

# QUADRANT

## Reflections on the Civil War in France

DOUGLAS MURRAY, DARYL MCCANN, JOHN O'SULLIVAN,  
DAVID MARTIN JONES, MICHAEL CONNOR

Ideology First, Children Last

JEREMY SAMMUT

Capitalism, Christianity and Confucianism

PETER SMITH, RAZEEN SALLY

God Is Dead but He Won't Lie Down

PETER SELICK, PAUL MONK

Kindergarten U

ROGER KIMBALL

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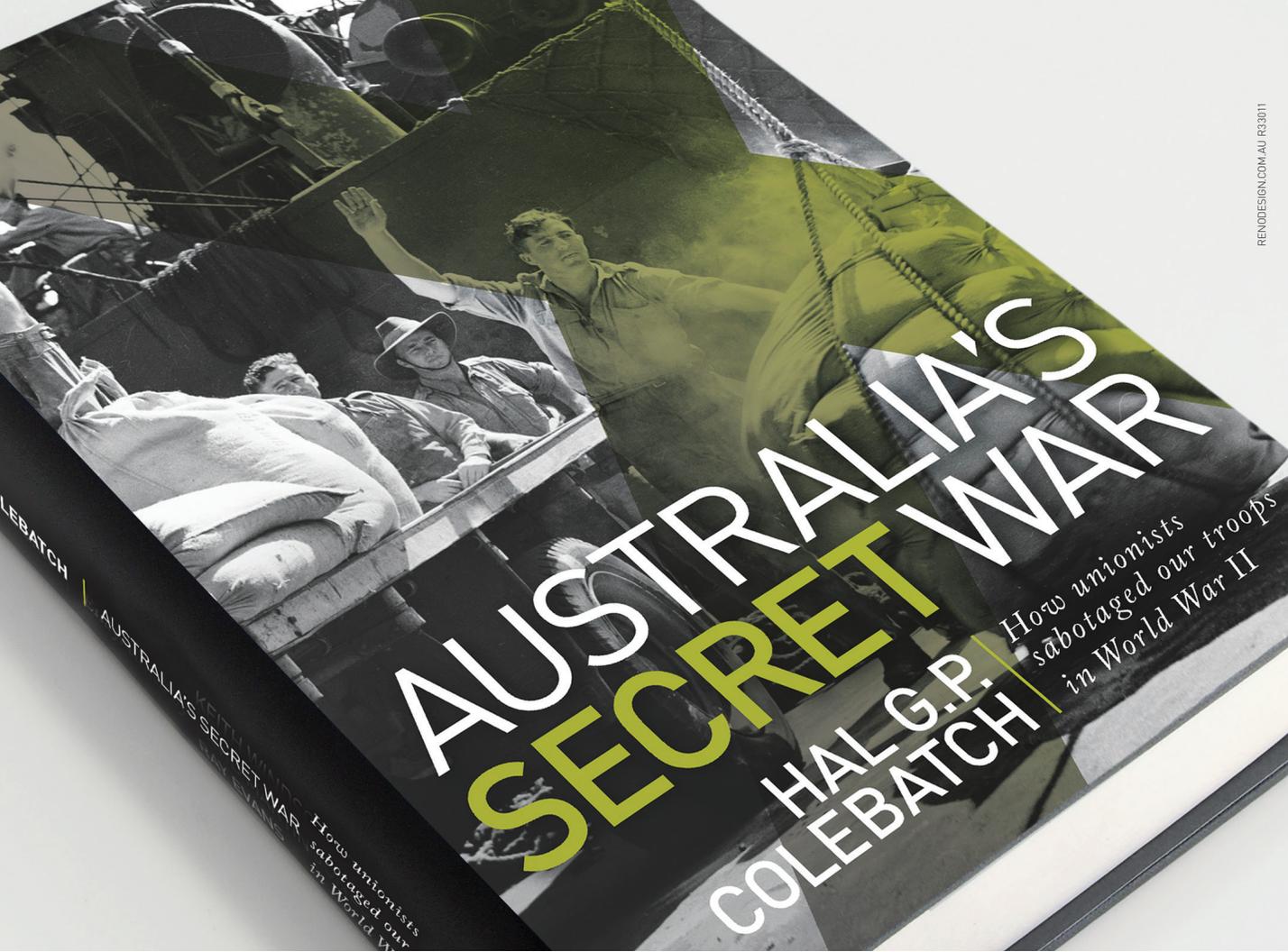
Books on Henry Kissinger, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Soviet  
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Shakespeare, Richard Hannay and much more

Reviewed by HELEN ANDREWS, ANDREW STUTTAFORD,  
MARK MCGINNESS, PHILIP AYRES, HARRY GELBER and many more

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**QUADRANT BOOKS**

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# LETTERS

## Brian Sewell

*SIR:* Giles Auty's appreciation (November 2015) of the recently deceased Brian Sewell focused on the Englishman's career as a controversial newspaper art critic with an acerbic tongue, but his talents were more significant and wide ranging than probably many Australians are aware of.

His father (who committed suicide before Sewell was born) was Peter Warlock, the composer. Born in 1931, Sewell studied at the Courtauld Institute of Art, became an acknowledged expert for Christie's auction house, and later was an art dealer, so when he became art critic for the London *Evening Standard* in 1984 he had a thorough knowledge of the Old Masters and more recent art.

In the beginning he tried to be open-minded about the contemporary art scene but the mediocrity of artists like Damien Hirst and Banksy, the inane works of the Turner Prize, ludicrous installations, the ubiquitous presence of arts bureaucrats, the cynical networking of self-congratulatory artists and the deliberate opaqueness of art-speak soon disturbed him. His reviews were so cutting and true that in 1994 thirty-five artists and writers demanded the newspaper fire him. The signatories were second-rate artists and writers like Marina Warner who, typical of progressives, demand free speech for themselves but not for those they disagree with.

He was accused of being homophobic and misogynist, of course. But his main problem was that he was a critic in a time of awful Western art. He made several television documentary series, including a highly personal one about pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela (*The Naked*

*Pilgrim*) and the delightful and eccentric ten-part series about the grand tours of Europe in the eighteenth century. His patrician manner and posh accent were criticised, but his refusal to dilute the content and his vocabulary was a refreshing change from the contemporary need to dumb down these things so as to appeal to the mythical "ordinary viewer".

What are overlooked are his three memoirs. His two volumes about his life, *Outsider: Always Almost: Never Quite* and *Outsider II: Always Almost: Never Quite* are exceptional works. They are candid, disturbing (the description of his rape is extraordinary in its objectivity), erotic (once he discovered he was gay), honest, with a balanced dose of self-loathing and self-awareness, and historically interesting (his friendship with the traitor and art historian Anthony Blunt is vividly recalled). His gorgeous prose has an ease about it that makes the volumes impossible to put down. After buying the memoirs when I was working in London a couple of years ago I was so enthralled by them that I didn't go out at night, just so I could finish them. They are an extraordinary achievement.

As a bonus he wrote a third memoir, *Sleeping with Dogs: A Peripheral Autobiography*, which is one of the best books about living with dogs I know of (and I've read plenty). It's also a moving portrait of an emotionally vulnerable man who found his deepest friendships with his canine companions.

Even after he died an art reviewer disparaged his views that there have been no great women artists, and gays are still put off by his stance against gay marriage. What his critics didn't and don't understand is that every culture needs a Cassandra like Brian Sewell, someone who points out that the emperor has no clothes, that group-think is poisonous to new ideas, and arts lobbyists and

bureaucrats are an impediment to great art.

*Louis Nowra  
Kings Cross, NSW*

## The Soviet purges

*SIR:* As a coda to the tributes to the great Robert Conquest and the question of “who knew what”, or perhaps “who cared at all”, I offer a report from our local paper, the *Gloucester Advocate*, on February 7, 1930. The report noted that the Bishop of Chelmsford had been informed by the Metropolitan of the Russian Synod of the slaughter of more than eight thousand priests, monks and nuns without trial. Also reported was the massacre of several hundred ex-naval officers.

It seems inconceivable that such reports, finding their way to a remote Australian newspaper, could have escaped the attention of any literate person in the UK or Europe. Even wilful ignorance is not a sufficient explanation for those who continued to support uncritically the regime and its political philosophy. Which explains why, to this day, you can still encounter people who view this and other twentieth-century horrors, provided they occurred under the correct banner, as necessary purges. They have not forgotten the lessons of history. They just see a different lesson.

*Jim Hoggett  
Gloucester, NSW*

## Tony Abbott

*SIR:* John Carroll (Letters, November 2015) hasn’t “talked to

anyone” who does not share his sentiment “that most of the country breathed a collective sigh of relief when Abbott was deposed”. He should get out of Fitzroy more. The people I have spoken to are disappointed that a good PM and, just as importantly, a good and genuine person, has been replaced by a left-leaning showman. But I would not presume to think that my circle is representative of the country as a whole. The same comment could be directed to Richard Forrest and his “wide variety of acquaintances”.

*Michael Smith  
Mooroolbark, Vic*

*SIR:* The myth that Tony Abbott was a bad Prime Minister should be quashed at birth. He disappointed many conservatives with slowness and caution, but he was putting the building blocks in the right place, slowly but steadily. Had he been given a chance, and not been the victim of a political assassination by a man whose only demonstrated loyalty is to himself, he might have been as great a Prime Minister as Howard or Menzies. I hope he will, like both those great men, recover from being stabbed in the back and return.

*Hal G.P. Colebatch  
Nedlands, WA*

## The migration challenge

*SIR:* Nick Cater (October 2015) has made an admirable effort to make sense of a critical situation which has been long in coming and the end of which is nowhere to be seen.

Country-shopping now has a distinctly proletarian ring about it,

even as most of the shoppers in this case are middle-class, educated and not without means. The rich have always been able to go where they pleased. The rest have been able to travel and settle in places of their choice only within the bounds set by financial considerations on their part and political considerations on the part of the host country of choice. Breaking and entering *en masse* by people determined to make their way to a country of their choice, as is happening in Europe, is novel in recent times.

Although the regular media is reluctant to flag developments which the ruling clique and its servant cliques in the West’s nation-states are wishing to keep under wraps until such developments cannot be stopped, the general public in the West is working out what’s afoot. It cannot be long now before people in Western Europe, at least, who have most to lose, are roused by events which they, and the media, are unable to ignore.

The West’s democratic principles have been subverted and perverted by those who have been charged to uphold and defend them against encroachment from without as well as from within. Now the race is on for the peoples of Europe to reassert their authority—that of the people by the people for the people.

*Jacob Jonker  
Fern Tree, Tas*

*Quadrant welcomes letters  
to the editor. Letters are subject  
to editing unless writers  
stipulate otherwise.*



Australian Government



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# CHRONICLE

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JOHN O'SULLIVAN

We were about thirty hours from sending this issue of *Quadrant* to the printers when the news broke that terrorist attacks in Paris had killed more than a hundred people. It seemed an important enough event, throwing light on both European and Australian concerns, to justify commissioning serious commentaries on it. That in turn pushed us into re-shaping this *Quadrant* around the concept of France's emerging civil war.

Chance favours the prepared mind, it is said, and that concept had been planted in our minds the previous week when we received an article from our perceptive cultural critic Michael Connor titled "Paris, at Five Minutes to Midnight". On a visit to France, Michael was struck by the unstable jostling blend of joyful cultural entertainments, car-burnings in resentful anti-white suburbs, the smart bookshops running out of republished Occupation-era fascist novels, all within a few stops on the Metro. "Nowhere in Paris is far from possible danger," he writes. "The theatres and museums operate under strict security. Armed soldiers punctuate the street outside the Shoah Memorial, as they do outside Sacré Cœur."

The mass murders in Paris took place following a summer that had seen a vast non-military invasion of Europe, mainly by young men from the Middle East and Africa sweeping over Europe's external and internal borders under the guise, not false in all cases, of refugees from the Syrian civil war.

Europe's political class had accepted this human wave on humanitarian grounds but with varying degrees of enthusiasm; Mrs Merkel went beyond that and issued a general invitation to all refugees who wanted to live in Germany. Hundreds of thousands from a pool of potential millions began to move over sea and land towards Germany and Sweden. What few anxieties were expressed by Berlin and Brussels through the summer did not include concern that this influx of young men might include terrorists or otherwise threaten security.

Europe's peoples had been more sceptical from the start. A handful of political leaders, notably Hungary's Viktor Orban, expressed disquiet, puzzlement, opposition. They were promptly denounced as, in effect, neo-fascists, and the EU voted to impose mandatory refugee resettlement quotas on them

and everyone else. Mrs Merkel had the extra-legal authority to invite millions of people to live anywhere in the twenty-six countries of the Schengen zone.

Or so it appeared. But this firm imposition of open borders, justified by multicultural pieties, began to break down even before the Paris murders. Not only Central European countries such as Hungary, but also Denmark, Sweden and Austria imposed border controls. The new Polish conservative government announced that it would refuse to accept refugees under the "mandatory" resettlement program. The German government announced that refugees would have to leave for their country of "first arrival" after a brief period for registration and recuperation (though apparently Mrs Merkel learned of this change through the media). And her Finance Minister, the powerful Wolfgang Schäuble, mused loudly that sometimes an avalanche can be inadvertently started by the recklessness of a "careless skier".

Since the murders, France and Belgium have closed their borders, and the EU Commission President, Donald Tusk, has warned that the Schengen Agreement might collapse entirely. Mrs Merkel herself no longer seems immune to political mortality. Early reports claim that one of the terrorists is a "Frenchman of Algerian origin", that another had a Syrian passport, and that he and a third entered the EU through Greece where their passports were checked in accordance with European rules.

Everything was in order but 127 people died.

What were the politicians thinking? Well, they were slightly afraid of thinking, especially of thinking any thoughts that might conflict with the orthodoxies of a borderless Europe and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism in particular makes politicians nervous because there isn't much agreement on what multiculturalism *is* except it's a Good Thing.

Various definitions are available—eating fusion food or listening to Asian jazz; publishing official documents in minority languages; treating all cultures as equal, including those cultures that deny human and sexual equality; and ensuring that social groups are hired, fired, paid, promoted, elected to parliament, and much else in line with their percentage of the population. That last definition involves a lot of complicated policies such as affirmative action, bilingualism, protected classes, and so on. But the

fuzzy general attitude underlying it is that it's always wrong to show preference for your own kind of people but occasionally right to do so for the Other. Legitimate preferences for the Other seemingly include not asking them questions about security that might embarrass them.

That's very firmly, if vaguely, the attitude of European (and especially German) political elites. Its technical term is "idealism". Curiously enough, most ordinary Europeans (like ordinary Australians or Americans) tend to reverse this preference. Without being hostile, they tend to think that if distinctions are to be made, they should favour their own countrymen. The technical term for this is "xenophobia".

For obvious historical reasons, the elite attitude has usually won out in post-war German politics. Just lately, however, the elites have swept aside all sceptical opposition. After a recent visit to Berlin, Adam Garfinkle, editor of the *American Interest*, wrote:

Even the Chancellor, who by German standards is far from a raving leftist, appears to firmly believe that everyone must be a multiculturalist for moral reasons, and that all people who want to preserve the ethno-linguistic integrity of their communities—whether in Germany or in Hungary, Poland, and elsewhere—are acting out of base motives ... [But] that is not racism ... It is simply preferring the constituency of a high-social-trust society, from which, social science suggests, many good things come: widespread security, prosperity, and a propensity toward generosity being prominent among them.

That contempt for the desire of ordinary citizens to feel comfortable and safe in their own society has dominated German and European politics since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Multiculturalism will now be going out of fashion. And since atrocities like those at the weekend are likely to continue—or so the intelligence authorities warn us—it will stay out of fashion a long time.

Mr Turnbull is fond of proclaiming that Australia too is a multicultural society, but this is loose talk. A multicultural society is a contradiction in terms, since common cultural understandings are the glue that holds a society together. Australia is really a multi-ethnic liberal society with an English-speaking common culture (like almost all other Anglosphere countries) and exotic tastes. Hindus, Sikhs, Italians, Greeks, Chinese, Vietnamese and other non-Anglo groups meet in an Australian public square and address their difficulties and each other in English. They conform without difficulty to the law and they operate inside common institutions.

They either are or become Australians with only the faintest touch of hyphenation. Their ethnic cultures (language, food, religion) they employ and celebrate at home or on ethnic feast days along with—increasingly—their neighbours. And where they seriously differ—on blasphemy, for instance—they don't try to enforce their beliefs on each other. They follow the ur-liberal principle: live and let live.

The exception is when a minority has settled political or religious beliefs at serious variance with the political institutions of the country—with the Constitution. If there were widespread support among Muslims for the imposition of sharia in Australia, for instance, that would be a serious problem because sharia treats women as inferior beings while Australia's political culture is rooted in sexual equality. Leading Australian Muslims deny any such conflict and argue that those Muslims who see one misunderstand their own religion.

Plainly, however, those Islamists who have decamped to ISIS have a quarrel with Western liberalism—along with those remaining in Australia who support and sympathise with them. What they want is to impose an Islamist puritanism on Western society that includes slavery and the murder of apostates. Killing random strangers as if in a war is how they try to break the West's will. It is Australia's good fortune that they are still very few in number and as yet constitute a local police problem rather than a political or a constitutional or a national security one.

That's no longer the case in France or in much of the rest of Europe. Mark Steyn summed up France's situation following the Paris murders as, "The barbarians are inside, and there are no gates."

The Islamists are growing in numbers, in part through immigration, but they are still a minority within a minority. Yet they have succeeded in reducing freedom of speech throughout Europe, and in local areas where the Islamists dominate they impose rules such as "no alcohol" and a "modest" dress code for women through threats and beatings. By contrast liberal governments tell Muslim pupils that they need not sing the national anthem if it offends them, and neurotically avoid giving the slightest offence to supposed Muslim sensitivities.

What is needed above all else is a recovery of moral self-confidence and an assertion of the liberal values that attracted Muslims and others to Western societies in the first place. But will that come from the political elites? Douglas Murray thinks not in his powerful polemic in this issue of *Quadrant*. He echoes a remark made two decades ago by Jean-Francois Revel: "The Left may sometimes be wrong, but the Right can never be right."

But there are only so many times that you can be wrong, even in politics.

# ASTRINGENCIES

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ANTHONY DANIELS

One should not read too much into a single case, of course: but not too little either.

A twenty-four-year-old man in England called Lee James was sentenced to life imprisonment for having kicked the head of his victim so many times (while shouting “Have some of that!”) that he died. Then he and a neighbour dragged the body to a public place, doused it in white spirit and set fire to it.

The dead man was called Bijan Ebrahimi, an immigrant from Iran who had become disabled through disease of his back. He was subjected to a long campaign of abuse by neighbours who accused him of being a paedophile. This was because Mr Ebrahimi filmed some local children destroying his flower-pots and also James drinking and smoking while in charge of one of his children on the lawn just outside his, Ebrahimi’s, window.

James complained to a passing police patrol of Ebrahimi’s “paedophilia”, and though James almost certainly had a criminal record, was known to be a violent “partner” of the mother of his children, and had a visage of inspissated malignity that could have been used by Lombroso as evidence for the plausibility of his theories, the police arrested Ebrahimi, who had long complained to them about the abuse he had suffered from James and others. James, who openly threatened that he would take the law into his own hands if something was not done about Ebrahimi, told the police that he was prepared to go to prison if he attacked Ebrahimi, and that his children would, when they were old enough, be proud of what he had done to protect them. A mob of local people cheered and shouted abuse as Ebrahimi was taken away by the police.

Ebrahimi was released without charge, the police having searched his phones and computer for incriminating material, and returned home. Soon afterwards, he filmed James threatening him in a terrifying way (three days before James killed him); Ebrahimi complained to the police several times and the very day before James killed him sent the police an e-mail telling them that he felt unsafe.

The police ignored all these cries for assistance. The fact is that when respectable people from a poor area call for help, our police always have paperwork to do that needs their more urgent attention. In effect the police are on the side of the wrongdoers.

James locked his “partner” and his children in the house while he was killing Ebrahimi, and on his return said that the problem had been “sorted”. When the police came to arrest him, he said, “I bet this is about that f\*\*\*ing paedo.” James later told the police, “I had so much anger in me, I just wanted him to leave my girls alone”: his girls on which Ebrahimi had not so much as laid a finger.

The human mind is a subtle instrument, capable of the most astonishing feats of bad faith, not only individually but in epidemic proportions. When Lee James was killing Ebrahimi he must have been aware that his anger was bogus, that he was angry with Ebrahimi not because he was a paedophile, for which there was no evidence whatever, but because he dared to criticise and was opposed to the psychopathic mores that reigned in the area in which he had the misfortune to live (as they now reign in so much of England), mores in which James himself fully partook. And he must also have known that it was his bogus indignation that allowed him to enjoy killing Ebrahimi with what he thought was a clear conscience.

Moreover, as I learnt from speaking to a thousand Lee Jameses, he was fully aware that he would not have had contact with his children for very long: that their mother, to whom he was violent, would at some time in the near future refuse to have anything further to do with him; that she would take another “partner” or series of “partners”, one or more of whom would sexually abuse his children; and that she would allow him, Lee James, no access to his children not because he was a bad parent (though obviously he was that), but because the latest “partner” would turn any contact with him into a *casus belli*, that is to say an excuse for violence against her. James would

contribute nothing to his children's upkeep, except an occasional pair of shoes or some such, purchased not because the children needed to be shod but to give him an excuse to have access to his former "partner" who was committing *lèse-majesté* by consorting with another "partner", or "partners", and who therefore needed to be taught a lesson in fidelity. And he would know all this because, in his experience and social environment, it was *the* (or at least *a*) standard pattern of child-rearing. Mr Ebrahimi was a witness to what was done around him, and therefore had to be driven out or neutralised.

