brigadier-General Evan Wisdom, Administrator of the New Guinea territories seized from conquered Germany, happened to meet young George Townsend, and offered him a job as a patrol officer. Arrived in Rabaul, Kassa found himself stuck in an un congenial desk job, from which he fought himself free to start the life he really sought: that of a kiap serving in the multifarious responsibilities, hardships, dangers and fulfilments of the wide-scattered districts. By the end of his service, he had served in every one of them, but he loved the Sepik best.

A kiap’s range of duties might include traversing (on foot) and mapping some unvisited and wholly unknown stretch of territory; introducing the government to villagers who had never seen a white man; building the necessary basic housing for some impending government centre, including perhaps even a simple hospital, and using the rough bush materials, including serviceable thatching, growing on the spot; identifying and arresting offenders against the government’s new policy forbidding the excitements of headhunting; conveying the alleged wrongdoers to Rabaul, there to answer to the Supreme Court for their actions—possible crimes carrying the capital penalty; on occasion, actually hanging them, back in the region of their offence. Less dire were counting and recording villagers for census purposes, and collecting payment of taxes and fines, usually in New Guinea-minted coinage of either the German or the Australian regimes. These had a hole bored through their centres, for the convenience of users who, having no pants, perforce had no pockets, so carried their liquidity threaded on a thong.

Law enforcement in the districts fell to the
The man who wanted to give me a gun was simply old and full of fun.

When we took the rifle to the station to apply for registration

he pointed it at the policeman there, charging him to “Reach for the air!”

But the copper with a kind of chortle merely brushed aside the barrel.

Yes, these were days before Islam’s error whelmed the world with holy terror,

yet the sergeant saw the man with the gun was simply old and full of fun.

Andrew Lansdown