Lee James would be perfectly aware, in at least part of his consciousness, that Ebrahimi was his moral superior, which was why he had to turn him into a monster so beyond the pale that he could rightfully be killed. And the mob who hurled abuse at Ebrahimi during his arrest were of the same ilk. In Britain, when an alleged paedophile is brought to court, a mob of slatternly mothers with their infants in tow gathers outside the court to scream their hatred at the defendant and beat their fists on the police van that transports him, apparently unaware that to expose small children to such a terrifying scene is itself a form of abuse. And yet, spoken to individually, it is not difficult to get them to recognise that their way of life is such as no child should have to experience, and which they would not want their children to imitate when they grew up. In other words, the mob is full of self-hatred and is right to be so.

This has all come about for a number of reasons acting in concert. The social security system in Britain makes it possible, and perhaps even profitable, for parents such as Lee James and his "partner" to bring children into the world without as much as a moment's thought as to whether they can support them by their own efforts. Come what may, the state will always be father to the child. But far more devastating has been the ideological gestalt switch that has taken place, so that what was once socially respectable has become socially despicable, and what was reprehensible has become

laudable. The problem with Ebrahimi was that he was too judgmental, not multicultural enough: he did not realise that beating your partner and drinking while pushing your infant in a pram is part of modern British culture, which he therefore should have respected more.

The transvaluation of all values in Britain is not confined only or even mainly to the class of which Lee James was a member. A few years ago I was the *de facto* vulgarity correspondent for a newspaper whose opposition to vulgarity was inconsistent, to put it mildly. The newspaper would send me to wherever a British crowd was gathering and behaving in a vulgar way—which was practically everywhere a crowd gathered.

I was sent to watch a football match to report on the crowd behaviour. The seats are now so expensive that football has become a middle-class game, at least for spectators who want to watch it live.

Next to me was a man with a son of about eleven. He seemed to be decent enough, fond of his son and generally well-behaved. Then suddenly he stood up and started pointing repeatedly at the opposing fans, extending his arm in a near-fascist salute (soccer may now be defined as the continuation of fascism by other means). He started to chant with an intonation of real hatred, "Who the f\*\*\* do you think

you are, who the f\*\*\* do you think you are?" I need hardly say that the opposing fans replied in kind. Fortunately the two sets of fans were kept apart by an army of police, who were not answering calls from such as Mr Ebrahimi.

Is this how he wanted his son to see him, I wondered; is this the example he wanted to give? It is only an anecdote, I know, but when an anecdote is one of a hundred or a thousand instances, it ceases to be a mere anecdote.

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*Anthony Daniels's latest book, published under his pseudonym Theodore Dalrymple, is the essay collection *Out into the Beautiful World* (New English Review).*

# Europe's Fatal Contradiction

Even more than most other first-world nations modern Europe suffers from a potentially fatal cognitive dissonance. All the time we hold two wholly contradictory ideas in our heads.

The first idea is that our countries are multicultural paradises where anyone from anywhere in the world can come and deserves to settle if they so wish. We believe that those who come here will assimilate, but at the same time we do not especially mind if they do not, and offer no incentives for them to do so. Indeed if they do not wish to assimilate we respect them for holding on to their own culture. At the same time it is natural that we should decry as “racist” anyone who wants to hold on to what is left of our own culture. This part of our brain talks about “integration” and “radicalisation” and “violent extremism” and all the other weakly euphemisms of our time.

Yet all the time our brains hold another idea—ordinarily pushed to the very recess of our minds but always capable of breaking out. This holds the possibility that this is all nonsense. That integration if it does ever happen takes centuries to occur and has certainly not happened in present-day Europe. This part of the brain knows from observation and from an awareness of history that a strong religious culture when placed into a weak and relativistic culture will make itself felt long before it will significantly adapt. If there is a reason why we repress this instinct and favour the wilfully optimistic version of events it is because the consequences of accepting this truth are so utterly calamitous and damn the majority beliefs of a whole generation.

The migration crisis, which has been going on for years but has gained particular attention this year, is a fine example of these two parts of our brain struggling with each other. This year Germany is talking of taking in an additional 800,000 citizens—or 1 per cent of its current population. It plans to bring in a similar number of people mainly from Muslim-majority countries in each of the coming years. In other European countries the same numbers emerge. Perhaps to see this best you have to see it on a local

level. In Malmo, Sweden, which once had a thriving Jewish community, just under 1000 Jews remain. Today, every day, around 1000 Muslim refugees arrive in Malmo. So every single day's immigration of new immigrants dwarfs the remnants of a long-established community.

There are so many things to be said about the rotten thought-culture that has led to this pass. But the most instructive way of considering the confusion of Europe is to consider something that Chancellor Merkel herself said only five years ago. Back in 2010 she gave what at the time appeared to be a crucial speech. “Multiculturalism has failed,” she declared. So striking and significant was that 2010 statement that the then French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, and British Prime Minister David Cameron gave their own “multiculturalism has failed” speeches in the months that followed.

I remember the excited copy that ran. I wrote some of it myself. But when you look back on those speeches of only five years ago they make less than no sense. If by “multiculturalism” Merkel, Sarkozy and Cameron meant—as they seemed to mean—the living of parallel lives in the same society, then what have they done in the five years since to change this around? If you go to parts of the north of England, to Marseilles or the suburbs outside Paris and Berlin, the lack of integration is as bad as it was then: the men who wander around the north of England dressed for the hillsides of Pakistan; the women who wander around London dressed for seventh-century Arabia. Have these people changed their views but not their mode of dress? It seems radically unlikely.

And so we come to the true perplexity: if multiculturalism had failed when immigration was relatively low, why on earth would it work now that immigration is at a historic high? Why would multiculturalism in Britain have failed in 2011 but not in 2015 when the UK government has seen a ten-year high in immigration even before you take the latest migrant-wave into account?

But then almost nothing about the grand schemes of Europe's political elites has made sense for some time. All are good at talking about how they will tackle problems "over there". Few if any have any idea what to do about our problems "over here".

After the latest terrorist atrocities in Paris, President Hollande said that France would be "merciless" in its pursuit of the perpetrators and in taking the war to the barbarians of ISIS. But surely he must know by now that this is the easy part. Bombing ISIS from the skies of Iraq or Syria is a pretty much cost-free exercise. The likelihood of losing even one French pilot is minimal and what fall-out there will be in Syria or Iraq can be ignored from France. The problem is the people at home. What is anybody going to do about them? What is Hollande going to do in an EU which has the free movement of peoples as one of its core objectives?

This is when a whole set of other aspects of our cognitive dissonance chime in. We will pretend, for instance, that we don't have the domestic problem we have because we will reassure ourselves and each other that the "vast majority" of Muslims in our countries are opposed to terrorism like that which occurred in Paris. Earlier this year, after the first atrocities of the year in the French capital, the BBC commissioned a poll of British Muslim opinion. It found that 27 per cent of British Muslims were "sympathetic" to the Paris terrorists with another 10 per cent either saying that they didn't know whether they were sympathetic to the attackers or refusing to answer the question. Our national broadcaster gave this story a necessarily positive spin by headlining it, "Most British Muslims oppose Mohammed cartoon reprisals". There is your "most" and that is your "majority". Only a mere quarter of the Muslims in your country are so fantastically unaware or unbothered about your laws and customs that they sympathise with violent reprisals for breaching Islamic "blasphemy" codes.

Two parts of the same brain. The first tells us that to be properly "European" we must allow anyone who wants to come here to come here; we must be against borders and for multiculturalism. The other part of the brain watches and waits. It can see that the new arrivals are not only coming in unprecedented numbers but are bringing unprecedented problems. The first part of the brain pretends they will assimilate and that given time Islam will go through its own "reformation". The second part of the brain starts to realise that we may not have that time.

What will be the long-term effects of this? I would suggest that, as the noted scholar of Islam Daniel Pipes has pointed out, the European

publics will migrate further and further to the political right. And in reaction the European political class will migrate further and further to the left. You can already see it. In Sweden one liberal newspaper editor responded to the latest polling triumphs by the until-recently pariah Sweden Democrats by saying that he would be happy to flood Sweden with ISIS fighters in order to punish the Swedish electorate for voting for the Sweden Democrats. That isn't such an unusual instinct. It is the same instinct that made one female refugee aid-worker and her colleagues hush up her recent rape at the hands of some recent arrivals. They feared that mentioning the rape might exacerbate anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe. This instinct fears that the European publics are far-Right extremists just waiting to break out, and the sad irony is that only by treating them in such a way for such a long time could anyone ever make them so.

The part of our brain that has fallen for the myths all these years has pushed restrictions on speech and behaviour and it is pushing them now. Sitting beside Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook at a UN lunch the other week in New York, Chancellor Merkel was heard by a microphone that was still live asking Zuckerberg what he was doing to stop Europeans writing anti-immigration things on Facebook. "We're working on it," was his reply.

And so we see the manner in which our continent will blow—restricting legitimate concerns and dismissing honest fears as dishonest bigotries. The only good news is that this suicidal part of our European mind, which has been the dominant part for several decades now, is beginning to lose ground to the part of the brain that still has some survival instinct. Perhaps it will succeed in wrestling back our collective mind. Perhaps it will be too late. What is certain is that after the dead of Paris are mourned the European publics will ask of their politicians why they have spent years setting the scene for just such attacks to happen. After the firebombing of *Charlie Hebdo's* offices the French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, criticised the magazine's publication of cartoons of Mohammed, saying, "Is it really sensible to pour oil on the fire?"

The European publics are beginning to ask, "Who made our societies into this fire?" There will be many physical casualties to come. But the next political casualties should be the entire political class who fed us lies for years because they themselves would not face up to some bitter truths.

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# Zealots and Fanatics, not Radicals

Islamic State and its media units release over 90,000 social media posts per day. That's nearly 33 million posts a year. As the head of MI5 stated, social media is the command and control network of radical Islamism.

The appeal of social media is evident. There are no gatekeepers. Messages posted from one remote or hidden location are immediately transmitted to the hip pocket of anyone with a SmartPhone.

After 9/11 a new wave of global Salafist jihadism turned to social media. Abu Musab al Suri developed the strategy of lone-wolf attacks and leaderless resistance online via his *Global Call to Resistance*. The Yemeni-born, but American-educated Anwar al Awlaki repackaged the message for Western youth and made jihad cooler than hip hop. Awlaki was killed in Yemen in 2011, but by then he had created the Jihadi John phenomenon in the West.

Awlaki and his successors, like the former West Sydney male stripper and boxer turned zealot, Feiz Mohammad, or failed Melbourne rapper, Neil Prakash aka Abu Khalid al Cambodi, use social media to brand the IS product. IS considers this aspect of their movement so important that in August they formed the Anwar al Awlaki Brigade, a special unit that includes at least ten Australians, to promulgate the message and recruit online. The brigade's media awareness is attuned to Western sensibilities. Segueing off a L'Oreal ad, for instance, a recent recruitment message targeting young Western women runs, "Cover girl, no; covered girl, yes. Because you're worth it."

The flow to Islamic State of young Muslim men and women brought up in secular, Western, multicultural societies demonstrates the success of the messaging. Western governments seem as shocked by the cultic appeal of IS as they were surprised by the rapidity and lethality with which it achieved de facto authority over vast swathes of Syria and Iraq.

In February 2015 the Obama administration felt constrained to convene a summit of like-minded democracies to counter violent extremism. The

United States discussed ways to "prevent violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States and abroad to commit acts of violence". During a summit described as a "strange and woolly affair", President Obama conveyed a curious impression of Western impotence, observing: "We all know there is no one profile of a violent extremist or terrorist, so there's no way to predict who will become radicalized."

Like a possum trapped in the headlights of an oncoming ute, the US, UK and Australian governments' default response is to introduce yet another tranche of counter-terror legislation and throw even more money into security agency budgets and counter-radicalisation strategies. Academic entrepreneurs and NGOs across the Anglosphere have, since 9/11 and 7/7, and contra Obama, exploited the funding opportunities available to establish a range of early warning initiatives that seek to identify those in danger of radicalisation. Yet after more than a decade of intervention they have singularly failed to curb the enthusiasm for jihad.

The Abbott and Turnbull governments have allocated over \$40 million to countering violent extremism. In recent months the Minister for Counter-Terrorism, Michael Keenan, made \$700,000 available to an Australian Intervention Support Hub for academics from ANU, Deakin and elsewhere "to research radicalisation and develop responses" for governments and community workers. The government devotes \$13.4 million specifically to counter radicalisation through programs such as "Living Safe Together". After Neil Prakash groomed fifteen-year-old Farhad Jabbar online to carry out a lone actor attack, resulting in the death of police accountant Curtis Cheng in October, the Turnbull government announced it would devote more funding to social programs aimed at "preventing youth radicalisation". Counter-terror coordinator Greg Moriarty hosted a meeting of state and federal officials, police intelligence agencies and

multicultural affairs and education bureaucrats to “develop a more co-ordinated approach for its de-radicalisation push”. The latest approach will stress the need for “social cohesion”. “Early intervention and community based solutions work best,” Moriarty averred. Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs Concetta Fierravanti-Wells fervently hoped to engage “the views of the Muslim community” and address “gaps” in the program of counter-radicalisation. Last month the Victorian and New South Wales governments announced funding amounting to \$72 million to address radicalisation. Explaining the Victorian programs, “terror expert” Greg Barton observed that they were “aimed at ensuring young people ... do not fall under the spell of those that would seek to radicalise them and damage their lives incredibly badly”. The new push reflects the fact that despite more than a decade of funding for de-radicalisation programs, they have, as one government spokesperson acknowledged, “failed to hit the mark”.

In the same week that state and federal governments announced the new initiatives, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the transnational Islamist party headquartered in London and which established a presence in Australia after 2001, denounced both the Australian oath of allegiance and the “forced assimilation” implied in singing the national anthem. British barrister and Hizb luminary

Ibtihal Bsis informed the delegates that “Islamic State is not really a problem” at all. Evidently, de-radicalisation so far has failed to get near the mark, let alone hit it.

In other words, while IS offers jihadi-cool messaging, the government responds with insipid pieties about cohesion achieved through culturally sensitive de-radicalisation programs that in the US, Europe and Australia have proved expensive and ineffective. It might be worth asking, before engaging more academics and bureaucratic agencies in taxpayer-funded programs, what precisely does the counter-terror community understand by “radicalism” and “radicalisation”?

### What’s in a name: radical or fanatic?

A cursory survey reveals that no government agency or counter-terror expert has paused to consider whether the term “radicalisation” in fact captures the process that converts a young Western

Muslim to the salafist cause. Indeed, governments, academics and police and security agencies rarely used the term before the London bombings of 2005. After 2005, it became the fashionable catch-all term to capture various aspects of the internal security, integration and foreign policy debate about Islamism. It also served at the same time both an analytic and a public policy function. Moreover, its attempted objectivity played into the notion of jihadi cool, for to be radical means in some sense to be street-smart. The political terminology matters. An adequate response needs an accurate diagnosis. George Orwell observed in 1948 that “the slovenliness of our language makes it easier to have foolish thoughts”. “Political chaos is connected with the decay of language,” he argued, or, more precisely, with prevailing orthodoxies that “conceal and prevent thought”.

This is precisely what has happened with the misuse of the term “radicalisation”. Radicalism, in fact, has a precise etymology. It entered modern usage in the nineteenth century in the context of political and economic reform and social progress. It was the nineteenth-century secular, liberal, utilitarian reformers associated with Jeremy Bentham and James Mill who devised the modern understanding of radicalism. It stood for a program of rational, constitutional, social and economic reform. Radicalism

as an ideology dismissed religion as irrational superstition and sought political reform along secular, capitalist and progressive democratic lines.

One thing we know about Islamic State and its message is that it does not do democracy or secular modernity. Thus it is not radical, nor does it engage in radicalisation. As Orwell pointed out, distorting meaning distorts understanding.

Rather than being radicalised, young Western Muslims are attracted to what a more religious age than our own recognised as enthusiasm, zealotry or fanaticism. This phenomenon has a long history in Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious understanding. Seventeenth-century Europe knew well the revived post-Reformation penchant for religious sectarianism, enthusiastic zealotry and its deracinating social consequences. Ben Jonson satirised the phenomenon of the religious enthusiast in plays such as *Bartholomew Fair* where characters like Zeal-of-the-Land Busy imposed their puritanical views on the wider populace. Fanatical millenarian

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sects like the Ranters or the Fifth Monarchists violated social and political norms during the English Civil War in order to establish what they thought would be the chiliastic millennium leading to the rule of Jesus Christ in England. Ranters like Abiezer Coppe claimed that “to the pure all things are pure” including, of course, murder and rape.

In the aftermath of the political chaos caused by religious sectaries, eighteenth-century social commentators, wits and philosophers like David Hume, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison identified the limited character of the zealot. Writing in the *Spectator* in 1711, Addison noted:

Zeal is ... a great ease to a malicious man, by making him believe he does God service while he is gratifying the bent of a perverse revengeful temper. For this reason we find that most massacres and devastations which have been in the world have taken their rise from a furious pretended zeal.

... the instruments [of the zealot are] Racks and Gibbets, Gallies and Dungeons; when he Imprisons Men's Persons, Confiscates their Estates, Ruins their Families and Burns the Body to save the Soul, I cannot stick to pronounce of such a one that ... his Faith is vain, and his Religion unprofitable.

Pope found that “graceless zealots” fight for “modes of faith”; hence, “his can't be wrong whose life is in the right”. Hume, meanwhile, thought fanaticism and enthusiasm had produced “the most cruel disorders in human society”. Hume, Pope and Addison would recognise in the activity of today's jihadi zealots fanaticism, not an anachronistic radicalism.

In other words, any analysis of jihadism's self-confirming zealotry suggests that those labelled “radicalised” are not really radicals at all. Ideological radicalism, properly understood, requires a clear break from traditional religion, of whatever form, in order to achieve a pluralist, secular modernity.

By contrast, a scriptural literalism based on the message of the Prophet Mohammad and the hadith of his rightly guided seventh-century successors, the Rashidun, fuels Islamic State's thought and practice. They look to past models purified by purificatory violence today to build tomorrow's religious utopia. Like the seventeenth-century puritanical sectaries they are fanatics who adapt the tenets of an ultra-traditional literalism to guide present action. Today's jihadi is an enthusiast as defined by the *Oxford Shorter English Dictionary*, namely,

one who is “possessed by a god” or in “receipt of divine communication”. No matter how deluded their actions appear to modern secular sensibilities, in their minds they are directly engaged in a divine mission to re-create the caliphate.

Therefore they are not radical in any meaningful sense of the word, because before the Enlightenment, it could be said that most of the world—and certainly Europe—often subscribed to non-negotiable religious precepts with a fanaticism similar to that which motivates present-day jihadism.

Both medieval Christendom and, in its aftermath, the early modern confessional state saw battle as an instrument of divine will, a providential means to deliver God's judgment. Even after the Enlightenment and with the decline of religious enthusiasm in Europe, the rise of political religions that replaced divine ordinance with ideologically determined nations, races or proletariats remained the touchstone of purifying violence. These ideas reached their apocalyptic apogee in Nazi Germany.

By contrast, the progressive emergence of cosmopolitan, representative, liberal democratic modes of rule in the nineteenth century constituted the “radical” structural break with the past. As a consequence, modern democratic pluralism in the West embraced secularism and, with it, as Max Weber observed, a condition of disenchantment. Soteriological order receded before a world increasingly governed by scientific reasoning. This secular rationalist worldview achieved spectacular and revolutionary change, but also narrowed the horizon of the good life, rendering citizenship modular and fulfilment to be gained through physical and material rewards.

It also had a down side. From at least the late nineteenth century, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers as different as Freud, Durkheim and Nietzsche recognised in modernity not only democratic opportunities for self-discovery and the revision of life choices, but also the anomie, anxiety and alienation associated with a complex mass society. By the late twentieth century writers as various as Herbert Marcuse, Tom Wolfe and Christopher Lasch identified a modern culture of narcissism and anxiety where altruism dissolves into an increasingly atomised, relativist and technomanagerialist world.

In other words, secular modernity offers a radical form of life against which the jihadist rages, considering it a “hideously schizophrenic” condition, as the Muslim Brotherhood leader Sayyid Qutb argued in the 1950s. Indeed, from the fanatic perspective, the *kufir* world order is weak, fragmented and ready for the taking because it lacks

the capacity to submit to a politically religious truth. Refusal to recognise this point exposes the scale of the problem facing Western governments. It also allows the stage upon which the modern zealot can disport his oppression, proselytise and strategise.

The global salafist jihad's appeal resides, then, in its ability to *re-enchant* the world through a manichean worldview and a millenarian vision. Its style is not dissimilar to the manner in which the seventeenth-century sectaries anticipated a new heaven and a new earth or the Nazis offered a racially pure future as a means of overcoming the failings of depression Germany in the 1930s. Contemporary salafist fanatics thus transform the fears and anxieties of disaffected sections of the diasporic Muslim youth in the West into a non-negotiable enthusiasm via the use of social media.

### What is to be done?

To curb the jihadis' enthusiasm, Western societies need desperately to recuperate their foundational understanding of what political activity entails and how it forms the basis of a tolerant and pluralist good life. This will not be straightforward, as there are no quick, technocratic fixes to the problems of urban disenchantment.

However, we can make a start by abandoning the language of radicalisation, which perversely misreads the problem. De-radicalisation reflects and reinforces progressive secular rationalism that refuses to treat religious worldviews as coherent within their own politico-theological terms of reference. It persists in portraying disaffected Muslims inclined to travel to Syria or snub the national anthem as "clowns" and "numbskulls", the pejoratives Australian politicians applied to Hizb ut-Tahrir (the party of zeal), rather than zealots that in some cases are willing to die and behead for the realisation of their total vision.

The result is that public policy in the West ignores fanatic agency and responds instead in self-consciously depoliticised ways. For Professor Greg Barton this requires communities to befriend the local jihadis. Islamic State, Barton claims, "offers friendship. They're filling a void." What "we have to provide", with taxpayer-provided pelf, is "alterna-

tive forms of friendship". In this approach there is only the need to de-program those who have been "radicalised" with a mixture of therapy and feel-good workshops, overseen by social workers offering empathy and boosting self-esteem.

In effect, this criminological therapeutic approach treats the converted zealot not as a danger to the wider society but as a victim pumped full of ideological steroids by unscrupulous online recruiters who, like paedophiles, ruthlessly groom their otherwise innocent prey. The approach becomes even more suspect when extended to the case of the young women who trip off to IS to offer themselves as jihadi brides. De-radicalisation paints these young women as the deluded subjects of brainwashing. The simple but harsh truth is that, like the men they embrace, they have found meaning in an enthusiasm which the wider society finds rebarbative, but which inspires action.

Neither "radical" nor victims, they are largely immune to de-radicalisation programs promoted by Western governments because there is not much that is particularly radical in jihadist self-understanding. Arguably, it is we in the West who are deluded, and we should make a start by "de-radicalising" our own thinking.

After much tergiversation David Cameron's Conservative government appears to have grasped this point. At the Conservative Party conference in September, Cameron expressed his determination "to tear up the narrative that says Muslims are persecuted and the West deserves what it gets" and to take on not radicalisation but "extremism in all its forms, the violent and the non-violent". Turnbull and Obama, who have much in common with Cameron's brand of liberal conservatism, might be advised to adopt a similar anti-fanatical, anti-extremist policy.

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# A Time for Enlightened Patriotism

On Friday November 13, 2015, three teams of armed Salafi jihadists did what soldiers are supposed to do in a war—they attacked the enemy. The targeted enemy, in this particular case, happened to be the defenceless civilians of Paris. Latest estimates at the time of writing are at least 128 murdered, with as many as 300 wounded, many critically.

French President Francois Hollande has declared this latest atrocity in Paris to be an “act of war”, although many in the West are not sure to what war he refers. Ever since the Salafi jihadist attacks on America on September 11, 2001, the political class in basically every Western nation has been keen to play down the notion of an emerging civilisational war between the apocalyptic millennialism of Sunni revivalism and the democratic and secular sensibilities of modernity. President George W. Bush addressed himself to “Global War on Terror”, a deeply ambiguous expression at best, while President Barack Obama’s use of the term “Overseas Contingency Operations” is not so much evasive as downright obfuscatory.

President Hollande has accurately portrayed the events of Friday 13 as “an abomination and a barbaric act”. He pledges that France will be “determined, unified and together” and “ruthless in its response to Islamic State”, and yet the question remains—for both the political class and the intelligentsia in most Western countries—what, exactly, is the Islamic State and how can it be fought?

The first problem is that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s would-be caliphate in Mesopotamia constitutes but one manifestation of the concept of “Islamic State”. The terrorist organisation Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement), according to its own covenant and propaganda, seeks to fashion “an Islamic state”; Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is hell-bent on transfiguring the Republic of Turkey into his own neo-Ottoman version of an Islamic state; Nigeria’s Boko Haram has an African model in mind; the Nusra Front has a Syrian rendering;

Jemaah Islamiyah is a South-East Asian adaptation—and the list goes on.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 there was some attempt by the mainstream in the West to comprehend—without demonising—the phenomenon of latter-day Islamic revivalism. Bernard Lewis’s *What Went Wrong* (2002) and *The Crisis of Islam* (2003) made it to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list. Lewis, a giant in Middle East scholarship, recognised that a three-cornered struggle existed in the Greater Middle East, between autocrats (tribal or otherwise), secular-minded reformers, and Islamists, each battling in its own way with the existential challenges of modernity. Lewis’s brief reign as a public sage soon faded as the PC brigade, often influenced by the anti-Western theses of characters like Edward Said, regained their position as gatekeepers of what is permissible in civic discourse. There would be no more talk—at the political centre, at least—of things going “wrong” with Islam, or Islam experiencing any kind of “crisis”. Self-delusion on the grandest scale ensued as a result.

W.H. Auden spoke about the “low, dishonest decade” of 1930s appeasement, and yet I fear our political class, not to mention our intelligentsia, have engaged in something far worse. During the terrorist frenzy in France that culminated in the January 7 *Charlie Hebdo* slayings, so many “experts” made so many preposterous announcements it proved impossible to keep track of them. Even many of those who momentarily designated themselves members of the *Je suis Charlie* camp expressed a concern that the writers and cartoonists at *Charlie Hebdo* had committed the “sin of provocation”.

Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent for the *Independent*, declared that France’s role in Algeria—which concluded fifty years ago—“provides a fearful context for every act of Arab violence against France”. Is he still making these mad pronouncements after the Friday 13 massacres? The Kouachi killers of January 7 were, admittedly, of Algerian

heritage, but does “identity”—of any kind—provide an excuse or reason to murder people in cold blood?

Unfortunately, the politics of identity both facilitates and justifies aberrant behaviour. Identity politics encourages us to see ourselves as a member of a group based on our sexual preference, gender, religious affiliation, and so on. For the modern-day Left, at any rate, it is through our group identity, rather than the sovereignty of self-determination, that we are expected to act and be judged in the public domain. A case in point, for instance, is the forty Muslim children in a Victorian school who were excused from hearing the national anthem because of the sensitivities of their group identity. Here, in a nutshell, is the foolishness of acquiescing to group identity—sectarianism by another name.

When Tony Abbott appeared on *The Bolt Report* recently, he proudly pointed to his record on national security during his two years in power. He correctly noted that his Operation Sovereign Borders had brought an end to irregular maritime arrivals, and that European countries would be safer if they were in our position. He also argued that Australia was safer for the five bipartisan pieces of legislation on national security that are now in place. There had also been extra money put into the various security agencies, and Australia’s jet fighters were playing their part in the war against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. All of this is necessary, I would argue, but not sufficient.

On a number of occasions during the interview Abbott referred to “our team”, an echo of his statement in mid-2014 that all citizens, regardless of their respective group identities, had to get behind Team Australia. At the time of his original announcement, we might recall, Tony Abbott was lambasted from every direction. The central complaint was that the prime minister of the day was exploiting the fear of domestic terrorism to improve his standings in the polls. It might be right that Abbott never had the charisma or universal appeal to unite the country behind the kind of enlightened patriotism that allows us to remain individuals—and, if we must, identify with our various social groups—but at the very same time be united in a core set of demo-

cratic values that make us Australians. If I could change one line in the song “We Are Australian” it would be “We are one, but we are many” to “We are many, but we are one”. Obviously the rhyme and the rhythm would be wrong but the message would be great.

There were three detonations at the Stade de France, which was hosting 80,000 people for a football game between France and Germany. Two of the blasts were the result of suicide attackers. In the end, luckily, the death toll at the stadium did not rise above three. Although the explosions shook the crowd, reports suggest that the spectators did not panic and, in the end, left the stadium singing the French national anthem, “La Marseillaise”. Is that not just another way of saying, “We are many, but we are one”?

Frazer Egerton bases his book *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism* (2011) on real research and authentic case studies. He comes to the common-sense conclusion that religion, or more specifically religious culture, is crucial in shaping the outlook of a militant jihadist born and raised in the West. Of course, there are many Muslims who are proud to be Australians, and a number of them I count among my favourite friends. Nevertheless, to keep insisting that

Islam *per se* is the religion of peace and that is the end of the matter does not serve the best interests of anyone, except those who do not believe in the possibility of enlightened patriotism.

The ultra-Right in France, Marine Le Pen’s National Front, might well experience a boost in popularity because of these latest acts of terrorism. She was already tipped by some to win the first round of the 2017 French presidential elections, and now there is every chance she will go all the way to the Élysées Palace. The political centre or political mainstream in France only has itself to blame by refusing to face up to the reality of Islamic revivalism and addressing the problem with liberal—but nevertheless genuine—policies. Hiding behind political correctness was never going to be an answer.

Daryl McCann has a blog at <http://darylmccann.blogspot.com.au>.

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# The Last Bastion of Aboriginal Separatism

Writing in the *Guardian* in March 2014, the Australian film-maker and activist John Pilger accused Australian child protection authorities of perpetrating a repeat of the “infamous Stolen Generation of the last century”. Drawing attention to the fact that the number of indigenous children in “out-of-home” care today is five times what it was in the mid-1990s, Pilger argued that “assimilation remains Australian government policy in all but name”, based on an “official attitude” in Australia that regarded indigenous people as “morally deficient”.

The growth in the number of indigenous children taken into care across Australia has led to claims of a “new Stolen Generation” becoming commonplace. But the parallels drawn with the Stolen Generations are inappropriate: the removal of children is hardly based on race, but on demonstrable family and community dysfunction in some indigenous communities. The escalating child welfare crisis in these communities in recent years is measured by, and is the root cause of, the increasing number of indigenous children who have been removed from their families and communities.

The politically charged assertion that race is the issue overlooks the well-founded child safety concerns that drive decisions to remove children. It also overlooks the shortages of suitable carers due to high levels of social and personal dysfunction in indigenous communities, which prevents placing removed children in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP). This accounts for the inability to place all indigenous children in “culturally appropriate” kinship care placements with relatives or other local community members to maintain connections to indigenous culture.

Focusing on race also misses the bigger issue: the real concern is not too much child removal but too little, and not too few kinship placements, but too many inappropriate ones. The activists and indigenous community representatives and organisations that make heated claims about a repeat of the

Stolen Generations need to be held to account for the results of the separatist child protection policies they endorse, which threaten to further encourage child protection authorities to keep abused and neglected children in unsafe and damaging situations with their parents, or to place children in unsuitable kinship placements.

There have been long-standing concerns about how part of the national response to the Stolen Generations has compromised the care and protection of indigenous children. The use of kinship care as the preferred placement option may have mitigated concerns about repeating past practices. But in the worst cases, the determination to keep indigenous children with kin in low-quality placements in dysfunctional communities for the sake of preserving culture and identity have been catastrophic, and have allowed abusers, particularly the perpetrators of child sexual abuse, to continue to abuse children.

The common belief that it is right to place indigenous children with kin has been powerfully and emotionally fostered by the annual commemoration of National Sorry Day on May 26. This date is the anniversary of the 1997 tabling in federal parliament of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s *Bringing Them Home* report on the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (“the Stolen Generations Report”), the release of which generated a wave of sympathy and the demand for a national parliamentary apology.

The attention that *Bringing Them Home* drew to the stories of victims belonging to the Stolen Generations and the harmful impact of past child removal practices on indigenous individuals, families and communities intensified the commitment to practising the ACPP. In effect, the ACPP has been reinvented as a national commitment to avoiding a repeat of the perceived errors of the past, which denied Aboriginal children contact with kin

and culture.

However, worthy sentiments to right the wrongs of past mistakes make a bad situation worse when children are left in harmful environments. The association with the Stolen Generations, and the attendant sensitivities and political challenges it poses, have allowed the ACPP to become something of a last bastion for indigenous separatism: the last, unquestioned area of indigenous policy still decisively informed by the ideas and objectives of the movement for Aboriginal self-determination.

In reality, the ACPP and other forms of “culturally appropriate” child protection practices were developed before the national discussion of past indigenous child removal practices sparked by *Bringing Them Home*. The ACPP needs to be understood as a product of a wider political campaign for Aboriginal rights that emerged in the 1970s, which was preoccupied with the pursuit of the goal of self-determination—political, legal, social and cultural—in all areas of indigenous policy, including child protection. The real subject for discussion regarding indigenous child protection should be how political considerations, as distinct from child welfare considerations, account for how the child protection system treats indigenous children.

The ACPP was first proposed by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs in the late 1970s, and its implementation as national policy embedded in child welfare legislation was agreed to by all states and territories in 1986. The intention was to address the legacy of decades of assimilationist child removal policies. However, the development of the ACPP, and the decision to mandate its application through Australian child welfare laws and officially deal with Aboriginal children under a separatist approach, was also a result of the politicisation of the Stolen Generations issue, which was taken up as an important part of the political agenda of the campaign for Aboriginal rights.

Aboriginal self-determination was based on the idea that Aboriginal advancement required the separate development of Aboriginal people on their traditional lands, under their own political, legal and social organisations, and according to their own cultural and spiritual values. The doctrine was inspired by the national liberation movements that sprang up after the Second World War in Asia,

South America and Africa, which won colonised peoples the right to govern themselves.

A new age of Aboriginal political consciousness that began in the late 1960s essentially cast aside the principle that underpinned the successful 1967 constitutional referendum—that Aboriginal Australians should have the same rights as other Australian citizens. This principle of equality was superseded by the goal of self-determination and the principle that Aborigines should have separate rights and separate political, legal and social-service regimes, including the special right to recover and retain traditional culture and identity.

As in other post-colonial nationalist movements, indigenous Australians were thought to require their own political, legal and social institutions to protect and promote their distinctive culture. The institutional structure that developed chiefly took the form of “Aboriginal-controlled” organisations which were responsible for delivery of culturally appropriate, taxpayer-funded health, education and other services to Aboriginal communities.

The granting of land rights (communal ownership of traditional lands) to Aboriginal people created miniature “states” over which Aboriginal organisations exercised quasi-sovereignty. This homeland movement began with the Aboriginal land councils responsible for the local government of Aboriginal communities in the 1200 homeland settlements across Australia which, in theory, allowed Aboriginal people to live traditional hunter-and-gatherer lifestyles and maintain their cultural and spiritual connection to their ancestral lands.

Under this model, it was assumed that for Aboriginal self-determination to have full political and cultural coherence, Aboriginal people, in the homelands at least, not only needed separate local government and property rights, but also needed to live under separate, culture-based laws and have separate, culture-based schooling. The common denominator of indigenous policy then became the attaining of political, legal and social institutional autonomy as a means of recovering, maintaining and preserving traditional culture.

The belief that indigenous children required culturally appropriate care that came into vogue in the 1970s was an international phenomenon among the “First Nations” in the United States, Canada, New

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Zealand and Australia. Under the Aboriginal mission system that operated from the middle of the nineteenth century until the late 1960s, Aborigines had been subjected to a range of paternalistic controls that sought to suppress traditional culture. Repudiating past child removal practices became a rallying point for political awareness. For when cast in post-colonial terms these practices were presented as the leading edge of policies that had aimed to destroy traditional culture by assimilating Aboriginal populations into the white mainstream, as Aboriginal children who were removed from their families had been encouraged to reject their Aboriginality and cultural heritage.

How strong the influence of the doctrine of Aboriginal self-determination was over the formation of indigenous policy is exemplified by indigenous child protection policy. The formulation of the ACPP was as much a matter of ending cultural domination and validating the principles that inspired the separatist agenda as of child welfare and avoiding and addressing past mistreatment. For indigenous political movements in post-colonial countries, including the Aboriginal self-determination movement in Australia, the restoration of traditional culture by all means possible, including the care of children, became the definitive political objective. The goal was to reverse the subordinate position and inferior status that colonial invasion and its concomitant oppression of indigenous society had entailed.

The way child protection policy was taken up as part of a much wider agenda of Aboriginal self-determination is evident in what can be considered the founding text of the Stolen Generations issue, Peter Read's 1981 report, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969*, published by the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The politicisation of the Stolen Generations was typified by Read's claim that past child removal practices had sought to "breed out" the Aboriginal race, and that it was a "story of attempted genocide" by "White Australia", which sought to assimilate Aboriginal people and eradicate all traces of an Aboriginal culture assumed to be inferior. The theme of "cultural genocide"—which would perpetually feature in advocacy surrounding the Stolen Generations—was a powerful means of raising Aboriginal political awareness and a powerful argument for separatism.

By these means, the memory of assimilationist policies and practices reinforced the centrality of the recovery of lost culture to Aboriginal political consciousness and directly informed the logic of the ACPP. It followed that Aboriginal culture

and Aboriginal identity were held to be synonymous. And because child removal practices were one of the ways traditional culture had been suppressed and Aborigines had been assimilated into the mainstream, it was decreed that in the name of self-determination, Aboriginal children must have continuous contact with their culture to maintain their unique cultural identity. Thus, in the lexicon of indigenous affairs, the use of the term "culture" across a range of policy areas has a politicised meaning and is virtually interchangeable with the term "self-determination".

By the early 1980s, the right of Aboriginal people to look after Aboriginal children and sustain Aboriginal culture had become a highly symbolic and crucially important means by which the cause of Aboriginal self-determination was advanced. Recognition of the Aboriginal right to self-determination came to be expressed, in part, by official recognition of this communal right. The political goal and principle of the movement for self-determination—that the advancement of Aboriginal culture required a separate institutional structure—was accepted and authenticated when the states and territories agreed to practise the ACPP in the mid-1980s. State legislation giving effect to the ACPP also gave official recognition and privileged status to Aboriginal organisations granted the right to formal "community consultation" and participation in placement decisions concerning Aboriginal children. Hence, the New South Wales Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act, for example, includes "Aboriginal specific principles" that incorporate the language and intent of Aboriginal separatism. The act (in the words of the 2007 Wood Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in New South Wales) declares:

Aboriginal people are to participate in the care and protection of their children and young persons "with as much self-determination as is possible" and the Minister may negotiate and agree with Aboriginal people to the implementation of programs and strategies that promote self-determination.

Picking up the major political themes of Peter Read's report, the *Bringing Them Home* report controversially argued that racism had motivated the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and formed part of a genocidal policy of forced assimilation of so-called "half-caste" children into the white community.

In the wake of the divisive debate and controversies generated by the High Court's Mabo

decision and the subsequent native title legislation, *Bringing Them Home* upped the political stakes in indigenous affairs. Its claims about genocide renewed the moral force of the separatist agenda. This reflected the politics of the report's co-author, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice commissioner, Mick Dodson, who had been a leading figure in Aboriginal politics since the 1970s and a prominent activist for Aboriginal self-determination. The intensely political nature and purpose of the report stemmed from the way that drawing national attention to the Stolen Generations provided a powerful means of re-politicising the issue and advancing the cause of Aboriginal self-determination through discussion of indigenous child protection policy.

An important feature of *Bringing Them Home*, therefore, was the policy recommendations it made regarding the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and the need to reduce the number of Aboriginal child removals to prevent a repeat of the policies that had led to the Stolen Generations. The essence of these recommendations was that current child protection practices were as abhorrent as past practices, because it was claimed that decisions to remove Aboriginal children were based on an inherently racist view of Aboriginal culture. *Bringing Them Home* concluded that while the laws and language of child protection had changed, the attitude

towards Aboriginal children and families remained "overwhelmingly one of cultural domination and inappropriate and ineffective servicing".

At the heart of these attitudes as described by the report, which were paternalistic at best and racist at worst, was a conflict between Western (that is mainstream Australian) and Aboriginal cultural values regarding children and families. Child protection caseworkers were accused of failing to understand and respect Aboriginal family practices such as lax parental supervision, encouraging children to be independent and self-reliant, and the involvement of extended kin networks in rearing children. Because these practices differed from the Western view of the "normal" nuclear family, "abnormal" Aboriginal customs were incorrectly labelled as neglectful and seen as pathological, dysfunctional and indicative of problems with

the family.

Even at the time, this analysis of "cultural bias" accounting for the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the care system glossed over the reality of social and family dysfunction in some Aboriginal communities. The sort of culturally determined parenting practices described above may have been suitable to the social conditions of the past, but the conditions that gave rise to them no longer exist; these practices no longer function well in the present. The defence of traditional culture, which downplayed its impact on child well-being, minimised the raft of genuine child protection concerns that accounted for the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care, especially the fact that the most common form of maltreatment experienced by Aboriginal children is chronic parental neglect of basic needs, including "adequate food, shelter, clothing, supervision, hygiene or medical attention".

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*Bringing Them Home* was significant in applying principles of Aboriginal self-determination, in relation to child protection, in a culturally relativist manner. It suggested that a different, culturally appropriate, standard should apply in decision-making on behalf of Aboriginal children. The emphasis placed on cultural respect and awareness, and the use of culture to explain the uniqueness of family life in Aboriginal communities, encouraged the use of cultural

practices and differences to explain away problems in Aboriginal families, so caseworkers could avoid being accused of making culturally insensitive or racist judgments. This essentially demanded that the reality of dysfunction be overlooked, and gave culture precedence over child welfare.

The *Bringing Them Home* analysis has lasting implications for indigenous child protection—the question of "culture" remains pivotal to what is and isn't done to protect indigenous children. Distilling the findings of the body of research into culturally appropriate policy that has grown out of *Bringing Them Home*, the 2007 Wood Report asserted:

It could be difficult for caseworkers and others, with an understanding that values the nuclear family above other conceptualisations of the "family", to have any insight into the different

kind of information that may be required for them to assess the safety of an Aboriginal child, or the appropriateness of the potential options available within the family and community to meet the care and protection needs of the child ... Caseworkers raised in Anglo-Celtic society may find it difficult to understand and reflect in casework ... the complexity of Aboriginal family and kinship relationships that are important for a child, and for making decisions about where the child should live, if he or she cannot live with parents.

The Wood Report quoted with approval a 2004 Victorian Department of Human Services report, *Protecting Children*, which listed as one of ten “priorities for children’s well-being and safety in Victoria” the need to ensure that “the system as a whole is inclusive of Indigenous cultures and values”. The stress placed on creating an “inclusive” system explicitly made culture (and the underlying politics of Aboriginal self-determination, since Aboriginal control of services was the chief means of achieving inclusiveness) the priority, not child welfare. This priority, along with the separatist rationale for culturally appropriate child protection policy, was explicitly set out in another report cited by Wood and commissioned by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care and the Victorian Department of Human Services, which boldly stated:

*An individualistic approach that focuses on the child’s needs without proper consideration of their parent/s’ and communities’ circumstances has been criticised by Indigenous groups in Canada, New Zealand and Australia as failing to take into account Indigenous understandings of family and children. [Emphasis added]*

When this “culturally appropriate” rationale is added to concerns about “stealing” Aboriginal children, “culture” becomes a powerful justification for lack of action by child protection authorities in Aboriginal child welfare cases. It encourages under-responding to the protective needs of Aboriginal children out of fear of being judgmental or culturally insensitive at best, and racist at worst, and can lead to Aboriginal children being left in circumstances from which non-Aboriginal children would be removed.

The policy and practice advice in the standard literature on indigenous child protection amounts, then, to subjecting indigenous children to double standards and racism in the name of respecting culture. It is also calculated to raise fears about a

new Stolen Generation, to make child protection authorities reluctant to intervene in dysfunctional and dangerous indigenous families. This is a very powerful deterrent for child protection authorities because of the role that (white) social workers played in past child removal practices. The desire to apologise and make amends for social workers’ involvement in the Stolen Generations is a key factor that explains why the profession was so quick to endorse the ACPD and continues to support its practice today.

Culturally appropriate indigenous child protection policies mean that we are practising a form of 1970s-style separatism that in other areas of indigenous policy is now widely acknowledged to be the chief cause of the gap between the social and economic outcomes for disadvantaged indigenous people and other Australians. Nevertheless, the ACPD, or rather the indigenous policy thinking of the 1970s, continues to be applied to drive processes and evaluate outcomes in indigenous child protection policy, even though it advances the outdated political objective of Aboriginal self-determination at the expense of child welfare. The same sort of policy advice contained in *Bringing Them Home* is being redeployed to explain the worsening over-representation of indigenous children in care and to promote non-intervention in indigenous family and community dysfunction.

The findings and recommendations of recent official inquiries into child protection in Victoria and Queensland demonstrate how the politics of indigenous child protection distorts perceptions and debate. This includes the cultural relativism that evidently dominates the standard literature informing indigenous child protection practice. This literature encourages caseworkers to respect cultural differences between mainstream and indigenous family practices, such as lack of proper parental care and inadequate parental supervision in indigenous families. Such respect comes at the price of underestimating the threat to child welfare when children are left in unsafe environments or placed in substandard kinship care.

The 2012 report of the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry (the Cummins Report), lamented that despite recognition of the traumatic experiences of the Stolen Generations, the number of Aboriginal children in care remained “unacceptably high”. While it was accepted that over-representation in care reflected the entrenched disadvantage and dysfunction in many Aboriginal families, the Cummins Report endorsed taking a “holistic view” of the needs of Aboriginal communities and concluded that “outcomes for vulnerable

Aboriginal children and families will only improve once practical gains in Aboriginal self-determination about children and families are achieved”.

The Cummins Report’s recommendations included advising that “culturally competent approaches to family and statutory child protection services for Aboriginal children and young people should be expanded”. It also recommended delegating full responsibility for the provision of out-of-home care for Aboriginal children to Aboriginal communities, on the basis that “such a plan will enhance self-determination and provide a practical means for strengthening the cultural links for vulnerable Aboriginal children”.

Prioritising culture and self-determination satisfied the political principle of Aboriginal self-determination—and the interests of Aboriginal-controlled organisations that stood to benefit by way of taxpayer funding for “culturally appropriate” services. It also alleviated community anxieties about the potential for current child removal practices to repeat the history of the Stolen Generations. But the Cummins Report paid only passing attention to the best interests of Aboriginal children, and was silent about the impact on child welfare of “culturally appropriate” child protection practices. This flew in the face of the major reservations about kinship care that had been flagged by no less than the peak Aboriginal out-of-home care body, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA):

it was never the intent of the ACPP to place children with members of their family or community who presented a danger to them. If we do not protect Aboriginal children from abuse, the legacy will be a new generation of adults/parents who view abuse as normative rather than unacceptable and harmful.

The 2013 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (the Carmody Report) appears at a glance to have taken a different approach. The Carmody Report implicitly acknowledged that “culturally appropriate” policy and practice were compromising child welfare when it stated:

efforts to reduce over-representation should not result in a different standard of protection being

afforded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children than that afforded non-Indigenous children.

Yet rather than take this insight through to its logical conclusion—that different standards should not apply to indigenous children—the Carmody Report emulated the Cummins Report by focusing on the alleged need for an even more culturally appropriate child protection regime.

The Carmody Report began with endorsing the view that, even given the social dysfunction in indigenous communities, the over-representation of indigenous children was attributable to “misperceptions about child-rearing practices in Aboriginal families ... lead[ing] to incorrect assumptions about children’s protective needs in some circumstances”. This analysis of the supposed problem led directly to the major recommendation: because “keeping children out of the system is made more difficult by departmental officers having a poor understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and family practices”, Carmody recommended that Aboriginal-controlled organisations have a “more meaningful role in the delivery of statutory child protection practice”, as per the self-determination principles of the

Child Protection Act. The report envisaged not just greater consultation about the care and protection of indigenous children, but also a delegation of “responsibility for statutory practice over time” to Aboriginal-controlled agencies that were “familiar with local circumstances and have the requisite cultural competence”.

The Carmody Report noted that the proportion of indigenous children in care who were placed in accordance with the ACPP was just over 50 per cent, down from 64 per cent in 2006. It also noted competing views on kinship care, where some stakeholders felt the ACPP was not given due importance in making decisions about placements for indigenous children, while others felt it was given too much weight.

At face value, the Carmody Report endorsed the principle that “the child’s overall best interests should always be paramount”. Yet the message it sent on the key issue—whether child welfare or culture should take precedence in making decisions about kinship placements—was mixed at best.

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The Carmody Report not only recommended that Aboriginal-controlled organisations have input into identification and assessment of potential care, but it also stressed that “all reasonable efforts should be made to exhaust potential kinship carers for children”.

“Reasonable efforts” amounted to recommending a “culturally appropriate” approach that gave priority to compliance with the ACPP above considerations of child welfare. Carmody recommended the use of a special assessment tool for indigenous carers that employed

a conversational “yarning” style to assess key areas of carer competency, and visual cards to identify competency in each of the core areas ... enabling potential kinship carers to participate fully in the assessment process.

The justification for employing a simplified, less rigorous form of assessment was not just to overcome the evident illiteracy of potential kinship carers. There was also the need to “make the process less confronting” because:

some adults can be reluctant to seek approval as kinship carers because they find the assessment process intimidating. Many have reported feeling that their own ability to care for their children has been put under the spotlight during the process.

The emphasis the Carmody Report appeared to place on children’s best interests was dubious; its highly questionable recommendations can be read as an official warrant to afford indigenous children separate and unequal treatment and a lesser standard of protection.

**I**ndigenous politics, in combination with concerns about preventing a repeat of the Stolen Generations, distorts indigenous child protection policy. This political distortion of priorities means that instead of accepting and dealing with the increasing difficulty of reconciling the commitment to maintaining contact with kin and culture with child welfare, in the context of the worsening child welfare crisis in indigenous communities, the debate is dominated by restatements of the political positions assumed in the 1970s and 1990s. This is

evident not only in official literature such as recent public inquiries, but also in other opinion-shaping commentary and analysis produced by the likes of Pilger and his fellow activists.

The explosive claims that racist policy and genocidal intent are behind the over-representation of indigenous children in care also feature in commentary on indigenous child protection by Paddy Gibson, a senior researcher at Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney. Based on the fact that the number of indigenous children currently in care is greater than at any time during the Stolen Generations period, Gibson endorses the view that this represents a “new Stolen Generation”, driven by a return to what is essentially the assimilation policy of earlier eras.

Gibson has acknowledged that child removals are a consequence of the reality that many Aboriginal communities “suffer developing world living conditions”. But his analysis could be viewed as updating the *Bringing Them Home* account of “paternalistic attitudes” framing Aboriginal culture itself as a child welfare problem, while (contradictorily) calling for greater government investment in “community development”—code for Aboriginal-controlled social services, and a call to repeat and extend the failed policies of Aboriginal self-determination.

According to Gibson, “the triumphant politics of assimilation have exacerbated the drive to remove Aboriginal children”. This appears to claim that growth in indigenous child removals is a result of the policy shift in recent times away from the separatist agenda and towards mainstreaming of health, education and other services for indigenous communities. Politicised claims about racism driving removals overlook the reality that today, child protection policy is principally driven by the opposite of assimilation, due to the commitment to the ACPP. Moreover, it aggravates the way that Aboriginal politics, in the guise of respecting culture, downplays the genuine child welfare concerns that exist in indigenous communities.

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*Jeremy Sammut is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies. This is an edited extract from his book *The Madness of Australian Child Protection: Why Adoption Will Rescue Australia’s Underclass Children*, published by Connor Court last month.*

## The Flow

Mostly it happens outside  
hunkered down by a fence line  
dividing land into rectangles  
or using T-square and tape measure  
to cut a straight line through timber  
when you pause for a rest  
sweaty and tired  
with no one around  
and no particular sound.

Mostly it happens in the country  
and mostly you have to be alone  
so there is no conversation  
no human interaction to distract you  
and nothing in your mind  
no planning or reviewing going on  
no mental effort  
and no gloating or resentment  
just emptiness and quiet inside.

Mostly it happens very slowly  
a gradual awareness  
of something powerful and mysterious  
as though the air is clear syrup  
and everything within it  
is gentle and buoyant  
and connected with each other  
in a smoothly moving current  
whose beginning and end you will never know

Mostly you look around for reasons  
but all you find are miniature imitations  
the wild flower sweet persuasions  
the grass and weed invasions  
the slither of lizard or of snake  
the existence of anything that makes  
a path of curving curling undulations  
all intertwined and braided proliferations  
and the pattern they create.

Mostly you let go and carry on  
doing all the things you have to do  
but for a while you can feel  
on your skin that it is real  
all this profusion of illusions  
the flight of birds and bees  
the swaying of trees in the wind  
the glassy surge of rivers and streams  
are more than what they seem.

Mostly you forget until it happens again  
but sometimes you stop and wait  
to let yourself follow and trace  
your place as a thread in the line  
your dance as a mote in the tide  
your role as a pulse in the heart-beat's whole  
the ebb and flow of systole and diastole  
your note in the symphony's rise and fall  
and know you are part of it all.

*Edith Speers*

# The Dangers of Constitutional Alteration and Recognition

The lives and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people have extreme complexities which seem to defeat many well-willed actions and plans. Endlessly, initiatives and programs seem to produce less than was hoped for, or to produce nothing. The complexities of Aboriginal cultures and experiences mean that some appraisals and interpretations are easy and correct, but many more prove to be bafflingly unrelated to the people and behaviour they are brought to bear on, in the diversity of languages and societies. The huge extent of Australia means that many ATSI people have difficulty in understanding each other, and they have the same kind of cultural disadvantages in understanding what the immigrant population are thinking, wanting and doing, as the immigrant population have in understanding them. Many ATSI people no more value or want to live in the culture of the immigrant peoples than the immigrant peoples want to live in theirs. The cultures of the immigrant peoples are themselves diverse and distinct.

The Australian people face a long future, perhaps centuries, in which they are called on for patient beneficent policies of government towards ATSI people, without real understanding of what the outcomes will be and without undue concern for the cost. The Australian people include immigrants and their descendants and also ATSI people: there are no "them and us" in living this future.

Australia already has federal laws expressing recognition of ATSI people and invalidating legislative racial discrimination. The Recognition Act expresses recognition in section 3:

## Recognition

- (1) The Parliament, on behalf of the people of Australia, recognises that the continent and the islands now known as Australia were first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- (2) The Parliament, on behalf of the people

of Australia, acknowledges the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their traditional lands and waters.

- (3) The Parliament, on behalf of the people of Australia, acknowledges and respects the continuing cultures, languages and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This declaration of recognition is indisputable: no one could rationally say it is wrong, and the same would be true if these words had not been stated in a Commonwealth Act. The Recognition Act had a sunset clause after two years, now extended to five years: it does not need a sunset clause. Recognition as stated in the Recognition Act has meaning if recognition is generally felt in the minds of the whole population, and particularly those taking part in government. Recognition should be in the minds of everyone who takes part in Australian public life, including everyone who votes for parliamentary representatives: not as the dominant concern or as the first concern, but as a continuing concern. It would be wrong to give up on people, especially over problems arising from the limits of our own understanding. The question is whether and why our Constitution should say anything about it.

When limits are placed on the legislative power of parliament, consequences which we cannot foresee present themselves decades and even centuries in the future. We often cannot see consequences five years ahead. To impose a limit on legislative power is to express mistrust of legislators, and in a democracy also mistrust of voters: not only the legislators and voters of our time but also those of all future time. To employ so vague and malleable a word as *discrimination* while imposing such a limit is a folly for future ages as well as for our own. Better to let posterity manage its own affairs in its own circumstances: to let the Australians of the future make their own judgments and bring about their own successes. We should not make their

mistakes for them.

These notes introduce the main recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the JSC's final report to the Commonwealth Parliament in June.

Consideration has focused on three main subjects on which the Constitution might be altered. The first is the inclusion of a preamble expressing recognition. The second is alteration of the terms in which the Constitution gives federal parliament power to legislate with respect to ATSI people. The third is the inclusion of some constitutional provision against racial discrimination: this has been tacked on to the original project in the course of years of reviews and committees on recognition. A fourth, which seems minor, is the removal of section 25.

There has been a series of statements from prime ministers and others in government of support for a project of recognising ATSI people in the Constitution. This idea was already abroad when Prime Minister Howard expressed support for it in 2007. The JSC's final report quoted Prime Minister Abbott as having said in a public oration on November 28, 2014: "I ... see Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people in a form that would complete our Constitution rather than change it." (Make of that what you can.) Recognition of ATSI people in the Constitution was part of the platform of the ALP in the election of 2010, and in November 2010 Prime Minister Gillard announced that an expert panel would be appointed; and it was on December 23.

The expert panel report in January 2012 said that the panel had conducted a broad national consultation and community engagement program to raise awareness about constitutional recognition of ATSI people. The program included public consultation meetings, individual discussions with high-level stakeholders, presentations at festivals and other events, a website, a formal public submissions process and a commission to Newspoll to undertake research. The expert panel placed emphasis on capturing the views of ATSI people and communities. Its work was about finding out what ATSI people wanted: and if necessary, getting them to want something.

The expert panel report was followed by enactment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Peoples Recognition Act 2013 (the Recognition Act quoted earlier) in March 2013, and the Recognition Act provided for a review panel to review the work of the expert panel and of the body called Reconciliation Australia, and to address the readiness of the public to support a referendum, the proposal most likely to obtain support, and levels of support among various classes of people.

The review panel in its final report in September 2014 reported that there was a need to identify rapidly the final form of words and to draw debate to a conclusion, and recommended the appointment of a Referendum Council of trusted national figures to do so. In other words the review panel did not define the debate. There does not seem to have been a Referendum Council.

The Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition was appointed by a resolution of December 2, 2013. The JSC was very active and published an interim report and a progress report. The JSC's final report in June 2015 dealt (up to a point) with the things that it was contemplated the Referendum Council would deal with. The JSC put forward three options, forms for the proposed constitutional alteration to federal legislative power. The report represents a great deal of work in many sessions and with many submissions. Various people tried the jump on the bandwagon; for example there was an attempt

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*The Constitution is not the place for superfluous expression, and the only words which should be in it are words which are intended to state permanently the law about how Australia is governed.*

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to have a constitutional provision about discrimination refer expressly to discrimination against groups with no necessary connection with ATSI people, such as transgender persons.

There seems to have been no significant consideration in Parliament since the JSC's final report was presented, although there have been several inconclusive discussions.

All this process has not produced a decision on exactly what constitutional alteration is to be put to a referendum. However, the JSC put forward several options and it seems likely that their first option will be adopted.

A central difficulty is to understand what a constitutional alteration recognising indigenous Australians would be expected to achieve. There are several ideas abroad. One is that there is a need to recognise ATSI people in the Constitution. This idea has been often expressed in terms which suggest very deep feeling. It has become an unchallengeable proposition in public debate. However, there has

not been any real explanation for giving recognition by changing the Constitution. To do this would attempt to record or to confer dignity and respect and would operate in symbol and gesture. Dignity and respect are appropriate. The Constitution does not exist to recognise classes of people, and the entitlements of ATSI people and of many other groups to respect and dignity and proper treatment exist already despite the fact that they are not mentioned in the Constitution. The Constitution does not exist to state the facts of Australia's history, to recognise groups of people or to make gestures. A provision expressing recognition of immigrants or the descendants of immigrants would serve no purpose and could only seem ridiculous. However, voting against a constitutional alteration would have the appearance of rejecting recognition—or would be claimed to have that appearance.

No provision should be placed in our Constitution to make people feel happy or to soothe their feelings. There is no such provision in the Constitution so far. That is not what constitutions do. Every word and every phrase in the Constitution is examined and carefully compared with passages where the word or phrase appears elsewhere in the document, and in documents and debates in the course of its preparation; and assertions of varying strength are made about implications for meaning. This happens every time the Constitution is construed in a lawsuit, many times and in contexts where a great deal of economic and other interests turn on the result. The Constitution is not the place for superfluous expression, and the only words which should be in it are words which are intended to state permanently the law about how Australia is governed. The Constitution is not the place to record the policy concern or the moral concern which is at the forefront of our minds at the moment. One hundred and fifteen years of such records would be rather cluttered.

Another idea abroad seems to be that ATSI people are the subject of adverse discrimination produced by federal and state legislation and by the actions of governments. Committees that have consulted the public report that this is the most prominent complaint and appears in practically every submission. However, they do not state in clear detail what the adverse discriminatory legislation has been. As there has been effective federal legislation against racial discrimination for forty years, it is not possible to know what it could be. The claim that there has been legislative racial discrimination and that it has been adverse seems to be an unavoidable ornament to every expression of dissatisfaction of any kind. This has greatly changed the subject under

consideration and moved it far beyond recognition.

The Racial Discrimination Act 1975, a federal Act, has been in force for forty years. It is full of loose language and generalisations drawn from the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and it is largely directed to giving some provisions of the Convention effect in Australian law. Arguments and decisions about the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act are complex and obscure: see for example *Maloney v The Queen* (2013). Any abbreviation of its flood of words is inaccurate, but broadly it is directed at invalidating any provision of a state or territory law which in any way has the practical effect of producing racial discrimination, and so too for any Commonwealth law unless the Commonwealth Parliament expressly declares that it intends to override the Racial Discrimination Act. (This has only happened about three times.) As there has been a federal law invalidating legislation which brings about racial discrimination for forty years, it should be quite difficult to find any legislation which has that effect, because any provision which had that effect would be invalid. The Racial Discrimination Act would continue to be in force after a constitutional alteration took effect, it is very wide in its operation, and there is no prospect of the Racial Discrimination Act being repealed. It is difficult to know what more a constitutional alteration would do to counteract legislative discrimination.

It is important to know what are to be the terms of the proposed alteration. We are still in a stage so preliminary that we do not know this. Unless the terms of the proposed alteration are known, or at least the object in view is known, discussion has no real point. A possible constitutional alteration has now been publicly referred to for more than five years and many people in politics have expressed approval of the proposal, but the basic need for definition has not been met, and still has not been met by the JSC's final report. The vagueness of the topic and its persistent discussion have disarmed appraisal of its merits. The body called Recognise has been using Commonwealth funds to agitate in favour of a constitutional alteration for some years in the absence of any definition of what it is advocating.

Two basic terms in the discussion are so vague and indefinite that they defeat discussion. One is *race*. An attempt to assign a person to a particular race is often vague and debatable, although there are many instances where the answer seems clear. Attempts to define what a race is or to state clear reasons why an individual can be fitted within a definition of a race, or excluded, seem always to fail. Resort to self-identification instead of

definition is usual, but this has no real effect unless it is established what exactly people are identifying themselves as. In a legal system a term like that is better avoided.

The other is *discrimination*. This word has been pressed into service for meanings beyond what it means in ordinary English usage, with an overtone that discrimination is always adverse. In this application the meaning in ordinary usage is inverted and whatever is thought to be adverse is called discrimination. A word which started as a reference to good choices in artwork and brandy has been pressed into service which it can hardly bear, because it does not really identify what kind of adverse application it refers to, and is to be brought out in support of any contention that something in some government action or Act of Parliament is adverse.

The concept of discrimination is often deployed to give apparent support to grievances, without any real definition of the discrimination complained of. Racial discrimination is a vague concept vaguely expressed. The word *discrimination* is not used in a clear way. Laws about sentences for crime are often assailed with the observation that a far higher proportion of ATSI people are in prison under sentence than other people. This criticism is almost always offered without reference to the incidence of criminal behaviour, and it is sometimes offered with the suggestion that the sentences imposed on ATSI people are more severe than the sentences imposed on other persons who commit similar offences. All legal rules discriminate: they operate differently on different people according to circumstances. Much use of the word *discrimination* seems to assume that it refers to discrimination adverse to a person; this appears to be its established sense when used in international conventions, but it is not its ordinary meaning in the English language.

A prohibition of legislative discrimination may invalidate legislative provisions which according to their own terms enact different rules for different classes of people or make adverse rules for some class of persons. On the other hand it may operate on and invalidate legislative provisions which according to their terms apply indifferently on all persons who fall within them but have an adverse practical effect on some class, because when looked at in the light of circumstances their incidence is different and (it may be) more adverse for persons

of one class. One of these could be constitutional discrimination; both could be; time and judicial wisdom will tell.

Invalidation of legislation for discrimination would often be excessive to any need for protection. There would be no consideration of proportionality of the solution to the problem, no assessment of the importance or unimportance of the disadvantages, and no assessment of any benefits concomitant with adverse effects. Well-considered proposals allow room for considerations like these.

In the earlier stages attention seems to have been concentrated most on whether constitutional recognition should take the form of a preamble. A preamble anywhere is a potential nuisance because it could be called in aid of arguments about construction of the words which were intended to have operative effect. The Constitution does not have a preamble, although the Imperial Act which gave effect to the Constitution does have a preamble, and there is nothing in it about recognising anybody. Adding a preamble to the whole Constitution would carry the obvious consequence of recasting consideration of everything in the Constitution to see whether perhaps its meaning is affected by some implication from the preamble.

A preamble to the whole Constitution no longer seems to have support, and what is now under consideration is a preamble to a provision introduced by the alteration which would affect the legislative power of the Commonwealth Parliament. The final report contains a lot of discussion about the terms of the preamble on the model of the Recognition Act. Part of an earlier draft preamble which recognised the need for Aboriginal advancement was dropped out, apparently because of concern over the suggestion that ATSI people were not advanced. If recognition in the Constitution were a good idea it might as well take place in a preamble to some particular provision in the Constitution; but as this would not achieve anything useful, it should not be in the Constitution.

The main subject under consideration is the alteration of the Commonwealth power to legislate for Aboriginal people, the “race power” in section 51 (xxvi) as altered in 1967. Before 1967, section 51 (xxvi) said:

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**51 Legislative powers of the Parliament**

The Parliament shall, subject to this 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 ...

The words shown in italics are the words left out by the alteration in 1967, so (xxvi) now says:

(xxvi) the people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws ...

Now the words of the race power do not expressly mention Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders, but the purpose and effect of the alteration in 1967 were to enable the Commonwealth to legislate with respect to them. The race power still suffers from turning on the all-but-incoherent concept of race, but it has been a sufficient constitutional base for federal laws relating to ATSI people.

There seems to be a wish to express the Commonwealth legislative power in a more positive way. This sounds like a nice thing to do, but it involves huge trouble and expense and there is no need for it. The difficulties relate to what in detail the alteration would say, and to what else it would say.

The Joint Select Committee put forward in its Recommendation 5 three options as ways of altering the Commonwealth power. Their first and preferred option has a preamble in words which follow section 3 of the Recognition Act. This is a preamble only to one proposed Commonwealth power. No other Commonwealth power has a preamble. It can be supposed that the preamble would influence construction by a court only for anything it shows about that particular power, not for wider implications for other provisions of the Constitution; but this limit is not completely certain.

In the first option, section 51(xxvi) and the race power are replaced by a new section 51A. Not repeating the preamble which follows the word *Recognising*, it would say:

**51A Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

Recognising ...

The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Section 51A would restate what was earlier the race power but confer the power only “with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”. There would no longer be power to legislate for any other race and there would be no reference to the need for special laws.

As part of the first option a new section 116A would forbid the Commonwealth and states or territories to discriminate, with a proviso:

**116A Prohibition of Racial Discrimination**

(1) The Commonwealth, a State or a Territory shall not discriminate on the grounds of race, colour or ethnic or national origin.

(2) Subsection (1) does not preclude the making of laws or measures for the purpose of overcoming disadvantage, ameliorating the effects of past discrimination, or protecting the cultures, languages or heritage of any group ...

Section 116A is unsatisfactory in that it employs the unsatisfactory word *discriminate*, but the context seems to show that this refers only to adverse discrimination. If that is intended it would be well to say so expressly. More importantly, section 116A would not relate only to Commonwealth legislation: it would relate to all actions of the Commonwealth, states or territories, legislative or not. There is no limit to the actions of governments to which this would apply. It might apply to a decision to end a subsidy for a bus to a remote community inhabited only or largely by Aboriginal people, or to reduce the number of teaching staff at a school in a remote community attended only or largely by ATSI children. If one of those things happened we could expect to see a constitutional challenge. Section 116A could generate a constitutional lawsuit over any state or territory action for which it could be contended that it operated adversely on ATSI people, or operated differently in its incidence on ATSI people from its incidence on people generally.

The second option would leave section 51 (xxvi) in place but add a new section 80A conferring power to legislate with respect to ATSI people but so as not to discriminate against them; the sole power to make special laws for ATSI people. Omitting the (slightly longer) preamble:

Recognising ...

the Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but so as not to discriminate against them.

This section provides the sole power for the Commonwealth to make special laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Section 80A would contain express reference to adverse discrimination, and would contain a preamble, again a preamble only to this conferral of Commonwealth legislative power. If there is to be an alteration this seems to be the best of the three because it is limited to Commonwealth legislative power and is limited to adverse discrimination.

The third option is generally similar to the second option but it has a much more strongly expressed prohibition on adverse discrimination; I cannot see any need for greater emphasis. General similarities between the second and the third options suggest that they were both included to sow discord among those who do not support the first option.

In other words the Joint Select Committee has recommended the option which makes the widest available intervention in the actions of all governments, with the greatest potential for generating future litigation. The first option would operate far more widely than would be required for dealing with the original topic of recognising ATSI people in the Constitution, and introduces a very extensive new limitation on all legislative and all executive action of all governments, extending as widely as ingenuity extends in suggesting that some legislative or executive action has a discriminatory operation. This would be a short-form Bill of Rights: not of any stated rights but of whatever rights ingenuity could breathe into the concept of discrimination.

The Joint Select Committee had several real choices before it and made a choice which goes well beyond concern for ATSI people and their protection from adverse discrimination. The first option would set a huge bandwagon rolling, and it would roll for as long as the Constitution lasts.

If the Commonwealth deported Afghans who had served sentences for crime but did not deport New Zealanders who had done so there would be a breach of section 116A, as they have different national origins.

The principle appears to be that if you are going to make trouble you may as well make a lot of it. A very striking aspect is the record of repeated, indeed endless complaints that Aboriginal people were the subject of adverse legislative discrimination, without exemplification of what this discrimination consists of. This suggests that a lot of contention would arise out of section 116A.

Another recommended alteration is the repeal of section 25. The effect of section 25 is that if a state withholds the voting franchise for its own parliamentary elections from all members of any race, the state is disadvantaged in enumerating its population for the purpose of federal representation. Much comment seems to assume that section 25 authorised withholding the vote from all members of any race, but it said nothing like that. Section 25 imposed a disadvantage on any state which withheld its voting franchise from all members of any race. In 1900 two or three colonies did that, but for many decades there has been no prospect that any state might do so. Section 25 is completely obsolete. There is nothing to be gained or lost by removing section 25. Its removal would be tidy, would do no harm and would achieve nothing.

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*John P. Bryson QC spent over twenty years practising at the Bar in Sydney, followed by over twenty years as a Judge and Judge of Appeal of the New South Wales Supreme Court, and has now retired.*

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## Ron

How good was Ron Clarke?  
 He was bloody good  
 Bloody good.  
 He broke seventeen world records  
 And beat a lot of top runners.

He lit the stadium torch in Melbourne  
 At the fifty-six Olympics, and gas flashed  
 Up and burnt his arm like buggery.  
 And he didn't even flinch.  
 That's how good he was.

*Saxby Pridmore*

## Conversation with Socrates

Sometimes he would walk  
between the small school where he taught  
and the bridge over the Styx River—  
stand under a tree, watch the river flow  
and wonder why he walked down.  
There was never a tangible reason  
but it troubled him that there might be.

Bird noises distracted him  
because he couldn't see the birds—  
whipbirds, black cockatoos,  
water-hens among ferns,  
rosellas and king parrots  
whose fragile bell-notes  
he thought didn't belong in the shadows.

The sound of water found his ears  
and its jagged path found its way  
into his heart—that secret  
of all secret places he dearly wished  
he could walk into and understand  
his fascination with the river's end.

Standing was not enough, nor leaning  
against a giant tree,  
nor sitting, nor lying down—  
like the one time he fell asleep and dreamt  
he had a conversation with Socrates.

There was always the return journey  
to be made—back to the school  
where he left his car  
and a cup of tea waited to be made.

He had read about the Styx River and the Underworld  
and would think of other names  
from mythology and history  
associated with them—  
Virgil, Aeneas, Charon, Avernus—  
that had attached themselves  
to his mind like wet leaves.

He remembered the conversation  
that he had with Socrates  
and asking him how he knew  
where the river ended before he reached the end.

## Small School at Colo Heights

A forest enclosed it  
on one side, the Singleton Road  
on the other—our small school at Colo Heights  
in the middle of sandstone country.

Cicadas became airborne  
from the trunks of bloodwoods.  
Bellbirds chimed above ground orchids,  
flannel flowers and white paperbark scrolls.  
Grass-tree spears rose out of rocks.

It was 1969. The first man stepped on to the moon.  
The school had no electricity  
but nobody seemed to mind during classes.  
Nearby, a river ran through the bush.  
Everyone in the school was happy.

Gullies, ridges, eucalypt forests,  
goannas, birds, snakes.  
We lived in the heart of sandstone country  
where no clock ticked on the wall.

*Peter Skrzynecki*

# The Halting Progress of Capitalism in Asia

*Without innovations, no entrepreneurs; without entrepreneurial achievement, no capitalist returns and no capitalist propulsion. The atmosphere of industrial revolutions—of “progress”—is the only one in which capitalism can survive.*

—Joseph Schumpeter, *Business Cycles*, 1939

My last *Quadrant* essay (November 2015) was on economic liberalism in Asia. Here I switch focus to capitalism in Asia. I say “capitalism” deliberately. What does it mean?

A capitalist economy is, of course, a market economy: the exchange of goods and services at freely forming prices in a system that unites production and consumption. This was what Adam Smith meant by a market economy; he also emphasised property rights and “natural liberty”, or what we now call economic freedom—the individual’s freedom to produce and consume, and to use his property rights, as he sees fit. But capitalism suggests more than “market economy”. I use it in the Schumpeterian sense. For hovering above this essay is Joseph Schumpeter, one of the great twentieth-century economists; he was also perhaps the greatest historian of economic thought of all time, and surely one of social science’s most colourful and dazzling performing artists.

Karl Marx wrote about “capital”—the stock of wealth around which production and class relations are structured. Werner Sombart, from the last generation of Germany’s Historical School of economics, was the first to refer to “capitalism”. But Schumpeter had a different vision of capitalism. *Vision* was one of his favourite words. Today the word is debased, for everyone has a “vision”, just as everyone has a “philosophy”. But Schumpeter meant something precise: a vision is a personal conception of how a whole system works, before filling in its compartments and its nuts and bolts. He laid out his vision of capitalism first in *The Theory of Economic Development*, and later, encompassingly, in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

Capitalism is the central nervous system of market society. It is responsible for the biggest increase in living standards the world has ever seen; it has lifted hundreds of millions, indeed billions, of people out of poverty and enormously improved the lives of ordinary people. Capitalism also transforms political systems and social relations. It is constantly changing, like cells in a biological organism. It also reminds me of Buddhist psychology: in the Buddha’s teaching, nothing is ever the same; everything changes all the time. Capitalism is never in equilibrium; it is always dynamic, never static. In that sense, neoclassical economic models of equilibrium-based perfect competition are irrelevant: they do not apply to real-world markets.

Capitalism’s central agent is the entrepreneur—to Schumpeter the “pivot on which everything turns”. His motives are complex in his restless, heroic quest to create wealth; making money is but one of many motives. He is much more than *homo oeconomicus*, the rational utility-maximiser of neoclassical economics. And entrepreneurs unleash “creative destruction”—Schumpeter’s “essential fact about capitalism”. They swarm around new technological inventions, turn them into marketable products, destroy old, established businesses, and create new, more productive ones of their own. This *innovation*—“perennial gales of creative destruction”—“incessantly revolutionises the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one”. It drives material progress.

Such is the past and present of capitalism. But its future is not inevitable. For capitalism to progress, it needs the right framework conditions, above all to allow entrepreneurs to work their magic. Private property rights and freely forming prices are among the essentials to keep the system open to entrepreneurial activity.

Schumpeter dates modern capitalism to the early eighteenth century, when it was centred in north-western Europe. It really took off with the

Industrial Revolution and the liberal nineteenth century. It disintegrated in the first half of the twentieth century, and revived after the Second World War. Up to then it was overwhelmingly a Western phenomenon—Western Europe and British offshoots in the New World, notably the USA.

Capitalism's post-1945 revival can be divided into two phases. The first, roughly from 1945 to 1980, saw the reconstruction and subsequent boom of an Atlantic economy uniting North America and Western Europe; it also saw the rise of the East Asian Tigers (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore). Other “developing” countries closed themselves off, as did communist countries (notably the Soviet bloc and China).

The second phase, from about 1980 to 2008, was a capitalist golden age. The market economy spread to the Second World and Third World, including Russia, China, India and Brazil. Now it covers nearly all of Asia. Before 1980, most Asians lived in command-and-control economies, ranging from Maoist China to India's “licence raj”. Since then, economic liberalisation has delivered unprecedented growth, poverty reduction and prosperity. Adam Smith has come to Asia: the removal of restrictions on economic activity has given individuals their “natural liberty”; markets, inside and across borders, have expanded, driving productivity gains and growth.

What has happened since the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008? Initially, output and employment fell steeply worldwide; international trade shrank, as did foreign investment. Advanced economies have had low growth ever since. Western Europe (with the notable exception of Germany) and Japan are stagnant, mired in an expanding swamp of public debt. Households and businesses are also deep in debt, and banks are unwilling to lend. The US has similar problems but is recovering better.

Most “emerging markets”, particularly in Asia, recovered faster and stronger from the GFC, mainly because they have much lower public, household and corporate debt. They continued their pre-GFC growth spurts. But, since about 2012, they too have had lower growth. Russia and Brazil are deep in recession; India and China have slowed down considerably, as have Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The proximate causes are the end of a decade of cheap money and high commodity prices.

Monetary policy is about to get tighter, interest rates will rise, and commodity prices have already crashed. This ebbing tide reveals much detritus on the seashore. For all the market economy's gains in the past three decades, it is still severely repressed in Asia and elsewhere outside the West. That makes growth more difficult, especially without the artificial stimulants of easy money and sky-high commodity prices.

The GFC ended an era of market liberalisation. Since 2008, public policy has been more interventionist; the balance between state and market has shifted. Keynesianism is back in macroeconomic policy. Fiscal stimulus was common in 2008-09, resulting in higher taxation, public expenditure and public debt. Monetary policy became much

looser, and remains loose seven years after the GFC. Central banks have printed unbelievable amounts of money; they have kept interest rates close to zero, and bought government as well as bank debt (what is known as “quantitative easing”). Now macroeconomic policy is more about manipulating aggregate demand and “fine-tuning” the economy; it is less concerned with keeping taxes, public expenditure and inflation low and stable.

Microeconomic interventions have also increased, starting with financial markets. An avalanche of financial regulation descended after the GFC, especially in the US and Europe. Other markets have also become more regulated, notably subsidies for the car industry and renewable energy, and tighter environmental standards to limit carbon emissions and combat global warming.

Asia was not at the centre of the GFC, but it is in the slipstream of post-GFC policy patterns. China had the biggest fiscal and monetary stimulus of them all in 2008-09, equivalent to about 50 per cent of GDP. State largesse went overwhelmingly to local governments (who went on a debt-fuelled construction spree), and behemoth state-owned banks and state-owned enterprises. Japan has “Abenomics”, whose two main “arrows” are fiscal and monetary stimulus. Persistently loose monetary policy led to soaring consumer debt across East and South Asia. Thankfully, trade and foreign-investment liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s was not reversed wholesale. But “creeping protectionism” set in, with a gradual increase in non-tariff trade barriers. Indonesia is the worst culprit, with a slew of new restrictions on imports and foreign investment.

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*For all the market economy's gains in the past three decades, it is still severely repressed in Asia and elsewhere outside the West. That makes growth more difficult.*

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Overall, the swing of the policy pendulum since the GFC is more akin to what happened in the 1970s than during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The 1930s saw a dramatic swing to a bigger state and a more constrained market; in the 1970s the swing was smaller, though still significant.

The pendulum of ideas has swung towards market intervention as well. Classical liberalism (“neoliberalism” or “market fundamentalism” to its detractors) is weaker. Intellectual and political giants, led by Friedman and Hayek, Thatcher and Reagan, spread its message up to the 1990s. But since then epigonal figures—mostly bureaucrats in well-funded US think-tanks and foundations—have taken over. And the GFC, like the Great Depression of the 1930s, propelled market-interventionist ideas. These are a combination of Keynesianism and Pigovianism.

Keynesian ideas prevail once again in macroeconomics. Keynes’s distinctive view of “capitalism in crisis” informed his economic theory and policy prescriptions in the 1930s. He argued that a chronic lack of aggregate demand prolonged the debt-deflation of the Great Depression; hence governments should use deficit spending to stimulate demand. But Schumpeter thought that underlying Keynes’s short-term diagnosis was a profoundly bleak view of capitalism’s long-term prospects. To Keynes, capitalism, if left to its own devices, was doomed to “secular stagnation”. Capitalists would sit on their savings rather than turn them into productive investments and employment. Output would be stuck well below its potential, resulting in high unemployment. Only government-induced stimulus could get capitalism out of its rut.

Note the parallels with Keynesian arguments today. Most macroeconomists favour Keynesian demand management to overcome depressed conditions after the GFC. But some go further. Larry Summers has revived talk of secular stagnation. The world economy is set for prolonged anaemic growth, he says; new technology will increase unemployment and inequality will widen—unless governments pump up demand. This is a post-GFC echo of Keynes’s interwar “capitalism in crisis”.

The microeconomic complement to Keynesian macroeconomics comes from A.C. Pigou, a leading economist of the generation before Keynes, and indeed Keynes’s teacher at Cambridge. Pigou is the father of welfare economics. His basic idea is that the market is beset by “failures”. These are departures from perfect-competition equilibria in neo-classical models. And this sets up a presumption of government intervention—to remedy market failures. Pigou provided the theoretical foundation for post-1945 market interventions—until the

“neoliberal” revival in the 1970s. By then public-choice theory was popular. It countered the political innocence of welfare economics, which implies that governments, like Platonic guardians, are wise and benevolent actors remedying market failures for the public good. But, according to public-choice theory, politicians and bureaucrats are self-interested; they intervene in markets for their own benefit. Markets get distorted and consumers suffer. Welfare economics, in other words, is oblivious to “government failure”.

From the 1970s to the GFC, awareness of government failure restrained reflexive interventions in markets. But the GFC shifted the emphasis back to market failures and confidence in governments’ ability to correct them—particularly in financial markets. Pigou is back with a vengeance.

Keynesianism and Pigovianism were born in the West and spread outside the West. Asians habitually mimic Western ideas—whatever is the prevailing conventional wisdom. So Keynes and Pigou have revived in Asia as well after the GFC.

Both Keynesians and Pigovians believe that a cabal of smart people, acting solely for the public good, should intervene in markets to solve complex social problems. When markets fail, they know best what to do; in such situations, they can do better than individual households and firms. This is the mentality of the social engineer. Adam Smith captures this type well. He is the “man of system” who visualises society as a chessboard; he moves the pieces on the board as he chooses, in line with his strategy to win the game.

As Hayek says, this attitude is a “fatal conceit”. It fails on three counts. First, it assumes that a collective authority has sufficient knowledge to plan and execute superior outcomes. But knowledge is fragmented and widely dispersed in a complex market economy: no one person or group, however smart, has such knowledge at its disposal. This is Hayek’s essential insight. He argues that the best a government can do is set general rules for a market order; the game itself should be left to the players—individuals and firms—who use their local knowledge to discover their way to an inevitably uncertain future.

Second, “men of system” overlook government failure: they overestimate the honesty and competence of governments and underestimate their capture by powerful interest groups. And third, market interventions constrict “natural liberty”—individual freedom in the marketplace.

What has this to do with capitalism? Capitalism’s “engine” (another of Schumpeter’s favourite words) is innovation—the process of creative destruction.

For the engine to hum, the framework conditions must be right; the system must be wide open to entrepreneurial activity. But an overload of government regulation, macro and micro, represses entrepreneurs and innovation; it makes capitalism's engine sputter and stall. This is the greatest danger to capitalism after the GFC. In Asia, it threatens to slow down, even stall, the astounding catch-up growth of recent decades.

Let's delve a little into the right framework conditions for capitalism today. Start with macroeconomic policy. It has swung towards regulatory discretion and away from hard rules: that is the essence of fiscal and monetary stimulus. Most glaringly, central banks, through "quantitative easing", have added to their arsenal of policy instruments. So armed, they have marched onto fiscal-policy turf, making decisions that directly affect taxation and expenditure.

So far, these policies have not worked—or not nearly as well as their proponents anticipated. Fiscal stimulus in the US and Europe has not had the predicted growth-multiplier effect, while piling up deficits and debt. Loose monetary policy has boosted growth a little, though again less than predicted. Massive monetary stimulus has failed to kick-start Japanese growth. China's post-GFC stimulus has created an Everest of local-government and corporate debt; its distortions make urgent market reforms to "rebalance" the economy (from fixed investment and exports to domestic consumption) more difficult.

Easy-money policies have enlarged asset bubbles in financial and housing markets—a boon for banks and billionaires, but quite the opposite for small savers facing near-zero interest rates. Worst of all, cheap money is as addictive as heroin: market actors, particularly in finance, cannot wean themselves off it; they importune governments and central banks to keep injecting it into their bloodstream. Finally, macroeconomic policy discretion is infectious: it spills over to other policy areas. Financial-market regulation is the most conspicuous example.

These are the ill effects of post-GFC macroeconomic policy. The treatment should be constitutional—to return to rules that constrain regulatory discretion. Rules should be simple and clear to protect private property rights and economic freedom. They should be stable and predictable,

so that market actors have the confidence to save, invest and be entrepreneurial. Schumpeter was a big fan of Gladstonian public finance, based on low taxation and low expenditure. Budgets should be balanced, not in deficit, and fiscal measures should interfere as little as possible with market activity. Monetary policy should aim for price stability, which could be achieved through a fixed exchange rate or an inflation target. Central banks should be restricted to a single objective (price stability) and a small set of policy instruments, rather than having multiple objectives and multiple (fiscal and monetary) instruments.

Now turn to microeconomic policy. There is much unfinished business in Asia, despite market liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s. Economic freedom remains much more repressed than it is in the West—less so in product markets, where most liberalisation has occurred, and more so in factor markets. Property rights for land are undeveloped or unclear in China, India and elsewhere. Labour laws restrict hiring and firing, thereby deterring investment in jobs. India's labour laws are probably the most damaging. China's *hukou* system of household registration restricts labour movement to its cities; it deprives rural migrants of rights to urban housing, schooling and social welfare. Capital markets are rudimentary, often dominated by state-owned banks and insurers. China's financial system is a command-economy Forbidden City, walled off, with a protective moat separating it from the surrounding market economy. Energy markets are even more throttled than financial markets,

replete with state-owned monopoly incumbents, subsidies and price controls.

The same principles should apply to both macro- and microeconomic policy. Market rules should be simple, clear, stable and predictable. They should protect property rights and economic freedom. They should constrain regulatory discretion. And they should be general rules of conduct rather than specific market interventions. Government should be more an "umpire" and less a market "player"—in Michael Oakeshott's phrase, "an umpire of a civic association, not an estate manager of an enterprise association".

But this classical-liberal ideal collides into raw political realities. It is difficult enough to steer macroeconomic policy away from discretion and

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towards hard rules. It is even tougher to do this with factor markets, for they are arteries that attach to the heart of political systems. Property rights to land, labour laws, financial systems and energy markets are all bound up with the make-up of the state and, ultimately, ruling parties. Hence sluggish “second-generation” market reforms throughout Asia.

Take another issue—inequality. Income inequality has become a leading preoccupation since the GFC, propelled to the fore by Thomas Piketty’s best-seller *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Incomes of educated, skilled professionals, and those with substantial capital assets, have increased tremendously while incomes of the unskilled and low-skilled have stagnated. Median incomes have stagnated. This is true of the US and UK before and after the GFC. East Asia has seen widening income inequality since the 1990s. In China, income inequality is back to where it was when the Communist Party grabbed power in 1949. Income gaps have widened markedly in the city-states of Hong Kong and Singapore.

Technology and globalisation are the culprits. Globalisation has brought new competition from low-wage countries, particularly in Asia, squeezing low-wage, low-skilled industries in the West. New technologies—robotics, artificial intelligence, supercomputers, 3D printing, to name a few—are killing jobs, including skilled white-collar jobs. Schumpeter would not be surprised: these are perennial gales of creative destruction. But, unlike Schumpeter, today’s ranks of the inequality-obsessed are techno-pessimists and globalisation-pessimists. They see a future of low growth and greater inequality. Their solutions are collectivist. Governments should intervene more to redistribute wealth; markets should be fettered.

There are many counter-arguments. One is that global (rather than in-country) income inequality has decreased substantially—because hundreds of millions of people in developing countries have escaped poverty and had fast-rising real incomes. Asia, especially China, has narrowed the income gap with the West. Another counter-argument is that people all over the world have enjoyed huge consumption gains as prices for consumer goods have fallen dramatically. In other words, with a given income, consumers can purchase a greater variety of goods and services at better quality and cheaper cost. A third counter is that better education for girls—the fruit of higher economic growth in developing countries—narrows income gaps.

But to return to Schumpeter. He would surely attack today’s techno-pessimism. To him the

problem would be too little innovation, not too much of it. History shows that innovation destroys old industries and jobs, but it creates new and better ones, with rising incomes that spread from entrepreneurs to the middle and bottom of society. That is what happened in the second half of the nineteenth century up to the First World War, and again after the Second World War.

For all the sexy inventions of the last generation—chiefly the internet and mobile communications—innovation remains stymied. Corporations sit on trillions of dollars of cash and play around with it in financial markets, rather than investing it in R&D and new products. Capitalism is too cautious and bureaucratic. That is true of the West; it is even truer outside the West, including Asia. Excessive government regulation is mainly to blame. Restrictions on competition obstruct the creative destruction of new entrepreneurs. Governments and big business continue in happy collusion; crony socialism elides into crony capitalism.

Market deregulation would unleash creative destruction. Innovation would spread to wider swathes of economic activity. New industries would replace the old. Application of new technologies would require huge investments, not least on infrastructure. And they would stimulate huge demand from consumers. All that would translate into new jobs, rising incomes and greater purchasing power from the top to the middle to the bottom.

Capitalism is inherently unequal. A small band of entrepreneurs drive it; the most successful reap super-profits. But capitalism is also the greatest engine of progress for the world’s poor and middle class. It requires the right framework conditions. Obsessive government intervention to reduce inequality undermines them.

**H**ow can capitalism thrive in Asia? Here one must factor in Asia’s diversity, with different countries and regions at different stages of development. Capitalism’s regulations and institutions vary enormously across Asia. So do political systems. Asia has only five high-income countries: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. They have living standards equivalent to those in the West. China, Malaysia and Thailand are in the upper middle-income bracket. Most Asian countries are lower middle-income, including India, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam. And some are still very poor. Nepal and Cambodia are still in the low-income bracket; Bangladesh, Laos, Burma and East Timor are only slightly above it. There is also large variation within countries. China’s first-tier cities and coastal provinces have much higher living standards than its lower-tier cities and interior

provinces. Similar gaps exist in India.

The challenge is twofold: get the basics right; and embark on structural reforms.

“Getting the basics right” was the essence of the East Asian Miracle—the spectacular catch-up growth of two generations of East Asian Tigers, followed by China and Vietnam. It has the following ingredients. Fiscal policy should aim for balanced budgets, and monetary policy should be geared to price stability. Both help to maintain a stable exchange rate. Taxes should be low and simple; and public expenditure should avoid creating a welfare state with open-ended middle-class entitlements. Such prudent macroeconomic policies create a conducive environment for savings and investment. Basic domestic distortions such as price controls and wasteful subsidies should be removed to boost competition. International trade and foreign investment should be freed up. The labour market should be flexible. And the government should invest in education and infrastructure.

Structural reforms go deeper into domestic regulation. They are more complicated—technically, administratively and politically. Among them are nitty-gritty measures to cut red tape and lower the costs of doing business; liberalising labour, energy and financial markets; shrinking the public sector and opening it up to competition; and bringing competition to education, health care and other public services. Such reforms dovetail with reforms to state institutions: strengthening private property rights and the enforcement of contracts; building a more sophisticated legal system and entrenching a real—not a sham—rule of law; making public administration leaner and more efficient; and establishing transparent, clean and competent regulatory agencies.

Obviously not all these reforms can be done at once, or indeed quickly. Nor is there an identikit package. To repeat, Asia has different countries and regions at vastly different stages of development. Reform priorities—the balance between basics and structural reforms—and reform speeds will differ from place to place. What Asian countries should have is a broad direction of travel: limiting the reach of government and expanding economic freedom for ordinary people.

Asia’s poorer economies—those classified as low-income and lower middle-income—should concentrate on the basics. These are “first generation” reforms of macroeconomic stabilisation

and market liberalisation. They provide the right environment for mobilising resources—savings and investment, labour and capital—for growth. This is “catch-up”, “input-led” growth—what Paul Krugman calls “perspiration”. Most of South Asia, the poorer South-East Asian countries, and the poorer parts of China (its interior provinces) are in this growth phase. These countries, especially in the lower middle-income bracket, should attend to “second generation” structural and institutional reforms as well. But, given limited state resources and capacity, getting the basics right should be the over-riding priority.

Asia’s upper middle and high-income economies have unfinished and never-ending business with policy basics: it is a constant battle to maintain macroeconomic stability; and there are always plenty of basic market distortions left to tackle. But they should focus also on structural and institutional reforms to boost competition, innovation and productivity gains. These economies are approaching the end of or have exhausted catch-up growth. Hence they depend more on productivity or “output-led” growth—what Paul Krugman calls “inspiration”. Otherwise countries get stuck in a “middle-income trap”.

Entrepreneurship and creative destruction apply to all growth phases, but they are especially relevant to this growth phase. Now capitalism gets more advanced and sophisticated.

Asia’s richest countries—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—have made the transition from low to middle and now high-income status. Exceptionally, they have escaped the middle-income trap. Their challenge is to drive productivity gains and innovation in established and new global-market niches. Their products need to be more differentiated and their economies more specialised. China, Malaysia and Thailand, in contrast, risk being stuck in an upper middle-income trap for lack of structural and institutional reforms.

Economic reforms to expand economic freedom beg the question of political reforms to expand civic freedom and representative democracy. The record in Asia and elsewhere shows that catch-up growth is compatible with various political systems, ranging from authoritarianism to democracy. Liberal-democratic institutions and open societies, with their contested elections, plural ideas and checks and balances, are not a prerequisite for

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catch-up growth. It is possible for governments to get some policy basics right and enjoy catch-up growth in the midst of authoritarian politics, a largely unreformed state and corruption. The East Asian Tigers from the 1950s to 1980s, China from 1978, and Vietnam from the mid-1980s, prove the point. Democratic India lagged way behind with “license-raj” policies, but the same democratic India boosted growth and lifted more than 200 million people out of extreme poverty with market reforms from the early 1990s.

But it gets more complicated as countries approach upper middle-income levels. Now the link between political and economic reforms becomes stronger. Today, China, Malaysia and Thailand need to shift from “perspiration” to “inspiration”, from mobilising resources maximally to using them more efficiently. They need Schumpeterian creative destruction. And for that they need structural and institutional reforms. But unreformed autocracies, or even shambolic semi-democracies, with unchecked vested interests at their core, are badly fitted to undertake such reforms.

In their book *Why Nations Fail*, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson argue that countries like China, Malaysia and Thailand, and those lower down the income scale, have “exclusive and extractive” institutions. Institutional insiders extract rents from markets rigged in their favour; they use enormous power within an unreformed state to block market reforms. This is the recipe for staying stuck in the middle-income trap. Getting out of it requires a shift to “inclusive” institutions that are open and transparent, with built-in checks and balances—in other words, liberal-democratic institutions in an open society. These have their own problems, of course: vested interests block market reforms in mature liberal democracies as well. But their openness and plurality equip them better to challenge entrenched interests, and their liberal atmosphere encourages individual expression and creative ideas—the fuel for innovation. This, then, is the playbook of Hamilton and Madison’s *Federalist Papers*, not that of Lee Kuan Yew and Deng Xiaoping.

China’s “market Leninism” graphically illustrates the tension between a static political system and a fast-changing, globally integrated market economy. Under Xi Jinping, China has a combination of “Mao and markets”. At the Communist Party’s Third Plenum, the Beijing leadership signalled new reforms for a “decisive shift” to the market economy. It recognised the urgency of second-generation reforms to transform China’s growth model from mobilising inputs to generat-

ing productivity gains, from perspiration to inspiration. But, concurrently, President Xi has centralised power and clamped down on dissent; China’s political atmosphere is less, not more liberal. There is no sign that institutions will become more inclusive. So far, only minor market reforms have materialised—mere baby steps. There remains a basic contradiction between China’s closed, extractive institutions and fundamental market reforms. Will China’s party-state adapt? Is it capable of introducing sufficient *liberal* and *democratic* political reforms to enable further economic reforms? Or will China stagnate and get stuck in the middle-income trap? The auguries are not good.

India, unlike China, has a historically weak state. Since independence, its political system has combined illiberal, over-extended government with messy, rambunctious democracy. This compound has blocked market reforms. That continues under Congress and BJP governments, despite the opening of the economy from the early 1990s. But India has British-endowed liberal institutions (at least in outline), and a more decentralised and diverse society than China’s. That is the context for its economic silver lining: bottom-up market reforms in some Indian states that set good-practice examples to emulate elsewhere in India.

Hong Kong and Singapore come closest to the classical-liberal ideal in Asia. They have grown prosperous with their low taxes, balanced budgets, low inflation, flexible labour markets, free ports, openness to foreign capital and immigrant labour, lean, efficient administration, and excellent infrastructure. They maintain secure private property rights, the freedom of enterprise, and are wide open to the world. So far, they have avoided the horrors of a big-government welfare state. They have got the basics right better than other places, and have pretty high-quality regulations and institutions. They are worthy successors to the old port-polities, such as Cambay, Calicut, Malacca and Macassar, that were hubs of Indian Ocean and South-East Asian archipelago trade—the last golden age of Asian commerce before Western colonialism.

Capitalism is more advanced in Hong Kong and Singapore than anywhere else in Asia. But even there it lacks something. It is too safe and bureaucratic—not freewheeling enough. Both are still high-end copying cities, not really innovative cities like London, New York and several other cities in the US. They lack Schumpeterian creative destruction.

Multinational companies and the public sector dominate Singapore’s economy. They squeeze the domestic private sector, whose companies, with few

exceptions, are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs employ about half the workforce, but most have low productivity. Their main obstacle to growth is the public sector—GLCs (government-linked companies) and three huge sovereign funds that dominate the local land and capital markets, and account for a big chunk of the labour market. They suck oxygen from private-sector SMEs. In addition, Singapore's political system is not exactly a Western-style liberal democracy, though it is more liberal and democratic than it used to be. A small coterie of insiders dominates both politics and business. The result is a bureaucratic capitalism that lacks entrepreneurs and creative destruction.

Hong Kong has more vibrant SMEs and no history of state-owned enterprises. Under the British, it was certainly not a democracy, but it had liberal institutions and an open society; it never had the nanny-state, social-engineering proclivities of Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore. But it still lacks the entrepreneurial buzz of London and New York. Its SMEs are not very productive. They are crowded out by Hong Kong's tycoons, whose conglomerates dominate the property market and many other sectors of the local economy—aided by their political connections at home and in Beijing. Moreover, Hong Kong, since its handover to China, has a defective political system that produces a mediocre governing elite—one that constantly kowtows to Beijing masters and is incapable of making strategic decisions. Political uncertainty—from Beijing's encroachment on Hong Kong's autonomy and divisions in local society—makes Hong Kong's future as one of Asia's "global cities" ever more uncertain.

Asia's three other rich societies—Japan, South Korea and Taiwan—have even bigger capitalist shortcomings. Which shows what a huge agenda there is for capitalism all over Asia.

To sum up the state of capitalism in Asia: there is good news and bad news. Start with the good news. Compared with a century ago, or even

twenty or thirty years ago, Asia and the world are much better off. Their population has increased enormously, but people are better housed, clothed and fed, with much-improved life-chances. Markets and economic freedom have spread far and wide. On the eve of the Great War, ideological collectivism—a noxious mix of nationalism and socialism—was gathering pace, and great-power conflict was about to destroy a century of relative peace and unprecedented material progress. Now anti-market ideologies are far less noxious, markets and globalisation intertwine nations and peoples as never before, geopolitical tensions are not as threatening, and international institutions (however faulty) enable governments to cooperate—to "jaw, jaw" not "war, war".

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*Compared with twenty or thirty years ago, Asia and the world are much better off. Their population has increased enormously, but people are better housed, clothed and fed, with much-improved life-chances.*

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The bad news is that since the late 1990s, and especially since the GFC, classical liberalism has retreated. Collectivist ideas and policies are advancing again—this time not unregenerate socialism and communism, but the social engineering of Keynesian macroeconomics and Pigovian microeconomics. Like classical liberalism, these are Western exports; mimicry has embedded them in Asia and elsewhere outside the West. Their advance obstructs

capitalism's entrepreneurial engine, as Schumpeter feared. The right oil for that engine is simple, clear rules; rules that focus government on its vital functions, limit regulatory discretion and keep the system open to innovation. These insights go back to Adam Smith and David Hume.

In Asia, the twin challenge is to get the basics of economic policy right, and, especially in upper-middle and high-income Asia, to shift from well-worn imitation to genuine innovation. The latter is the biggest challenge, for it demands major changes to rules and institutions, including political systems. Those changes are all about freedom in open societies.

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## On the Beach with Robert Graves

The wind seeks out the dead whale's ribs—  
an earliest lyre that tongues and probes,  
and Robert Graves, you're on this beach  
to coax a poem into reach,  
and I'm here too, to quiz if good  
attends a lyric livelihood

when click-and-pluck caress the ear  
as shantyman enchants the oar,  
when tink, then thump, two hammers hit,  
iambic lightning flares from it,  
as barefoot, you, with oar and forge,  
tickle how English poems emerge.

Robert, you have the deadpan eyes,  
that watched gas dawns on Flanders rise,  
and saw how war's atrocious farce  
infected too that tranche of verse  
wherever tawdry jubilee  
had spoiled, for you, our art's integrity.

Did no-man's-land prepare your nerve  
to deal the shibboleths their serve,  
clap Pound and Milton in the stocks  
to cop your cabbages and knocks?  
Were you unfair? My oath, for all your humour  
swims in moral seas with Homer.

Your grandson lived three doors from me,  
and shared his grandad's roguery,  
shambled our hillside, slicked with sweat  
then suddenly was dead from heart,  
his big dog ghostly through our trees  
stampeding twilight's kangaroos.

Two Roberts, barefoot, who compose,  
the durance of a family nose,  
a burly and endearing *Geist*  
that ghosts how likenesses persist.  
The same for poems? Might a screen  
display a genome for the lyric scene?

And do I write my poems for money?  
(their cat-walks cannot tease me any)  
Perhaps I write them to be famous  
along the Broadway of disclaimers.  
Or do I not make them at all  
but they write me both large and small

as verbal music thrums a rib,  
that Robert, you and I transcribe  
in trance, in heartbreak and with toil  
to make for other poems their soil,  
while anvil, oar and you and me,  
make soundings in this charity?

## A Quibble for William Blake

*Fine Tints without Fine Forms,*  
so Mister B's opinion storms,  
*will always be the subterfuge*  
*of the blockhead and the stooge.*

Yet when that coy Big Bang  
swelled formless like a hot meringue,  
say, Mister B. where were the hints  
gave Form the premium in your prints,  
not Tints?

For there's attrition here  
between twin variants of human dare  
and both will take the fancy back  
to when we smeared on Altamira rock,  
aeons before the complex saints  
distracted us from tell-tale tints and scents,  
got us our lunch, but that's not all,  
showed how the casual and small  
possessed antennae for the whole.

*Alan Gould*

# The Pope's More Spiritual Approach to Economics

*We fight for and against not men and things as they are, but for and against caricatures we make of them.*

—Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 1954

Reading can be a pleasure and sometimes, as we all know, a chore. I confess as a Christian—albeit not of the Roman Catholic persuasion—to having not read a papal encyclical before the latest, issued on May 24. On my rough count, *Laudato Si'* (On care for our common home) ran to a daunting 40,000 words or so. The flesh is weak. I was deterred. However, my interest was piqued by media commentary on the Pope's condemnatory views, or so they were portrayed, on the role of free market forces in guiding economic affairs. It turned out to be a rewarding read.

A first thing to say is that when Pope Francis is on his "home turf", discussing spiritual matters, he is inspirational. I had to put his words down at times because they were so powerful and moving. On the other hand, his wide-ranging comments on the environment, to which the encyclical was primarily directed, were unremittingly one-sided. The way he begins sets his unchanging compass: "This sister [Mother Earth] cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods which God has endowed her."

Instructively, as you read on, it becomes increasingly clear that the Pope's perspective on the environment stems from, and is caught up with, his perspective on economics and capitalism. But stop here. Economics and capitalism take us down the road apiece from where the Pope starts. I think it is safe to say that the Pope starts with God. As you might expect, a number of conservative writers and broadcasters, in passing comment on the encyclical, started further down the road. And this, I believe, and as I will later explain, has led them into being more sharply critical of its economic content than is justified.

At one point John Maynard Keynes broke off debate with some of his contemporaries after the publication of *The General Theory* in 1936 because he did not believe that they were engaging his arguments with an open mind. Those who write with good will, hoping to persuade, are entitled to an open-minded reception. The Pope is no exception.

I intend giving the encyclical an open-minded reception by taking a walk on the Pope's side. I will explore the apparent gulf between the Pope's side and that of defenders of free-market capitalism and try to identify its source and character. My approach to this exploration will be to draw out those parts of the encyclical which bear on economics and the role of markets and to assess how they stand next to a conservative economics perspective. As they are prominent totem-bearers for this latter perspective I will refer in passing to the economics practised by President Reagan and philosophised by Friedrich Hayek. Now I admit to being a fan of both Reagan and Hayek but my objective is conciliatory, not adversarial. To set the scene, I will start with some conservative criticisms of the encyclical that were distinctly adversarial in their nature.

First I will go to the most adversarial and the least considered. It is no surprise that radio shock-jocks took the prize for extravagant language. For example Rush Limbaugh said that the encyclical confirmed that Pope Francis was a "Marxist" and Michael Savage called him a "stealth Marxist". However, other media were substantively as critical. James Delingpole, the London editor of *Breitbart*, claimed that the encyclical trotted out "formulaic bilge and accepted faux-wisdom required these days to pass a fairly typical exam paper". *Fox Business* commentator Stuart Varney warned that President Obama and Pope Francis were together "a very powerful force pushing left". Much more of a similar kind can be found summarised at *Media Matters* (June 18).

The editors of *National Review* ("Laudato No:

Praise Not Pope Francis's Crude Economics", June 18) and Samuel Gregg, writing in the *American Spectator* ("Laudato Si': Well Intentioned, Economically Flawed", June 19) provide examples of more considered yet, nonetheless, unreserved criticism.

Among other put-downs, the *National Review* editors argue that the Pope "combines an admirable and proper concern for the condition of the world's poor with a crude and backward understanding of economics and politics both". They accuse the Pope of setting up straw men such as this: "By itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion". None among "free-market thinkers" would disagree, they point out. They particularly draw attention, as do other conservative critics, to the lack of balance in the encyclical in downplaying the role of free markets in relieving world poverty while emphasising its role in fuelling "consumerism" in developed economies. Their view of the encyclical is well captured when they make the following comment:

The economic progress of the late 20th century and the early 21st century—which is to say, the advance of capitalism—particularly in the areas of agriculture, medicine, and energy, has not so much enabled consumption that is *excessive* in the rich world but *adequate* in places such as India and China, where famine, once thought to be a permanent part of ordinary life, has largely disappeared.

Samuel Gregg says the encyclical's "deeply negative view of free markets", is in line with the "demonstrably flawed arguments concerning the market economy's nature and effects in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*", issued by the Pope in 2013. He suggests that the Pope "appears oblivious to the fact that the twentieth century's worst economically-driven pollution occurred as a result of centrally-planned state industrialization in the former communist nations". He regards it as "lamentable that this pontificate seems so unwilling to engage in a serious discussion about the market economy's moral and economic merits vis-à-vis the alternatives". However, to balance the scales a little, he sensibly points out that it is "nonsensical to describe this pope as a Marxist".

It is quite easy as a conservative to nod in agreement when reading through these two critiques and others like them. Within their terms of reference they are surely right. There are a number of tenuous (or moot) economic observations in the encyclical. Two of them—that "universalizing" consumption will create unmanageable waste and that the finite-

ness of the world precludes continuing economic growth—I will cover below. There are others such as the following:

[Water should not be turned] into a commodity subject to the laws of the market ...

The foreign debt of poor countries has become a way of controlling them ...

... the economy has favoured a kind of technological progress in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines ...

... the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth ...

These observations all buckle under scrutiny. Clean accessible water is costly and scarce. It must therefore be rationed. If not by price, how? Poor countries need to borrow, but how will that be possible if they do not adopt measures to service existing debt? Companies and societies that do not adopt the best technology will provide fewer employment opportunities. Decreased growth in one part of the world usually lessens the scope other parts have to grow their markets. But, let me stop again, this is too glib by half.

The Pope is calling for a spiritual awakening which will have decision-makers taking more account of those affected by their decisions. Even among capitalists he is not alone. For example, John Mackey, the founder of the US company Whole Foods Market, calls in *Conscious Capitalism* (2013) for businesses to balance the needs of all of their stakeholders, including those of the community in which they operate. So perhaps taking a generous view of some of the Pope's slightly gauche economic observations might not go amiss. It is also worthwhile mentioning two observations which establish at least some free-market-friendly credentials:

... it is essential [quoting Pope Benedict XVI] that "we continue to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone" ...

In order to continue providing employment, it is imperative to promote an economy which favours diversity and business creativity ...

Ronald Reagan would have approved of these observations, I believe. His policies were all about creating jobs and promoting a vibrant economy. Though, perhaps his way of going about it by decreasing taxation and reducing regulation might not have quite fitted the encyclical script. The script

after all is not about extolling free-market capitalism but about exposing its deficiencies against a spiritual template.

Free-market capitalism is the “least worst” of the known systems for conducting national economic affairs. Set in an enlightened and ethical cultural environment—a Judeo-Christian one, dare I say—it produces growing prosperity. But it is neither perfect nor perfectible. It produces adverse side effects. Accordingly, there is always room for those of good will, including the Pope, to have a legitimate say in how it might be improved.

Take a heated exchange between Jon Faine and James Delingpole on ABC radio on April 27, 2012. My sympathies are with Delingpole. However, I have a caveat. Faine made the point that good environmental outcomes in the Western world were the result of regulation. This is clearly wrong as it stands. Regulation can't reduce the emissions from, say, car exhausts unless cost-effective technical solutions are available, and capitalism is the best way to ensure they are available. But Delingpole missed a beat in arguing that capitalists were not plotting ways to despoil the environment. Of course, they're not. At the same time, neither would they normally put environmental concerns uppermost; right now think Volkswagen. Their main job is to grow their businesses and their profits.

“Is it realistic to hope that those who are obsessed with maximizing profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage?” the Pope asks. He evidently thinks not. He might not be wholly right but he is surely partly right. Environmental regulations, both directly and in the effect they have in moulding business culture and community expectations, are an essential adjunct to capitalism.

The Pope's perspective on free-market capitalism stems from his perspective on the state of a turf war between man's allegiance to mammon and to God. His economic views cannot be understood outside of this spiritual prism. Referring to two encyclicals of John Paul II on social and economic justice, John O'Sullivan (in *The President, the Pope and the Prime Minister*) made the telling point that “such encyclicals have certain things in common: for instance they rightly warn against greed and materialism as dangerous sins”. This applies no less to Pope Francis and is no better illustrated than when he quotes John Paul II: “the Church does indeed defend the legitimate right to private property, but

she also teaches no less clearly that there is always a social mortgage on all private property, in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them”. It is from this that all else follows.

Economics is not a spiritual discipline. Accordingly, there is a chasm which separates the encyclical from economics as it is understood in textbooks. This does not necessarily mean that the encyclical is free from economic error. It simply means that a broader perspective than textbook economics must be brought to bear in assessing the worth of its criticisms of free-market capitalism. These criticisms can be distilled, I think, into a charge that capitalism's promise of ever-growing material abundance is both unwholesome and unfulfillable.

The free market is not a product of human ingenuity and design. It simply evolved warts and all because specialisation and exchange guided by prices are potentially capable of making all those participating better off. And human nature favours riches over poverty. If there were a better system no doubt it would have evolved and prevailed. At the same time, the Pope is right. The free market produces “collateral damage” on “society and nature”. The encyclical lists numbers of unconscionable market transactions, for example, human trafficking, the drugs trade, commerce in blood diamonds, and trading in the fur of endangered species. Another recent and particularly egregious example can be added. Doctors from the organisation

Planned Parenthood in the US were caught on camera arranging the sale of organs of aborted babies, which they went to some effort to preserve intact during the abortion procedure. That is the free market in action, when unencumbered by any moral strictures. It was those on the conservative right—the believers in free markets—who were most appalled. Leave aside the unfortunate fact that apologists for instances of barbarism can always be found; no one of common decency believes in untrammelled laissez-faire.

Equally, no one believes that “the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth” or doubts that “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion”. To his critics, the Pope is laying undue emphasis on what the market shouldn't do and can't do and not on what it can do and has done

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*Free-market  
capitalism is  
neither perfect nor  
perfectible. It produces  
adverse side effects.  
Accordingly, there is  
always room for those  
of good will, including  
the Pope, to have a  
legitimate say in how  
it might be improved.*

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to lift people out of poverty. But look at it another way. Making roads safer is a priority, not writing glowing reports on millions of safe journeys. The Pope is in the business of trying to make things better by pointing out deficiencies.

When the Pope sees materialism at the centre of free markets, and so evidently in the financial sector, it is unsurprising that he calls this out. He would hardly be expected to write a hagiographical account of the way bankers are working to fulfil human needs. Criticisms of him for not sufficiently lauding the market fall flat, in my view. But there is a problem that even with the best will in the world can't be avoided. This occurs when the Pope moves from analysis to prescription and echoes Pope John XXIII in arguing for a supra-national authority to "manage" the global economy. *Manage* isn't defined, but it sounds like a species of economic planning which is bound to end in tears. Friedrich Hayek sets out the problem in *The Road to Serfdom*.

Hayek explains how economic planning which determines what is produced, in what quantities and how it is distributed, can only be achieved by forcing people to act outside of their interests: "the only alternative to the submission to the impersonal and seemingly irrational forces of the market is submission to an equally uncontrollable and therefore arbitrary power of other men". That this ends in despotism is not initially the product of evil intent. It is nevertheless an inevitable consequence. To go back to Hayek: "It may sound noble to say: Damn economics, let us build up a decent world—but it is, in fact, merely irresponsible."

Clearly the Pope is not in favour of political despotism in expressing his belief in the limitations of capitalism and proposing a supra-national authority. However, is he naive? It is instructive to consider part of a letter from Keynes to Hayek, dated June 28, 1944: "morally and philosophically I find myself in agreement with virtually the whole of it [*The Road to Serfdom*]; and not only in agreement with it, but in deeply moving agreement". And yet later in the same letter he says:

I should say that what we want is not no planning, or even less planning, indeed I should say we almost certainly want more. But the planning should take place in a community in which as many people as possible, both leaders and followers, wholly share your moral position. Moderate planning will be safe if those carrying it out are rightly orientated in their own minds and hearts to the moral issue.

So, according to Keynes, planning is safe if everyone shares the same upright moral values. Not

to put too fine a point on it, that is naive from a man of practical affairs who lived in an age of evident moral turpitude. I don't accept that the Pope is being similarly naive.

Both Hayek and Keynes took the world as it was. What the Pope says can't be separated from his principal theme, which is a call for a return to a more spiritual existence:

Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption.

Utopian, you might say. But what other aspirations befit a pope?

So when the Pope envisages a supra-national authority he does not envisage Pol Pot types pulling the strings but those who "respect the natural and moral structure" endowed to them by God. I happen to believe that Hayek would think that there are no realistic circumstances in which this would not do untold damage. Reagan would have shared that view. As Dinesh D'Souza (in *Ronald Reagan*) puts it: "Reagan believed intellectuals have no right to attempt to plan or manage the economy. He didn't think [they] knew how." At the same time, it is reasonable to think that both Hayek, who met with John Paul II, and Reagan who (according to both O'Sullivan and D'Souza) developed a close rapport with him, would have taken account of the current Pope's implicit premise.

**M**aterialism, particularly consumerism, comes under sustained attack in the encyclical. I have observed that many of those among us who profess to be atheists claim to have a spiritual side. I have no idea what they mean by this and have never been able to extract a satisfactory explanation. But what is clear is that they have a negative view of unadorned materialism. Most of us do, as I am confident polling on the matter would verify, even among those queuing for the latest personal communications device.

Put aside the comment in the encyclical about the "tedious monotony" of the "constant flow of new products" with which many of us can surely agree. Please not yet another gizmo of dubious merit. The Pope believes that the level of consumption in the developed world cannot be "universalised". He points principally to the unmanageable waste that would result, but relevant too is his rejection of the possibility of unlimited growth in a finite world. From a free-market perspective this is all moot.

If the less developed regions were able to

consume at Western levels they would presumably, and in fact certainly, have embraced capitalism and the cultural values that make it work. No other system would deliver the goods. Demonstrably this would allow waste to be dealt with effectively as it has in the West and, equally demonstrably, it would lead to an improvement in environmental outcomes.

As to unlimited growth in a finite world; this presents a challenge to the rational mind. It is best not to think too far ahead. Infinity is a long way out. Capitalism has shown itself adept at confounding those who predict that resources are going to run out. And no end of this is remotely in sight. To reiterate my explanation in a previous *Quadrant* article ("Economic Growth in a Finite World"): Impending shortages lead to rising prices. Exploration and extraction intensify, substitute materials are brought into play, and new technologies and products are developed which rely less or not at all on the materials whose supplies are tightening. As Wilfred Beckerman (in *Two Cheers for the Affluent Society: A Spirited Defence of Economic Growth*) puts it: "History is full of dire predictions that if the demand for a certain product continued to grow as before the known resource would be used up in  $x$  years time, and all of them have been shown by events to have been absurd."

So, in sum, the Pope would appear to be wrong. Perhaps, but quite honestly the logistics of extending the ever-growing material demands of capitalism, as it is in the Western world, to the rest of the world would take us into unknown territory. It is a confronting prospect to envisage Western levels of consumption reproduced worldwide. The size of the leap is almost unimaginable.

According to the Population Reference Bureau, around 83 per cent of the world's population of 7.3 billion live in less-developed regions of the world. The world's population is projected by the UN's Population Division to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, almost all of the growth in less-developed regions; over one half in Africa (see "World's Population Prospects: 2015 Revision"). This will mean by 2050 that around 88 per cent of the world's population will live in less-developed regions. And this proportion will go on rising if, as projected, the world's population grows to over 11 billion by 2100.

All is far from well in the world and the prog-

nosis is unpromising. The disparity between rich and poor nations is not the whole of the malady but it is a major part. The Pope might well be closer to understanding the scope of the problem rather better than those whose field of inquiry is limited geographically and spiritually. In any event, right or wrong in its economic specifics, the encyclical draws attention to the wide material gap between rich and poor and to the insuperable problem of bridging it. And, when the primary goal and measure of mankind is material wealth, growing tensions are bound to arise from the success of capitalism in the smaller, less fecund part of the world set against the relative poverty in the larger, more fecund part of the world. Something's gotta give, as the old song goes. Principally that something is being played out in population movements.

Leave aside the Syrian (so-called) refugee exodus, migration from poor to rich countries has increased steeply since 1945 and most particularly since the mid-1980s (see Castles, Haas and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 2013). It is not hard to envisage the current "invasion" of Europe becoming the new normal as billions more people join the ranks of the relatively impoverished in less-developed regions.

Spreading capitalism combined with Judeo-Christian cultural values to these regions would provide a solution. The realist might say that this is as infeasible as getting people to replace materialism with spiritualism; mammon with God. It is. The realist would be right. There is no feasible solution.

In these circumstances it might be wise to give the Pope a break. Perhaps those in positions of influence in the Judeo-Christian world should support the Pope's efforts to strengthen spiritual values instead of concentrating on writing off his economics. This might help us withstand the cultural challenges that population movements will bring to free-market economies. For, if much of the migrants' "cultural baggage" were ever to flourish, it would undoubtedly subvert free-market principles as it has in the migrants' countries of origin. Else why would they be fleeing? The Pope surely has a point, even if his economics is not wholly of this world.

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*Perhaps those in positions of influence in the Judeo-Christian world should support the Pope's efforts to strengthen spiritual values instead of concentrating on writing off his economics.*

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## Getting a Headache

I was getting another of his headaches.  
There I was, preparing for a good-enough day,  
when it made its quiet appearance,  
showing itself only in a forced smile  
as he walked back into the house after checking the tyres.

But I didn't get it at first.  
It was only the averted eyes and the soundless sigh  
as he picked up the picnic basket  
and then as I marshalled the kids  
that told the whole story.

But true to form, when I asked him,  
"It's nothing," he said,  
making sure that it would be,  
for the rest of the long day,  
something indeed.

## No Turning Back

The hedge alongside us ended  
at a very high wall.  
As the wall was too high to scale,  
as the hedge was woven tight,  
and as there was no turning back,  
we had but one option.

The niggard path that offered itself  
was generous only with thistles,  
and except where it swerved from brambles,  
it closely followed the wall.  
The squashed cans and broken bottles,  
half hidden on either side,  
seemed remnants of another time,  
bequeathed to nature by people long since gone.

The wall, we assumed, went somewhere  
and so too the path,  
but the wall remained very high  
while the path grew harder to find,  
the thistles more thick.

## The Front Door

And when they reached the front door,  
we sat very still,  
hands gripping hands.  
Perhaps they would simply ring the bell,  
and perhaps, after a while,  
they would leave us alone.

We saw them first in the trees,  
eschewing the obvious pathway  
which led up to the door.  
But even as we fixed our gaze,  
they were lost from sight,  
swallowed by foliage and mist.  
They were, we decided to decide,  
a trick of the mind.

And it was only by chance  
that one of us looked again.  
We were going to open the door, but—  
once one of us stopped at the window—  
then everything stopped.

And now we are very quiet,  
afraid to breathe,  
our knuckles turned white.  
In a minute or two—  
we have to believe it—  
they will go away.

*Knute Skinner*

## Pictures from an Institution

Who says the guild system is dead? In New York, these days, you seem to need a licence for everything. The prominent Catholic journalist Ross Douthat discovered this mournful truth recently when he practised theology without a licence in his column for the *New York Times*. The offending column, “The Plot to Change Catholicism”, was published on October 18 and sparked an immediate rebuke from the Fraternal Order of Snot-Nosed Leftish Academic Theologians, Ltd. (I may not have the name exactly right.)

Here’s what the brotherhood had to say (as an aid to the reader, I italicise a few phrases):

Aside from the fact that Mr Douthat has *no professional qualifications* for writing on the subject, the problem with his article and other recent statements is his view of Catholicism as unapologetically subject to a *politically partisan narrative* that has very little to do with *what Catholicism really is*. Moreover, *accusing other members of the Catholic church of heresy*, sometimes subtly, sometimes openly, is serious business that can have serious consequences for those so accused. This is *not what we expect of the New York Times*.

This effusion was signed by more than fifty academics and many more have subsequently weighed in to denounce Douthat for practising theology without a licence. The “Twitter war” that erupted is partly comical, partly alarming, as such public displays of intemperateness often are. “Own your heresy,” Douthat recommended to one left-wing interlocutor, a piece of advice that sent the group-think brigades over the edge.

The case of Douthat is actually more complicated than a bare recitation of the events might suggest. The reason the brotherhood refused to issue the old *nihil obstat* to Ross Douthat was not really because he violated the cardinal guild rule against

freelance theology. The guild suffers many interlopers to wax theological, *provided that they come to the right conclusions*.

Ross Douthat’s real sin was not so much theologising as expressing the wrong opinion about certain sensitive subjects dear to the brotherhood’s collective heart (and other organs). Specifically, when writing about the recent Synod on the family in Rome, Douthat expressed the heretical view that the Catholic Church ought to abide by Catholic teachings. If that seems elliptical, let me explain that by “heretical” I mean “orthodox”. Douthat, as a traditionalist Catholic, had the temerity to point out that Pope Francis aimed to use the Synod to advance the Left-liberal view that marriage is a relationship of convenience that can be revised or abrogated at will without incurring ecclesiastical censure. Specifically, Douthat charged, the Pope “favors the proposal, put forward by the church’s liberal cardinals, that would allow divorced and remarried Catholics to receive communion without having their first marriage declared null”. Douthat continued:

The entire situation abounds with ironies. Aging progressives are seizing a moment they thought had slipped away, trying to outmaneuver younger conservatives who recently thought they owned the Catholic future. The African bishops are defending the faith of the European past against Germans and Italians weary of their own patrimony. A Jesuit pope is effectively at war with his own Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the erstwhile Inquisition—a situation that would make 16th century heads spin.

This might seem like something of interest only to theologically-inclined Catholics. But in fact it provides a good window on a much broader *Kulturkampf*. Ross Douthat—that rarest of *rarae aves*, a conservative at the *New York Times*—writes a

column defending the traditional Catholic teaching on marriage. The academic Left swings into action and tries to get him sacked.

Look again at that letter to the *Times*: Douthat has “no professional qualifications” for writing about the Catholic teaching on marriage. What can that possibly mean? That a PhD is required to opine authoritatively on the subject of marriage? Especially hilarious is the charge that what Douthat writes is part of “a politically partisan narrative”, as if the signatories to that letter were free from political affiliation. Behind that contention is an important leftist assumption about the world:

that politics are what other people, specifically conservatives, exhibit. What all right-thinking (that is, Left-leaning) people espouse is not politics but merely the state of nature. The idea, for example, that marriage is an indissoluble bond between two people (and a man and a woman at that) has the *imprimatur* of that other non-PhD theologian, Jesus of Nazareth. And yet in today’s world, it is a political—that is, a conservative, that is, a retrograde—position. All good people know that marriage is just what you want it to be. That’s not political, that’s just common sense. It’s what everybody I went college with thinks, ergo it must be true.

It’s the same with any contentious subject. There is the “non-political” (Left-liberal) position on abortion, climate change, the free market, the idea that there is a “rape culture” on American campuses, and so on. Sign up for the orthodox position and you’re home free; dissent and you get the treat Ring Lardner immortalised with the line, “Shut up, he explained.”

As I write, America is wracked by a couple of Academic scandals, one at Yale, one at the University of Missouri. They represent other chapters in the gospel of intolerance that greeted Ross Douthat. Both stories are hard to recount with a straight face. Towards the end of October, an entity called the “Intercultural Affairs Office”, which represents such groups as Yale’s “LBGTQ Resources” office, “Native American Cultural Center”, and others, issued a sort of travel advisory for Halloween. Be careful what costumes you choose, children, because you might give offence to someone, somewhere. “Feathered headdresses”, for example, as well as “turbans, wearing ‘war paint’ or modifying skin

tone or wearing blackface or redface” were deemed, er, beyond the pale. “Could someone take offense with your costume and why?” the memo asked, with shaky grammar.

This is just business-as-usual in the sanitised, politically correct kindergarten that is the American university today. But then something extraordinary happened. Another college administrator sent round an e-mail that began with all the usual Left-liberal pieties but concluded with this enormity: “Free speech and the ability to tolerate offense are the hallmarks of a free and open society ... In other words: Whose business is it to control the forms of costumes of young people? It’s not mine, I know that.”

Oh my God: can you believe it? How dare she stand up for “the ability to tolerate offense”? How dare she suggest that it would be OK for a student to wear a culturally insensitive Halloween costume? I know it is hard to believe, but trust me, Yale erupted in a self-induced panic.

I should add at this point that I agree entirely with the writer. I think people ought to be able to wear any costume they want. Doubtless some costumes are in bad taste, but none of the items listed above bothers me at all. I don’t care if kids, or others, dress up as injuns—dot or feather, either is just fine with me—minstrel singers, pasty-faced accountants, or slatternly suburban housewives in tattered dressing gowns.

But I am not a delicate hothouse seedling at Yale, which greeted this permission with several hours-long public gatherings at which students berated administrators for not treating them like helpless children. At one such meeting, a black girl screamed obscenities at the head of her college, shouting that it was his job “to create a place of comfort” for students—not “an intellectual space”, she elaborated, but “a home”. She ended by demanding that he step down as head of college. A public-spirited observer captured the encounter on video and posted it to the internet. It’s gone viral, and I recommend looking it up. You have to see it to appreciate the virulence of the exchange. It is a breathtaking exhibition of what Charles Mackay called “the madness of crowds”.

As chance (or perhaps it was Providence) would have it, I was at Yale the day after this episode to take part in a conference on (irony alert) the

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“future of free speech”. One of the participants was Greg Lukianoff, the president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), which has a long and distinguished record of defending free speech on campus. Having witnessed the bizarre show trial the previous day, Lukianoff was incredulous. It used to be, he noted, that the bulk of FIRE’s interventions were against college administrations that had infringed upon the free speech of faculty or students. But more and more, he noted, the assault on free speech was coming from the students themselves. Here was a case in point. Someone in authority had said, “It’s not my business to police your Halloween costume.” Why on earth would anyone object to that? It’s not, he mused, as if someone had burned down an Indian village.

The line got a laugh from the audience, which was appropriate, because (does this really need to be explained?) burning down an Indian village is an enormity while saying that people can wear whatever sort of Halloween costume they want is simple sanity. Or so one would have thought. There were a few student moles planted among the audience, and one proceeded to disrupt the proceedings by pasting up signs on the wall that read, “Stand with your sisters of color. Now, here. Always, everywhere.” He was asked to sit down or leave and when he refused, a security guard dragged him kicking and screaming from the room. The chief burden of his complaint revolved around that Indian village. Greg Lukianoff had said that the response to that innocuous e-mail was so violent that you would have thought someone had destroyed an Indian village. He didn’t advocate destroying an Indian village, mind you. No villages of any sort were despoiled in the conduct of his remarks. He merely suggested that the response to an e-mail treating students as responsible adults (first mistake!) was wildly disproportionate.

The student who was ejected obviously had friends, for soon there were about thirty, then over 100, students outside the lecture hall chanting, “Genocide is not a joke.” Extra security was brought in to assure the safe egress of the participants an hour later. Even so, some people were spat upon by the angry mob as they left the room.

Then there is the University of Missouri. Someone reported that a swastika made from human faeces was drawn on the wall of rest room

in a college dormitory. Whether the swastika actually existed is a matter of some dispute. There is no photographic evidence. Nevertheless, the alleged *objet* sparked a protest by the black football players at the university who demanded that the president do something to condemn racism on campus. (What the connection between the alleged swastika and racism is supposed to be remains mysterious.) Apparently the president’s response was inadequate. The football team struck, refusing to play until they got satisfaction. That came a few days later when both the president and the chancellor of the university stepped down, casualties in an escalating outbreak of politically correct insanity.

The story didn’t end there, however. Once the natives get stirred up, it is difficult to pacify them. There were more protests, demands for a “safe space” for “people of color” and so on. Some students, abetted by sympathetic Left-leaning faculty, erected a tent village on a public space on campus. When a student who was not one of the demonstrators attempted to photograph goings-on around the tents, a cordon of twenty or thirty students and faculty encircled him and, with menacing taunts, forced him back away from the tents. He calmly pointed out that the First Amendment protected his rights to free speech even as it did theirs, but the crowd just laughed at that. When another interloper got close to the tents, a professor called Melissa Click, who teaches in the journalism program at the university, obstructed his view and cried out for “some muscle” to come and

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*Rhetoric of “trigger warnings”, “micro-aggressions”, and “safe spaces” is deployed partly to infantilise the parties who indulge in it, partly in order to advance a covertly brutal regime of political conformity.*

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help remove the would-be photographer.

This episode, too, was captured on a video that has gone viral and, again, I suggest tracking it down to get a palpable sense of the aura of thuggish menace that suffused the event. American universities—American public discourse generally—is more and more captive of a newly minted species of Orwellian doublespeak in which putative victims are in fact victimisers and a rhetoric of “trigger warnings”, “micro-aggressions”, and “safe spaces” is deployed partly to infantilise the parties who indulge in it, partly in order to advance a covertly brutal regime of political conformity.

Back in the early 1950s, the poet Randall Jarrell published a novel called *Pictures from an Institution*, one of those comic academic larks that is as terrifying as it is funny. “If Benton,” the imaginary women’s college of the novel, “had had an administration building with pillars it could have carved over the

pillars: *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you feel guilty.* Just as ordinary animal awareness has been replaced in man by consciousness," Jarrell writes:

so consciousness has been replaced, in most of the teachers of Benton, by social consciousness. They were successful in teaching most of their students to say in contrition, about anything whatsoever: *It was I, Lord, it was I;* but they were not so successful in teaching them to consider this consciousness of guilt a *summum bonum*, one's final claim upon existence. Many a Benton girl went back to her nice home, married her rich husband, and carried a fox in her bosom for the rest of her life—and short of becoming a social worker, founding a Neo-Socialist party, and then killing herself and

leaving her insurance to the United Nations, I do not know how she could have got rid of it.

Jarrell's novel is still plenty pertinent to academic life, but there is this difference: the metabolism of misplaced guilt he anatomises has been weaponised. These days, the suffocating sense of guilt has been jazzed up into a cocktail of self-congratulation, on the one hand, and menacing intolerance, on the other. Doubtless it portends many things, but support for liberal education or liberal society, properly understood, is not among them.

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## Slim Town

The town is on a protracted diet.  
Near the centre, red brick buildings hold  
their age; the school and houses are trim.  
At the pub the barmaid serves where bushrangers  
met and planned to rob a coach  
of miner's gold but shot a policeman.

On the wall, pictures are of bullock teams  
hauling massive logs from eucalypt forests.  
Now wood is often plantation pine;  
sheep and cattle still graze the mustard hills  
but roads have taken the shops to nearby large towns  
where many work to live here.

White arms wave from the wind farm, to visitors  
and those who leave and sustain.

*Paul Williamson*

## Chet Baker in Japan

Ravaged Chet Baker,  
Junkie prince of jazz,  
Searching for a vein  
Under Tokyo's neon,  
The blue narco-moon  
A tattooed yakuza,  
A gleaming katana,  
Samurai shadows  
In clubland alleys,  
(Death could intervene,  
Like a deal gone wrong),  
Chet blowing a pure  
And improvised Zen,  
Spare riffs of beauty,  
The velvet of his voice  
Like mist on the harbour,  
The timbre of moon-drench  
On Mt Fuji's scree—  
Then, *My Funny Valentine's*  
Harmonics dissolving,  
All the songs collapsing  
Into a long dark night.

*Rod Moran*

## Paris, at Five Minutes to Midnight

The best free performance in Paris took place in a large bookshop just off the Place Saint-Michel. On the first floor, near the history books, a young African queen gives a performance worth considering for a French Molière. In the crowded bookshop his job seems to be directing traffic and dealing with book queries. He is in total control of his captive, browsing audience and plays broadly with a voice that can be heard in every part of the store.

As we enter he is languidly berating several young scarf-covered women who have sought his assistance. “Mademoiselles,” he scolds, “I adooore exactitude.” They giggle uneasily as they try to remember more details of the book they are looking for. Having disposed of them he regally farewells several “Mesdames” who have found and paid for what they sought: “... and now”, with a wave of his hand, “I suggest you head home, and have a good rest.” To our admiring and suitably submissive farewells he returns the compliment, “Goodbye, the young ones.” Over the river, not very far away, another not bad performance is taking place.

Marivaux’s *La Double Inconstance* (*The Double Inconstancy*) is playing at the Comédie Française. Before the 8.30 p.m. performance there is time to find the chair on which Molière fell ill while performing in February 1673. The tattered, sainted object turns out to be a seventeenth-century recliner chair.

On this Wednesday night in October the Salle Richelieu is packed with an audience that cuts across ages. This new production of *La Double Inconstance* (first performed in 1723) entered the company’s repertoire in November 2014. Village lovers Sylvia and Arlequin are torn apart when a prince, out hunting, sees and falls in love with Sylvia. She is kidnapped and taken away to his palace, and later Arlequin joins her there. Both lovers are tempted and find new loves—Sylvia with the prince, in the disguise of an officer, and Arlequin with a lady of the court,

Flamina. The simple country lovers have not been able to withstand the sophisticated wiles of their aristocratic admirers. The play is as light, slight and elegant as a Fragonard.

The stage set is a copy of a real rehearsal room inside the theatre. Glass doors at the back open onto a balcony and a representation of buildings opposite the theatre. The Paris sky changes colour, lights in the buildings go on and off as time passes and the play seems to move from first rehearsal to final staging. Piece by piece the actors’ rehearsal clothes are gradually replaced with stage costumes, and the set itself changes to suggest a fully developed staging. There are some modern musical intrusions: “Both Sides Now” by Joni Mitchell and a 1950s musical theatre dance number. There is a comic bath routine with the prince involving steam, bubbles and a sound-effect-maker sitting on the stage.

Although the modern bits could suggest that the director is not confident of the play’s own strength, the text is treated with affection and respect. Australian theatres are generally text-phobic and prefer rewriting and demolition.

The actors, mostly young, are disciplined and talented. The eighteenth-century language is delivered naturally and with precision, even when delivered at high speed. In the comfortably-sized auditorium the actors are unmiked and the clarity and volume are maintained even as they turn away from us.

My excellent dress circle seat has cost me less than a ticket to our subsidised theatres. For those who want to queue there are much cheaper seats sold before the curtain rises. The audience concentrates and enjoys. There are tourists like myself, no doubt, and first-time visitors to the theatre. At the end of the play the generous and warm-hearted applause goes on and on and on. It lasts far longer than even an enthusiastic evening in an Australian theatre.

The onstage set had reproduced a heavy downpour, and coming out of the theatre it is raining. Sheltering a moment under the famous

colonnade is like wandering into the opening scene of *Pygmalion* or *My Fair Lady*. A short dash to the Metro and we find ourselves among a pleasant chattering crush of theatre audience still with that friendly glow from having actually enjoyed being present in a theatre.

We go underground at Place Colette and come above ground in Boulevard Barbès. The short Metro ride takes us from Right Bank traditional culture and cultivated glamour into African prostitution. Not much further on, in outer Paris, are suburbs where anti-white racism is a reality.

**I**n French bookshops this autumn is Lucien Rebatet's *Les Décombres* (*The Ruins*). It was hastily reprinted after the initial 5000-copy print run sold out on publication day. It was also a best-seller during the occupation and this is the first uncensored post-war edition. The fascist and anti-Semitic must-read of 1942 now comes with a modern prophylactic introduction by a left-wing historian—strange when you think that the Left is now the home of anti-Semitism. A new translation of another wartime best-seller, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, will be in the bookstores in January 2016, after the author's copyright expires.

Before then Paris will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the 2005 *banlieue* riots. A nostalgic rock-throwing, car-burning veteran has been quoted as saying that next time it won't be a riot, it will be civil war. A civil war suggests two sides but in France there might not be another side to take to the battlefield. Just in the last few weeks there have been major incidents with gypsy bands attacking gendarmes, burning cars and closing down some of the country's main road arteries. With Holland appearing more and more like a Louis XVI *bis* there were few, if any, arrests. The Parisian *banlieues* already seem like a foreign concession—*Dogs and Frenchmen Not Admitted*. France does grand defeats on a grand scale—1870, almost happened in 1914, 1940, 1962, and possibly sometime very soon. When ISIS flags flutter along the Rue de Rivoli and Marais gays flap from the top of the Arc de Triomphe survivors may talk not of civil war but the War of Conversion *circa* 2016.

**T**he *Legend of King Arthur*, directed by Dove Attia, is playing at the Palais des Congrès. It's one of the large-scale musical theatre productions I've so far only seen on film. The auditorium is in

a shopping mall and conference centre complex and seats about 3700. As with all French theatres the ticketing is confusing. A line runs through the middle of the auditorium. Odd numbered seats are on one side, even on the other, so that seats 5 and 7 in any row are actually side by side. Before the performance an announcement that photography with flash is not allowed is the signal for the wholesale turning on of cameras and phones. The stage is large and is filled with giant projections, stage props, performers, dancers, puppets. A large burning, besieged castle fills the entire stage—nineteenth-century audiences would have loved the spectacular conception. This really is modern, popular musical theatre.

Some of what I see I don't quite get, but that doesn't really matter, it's the spectacle that counts. When we meet Guinevere she is accompanied by a retinue of female dancers in white dresses but I'm not sure why they are all pregnant. Later the women in red dresses who whirl across the stage are revealed to be men. I lose count at somewhere between fifty and sixty performers onstage. Though it is very enjoyable, the father in front of me gets bored and begins chatting on Facebook, until an elbow from his son beside him suggests he extinguish the screen.

These modern musicals are a way forward, a way to attract large popular audiences. This production will travel France and then to Belgium and Switzerland. It's using many performers who have made their names in popular French televised musical programs. The young audience are probably their television fans and Facebook friends. The story line is easy to follow. The songs, to me bland and uninteresting, are modern pop familiar to young audiences. The staging is grand in conception, active, and always interesting. The sound is loud enough to drown out chatting audiences, and the stage effects so captivating that you don't always focus on the camera-clicking pests in the audience. Australia could make these sorts of shows and export them.

**N**owhere in Paris is far from possible danger. The theatres and museums operate under strict security. Armed soldiers punctuate the street outside the Shoah Memorial, as they do outside Sacré Cœur. To visit the Memorial you need to press a button to attract a response from a security control room. You wait until a green light glows and you

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push the button to enter—a small cell-like entry room where we are confined until the door locks shut behind us. Now, if permitted, you press more buttons to be approved for entry into the main part of the building.

On Sunday afternoon a free bus takes people to the new museum opposite the Drancy internment camp site in the outer suburbs of Paris. During the occupation an uncompleted housing estate in Drancy was used for holding Jews until they were transferred to Auschwitz or other camps. Over 67,000 people passed through it. After the war the building was completed and today it is a regular housing estate. The free bus is a short walk away from the Shoah Memorial. In the street nervous people stand about waiting. A bus without a destination mark arrives and parks further up the street. A plain-clothed security man boards and checks it out. He smiles and waves to people who board for the trip to Drancy. When we arrive we are met by another security man who shows us into the museum building opened by President Hollande in 2012. There are only a few of us. One old man, an American Jew living in Miami, passed through Drancy when young and has the Auschwitz numbers on his arm.

We skip the guided tour and go straight upstairs to the permanent exhibition. Big glass windows look across the street to the housing estate. The buildings are laid as in a U shape. At the open end an old SNCF railway van used in the deportations stands on rails, and nearby is a memorial statue. The railway van has been vandalised before. Drancy has an important Muslim population. As we look down, the people from our bus cross the street and stand about listening to the tour guide. A security man stands at their back, his eyes travelling about. When later we go down to visit the site, the present tensions are stronger than the historical message.

The Theatre de la Porte-Saint-Martin has produced the best 1956 French musical to be staged in Paris in 2015. Wisely they made it a hit by avoiding tampering. *Irma la Douce*, with music

by Marguerite Monnot, who wrote for Piaf, is gloriously nostalgic, with Parisian love for a Paris that no longer exists. The theatre, rebuilt after burning down in the Commune, was played in by Sarah Bernhardt and saw the first production of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. It's a pleasure to be in. As with some other French theatres, English subtitles are projected above the stage. English-speakers can book tickets that offer a pre-performance talk and special seating in the dress circle from where the titles are easily read. From the comfortable seats in the stalls the titles are visible, with some neck straining.

In the Gallic Damon Runyon world of Montmartre, prostitute Irma loves Nestor, and he loves her. Jealous of her many work-day customers he agrees that she may have a single wealthy customer, Oscar—who he becomes beneath a thin disguise. Then he becomes jealous of Oscar—himself. When he makes his rival disappear he is arrested and convicted of killing Oscar. Sent to an overseas prison he returns, all is explained, and there is a happy ending with Irma giving birth to twin boys—Nestor and Oscar. The story is told by the owner of the Montmartre bar where the tale begins. The part is played by a crowd-teasing, crowd-

pleasing seventy-nine-year-old Nicole Croisille. It's a pleasure of a musical, and also a sadness. The world it celebrates no longer exists. The place names now summon up visions of very different inhabitants. The audience is very French—but you are not allowed to mention things like that in France.

Also appearing in Paris at the same time was the great Fabrice Luchini—performing a one-man show of selections from some of his favoured writers. As his political opinions are well known, many right-wing politicians headed for his dressing room after the performance to congratulate the great man and receive his blessing. With elections in the air French politicians have more important things to think about than migration, unemployment, the “jungle” outside Calais, or approaching civil war. *C'est la vie*.

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# BOOKS, ARTS & LIFE

## A Century of Bertie and Jeeves

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MARK MCGINNESS

They appeared in September 1915 in the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*: a hungover Bertie woken by a tap at the door, “Mrs Gregson to see you, sir,” and then, “Very good, sir, which suit will you wear?” Jeeves, the ultimate gentleman’s personal gentleman, was born; and so began the most enduring and congenial double act in literature. This was from “Extricating Young Gussie”, the first of thirty-five short stories and eleven novels to chart the adventures of the upper-class innocent cum Edwardian boulevardier, Bertie Wooster, and his consummate, inscrutable valet, Jeeves.

It was not until 1971 in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* that we—and Bertie—learn that Jeeves had a first name, Reginald. But even Bertie took some time to take orf. At first he was Mannering-Phipps and for the next four short stories featuring Jeeves, he was Reggie Pepper. Then at last, and forever twenty-four years old, Bertram Wilberforce Wooster. By 1919, in “The Artistic Career of Corky”, the fantastic formula was set. As the author put it years later, “Why not groom this bit player for stardom ... make him a bird with a terrific brain who comes to Bertie’s rescue whenever the latter gets into a

jam?” He confessed something like shame, “Now that I have written so much about him, to recall how softly and undramatically Jeeves first entered my little world.”

The other odd aspect was that this first introduction to Jeeves and Bertie was set in New York. As the critic George Watson observed:

So the most famous manservant of modern literature started life as an expatriate—the creation, what is more, of an expatriate mind. Appropriately for a writer who spent much of his time evoking an England which dwelt only in his imagination, he spent most of his life outside the jurisdiction, in New York, Hollywood, Le Touquet, Cannes and ultimately Long Island.

But what of the man behind the enigmatic duo? Pelham Grenville (P.G./Plum) Wodehouse was born in Guildford in 1881, the son of a Hong Kong magistrate. The scion of one of Britain’s oldest baronetcies and the Earldom of Kimberley (he was also a great-nephew of the great John Henry, Cardinal Newman), Plum was taken off to Hong Kong but soon returned to England with relatives, clergymen uncles and “a surging sea of aunts”, accompanying them on visits to country houses where he often ended up in the servants’ hall. Then, having pleaded to go, he spent “six years of unbroken bliss” as a border at Dulwich College—popular, clever and

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Arrow currently publishes all P.G. Wodehouse’s books in paperback for £7.99 each, while Everyman’s Library has them all in a hardback edition for £10.99 each.

good at games. He would remain at heart forever the schoolboy.

Family finances denied him a place at Oxford so his father found him a job in the London office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. He was, in his words, “the most inefficient clerk whose trouser-seat ever polished the surface of a high stool”. Writing—journalism and school stories—became an escape and, in 1904, allowed him to go to New York, which was “like being in heaven without going to all the bother and expense of dying”. He stayed there throughout the First World War, refused enlistment due to poor eyesight.

In 1914, he fell instantly in love—just like Bingo Little and Freddy Widgeon—and wed a fellow expat, the twice-widowed former chorus girl, Ethel Rowley, who had an eleven-year-old daughter, Leonora, whom Plum adopted and adored. Ethel was described by Malcolm Muggeridge as “a mixture of Mistress Quickly and Florence Nightingale with a touch of Lady Macbeth thrown in”. In reviewing Robert McCrum’s consummate biography for the *Spectator*, Michael Vestey added, “She was everything Wodehouse wasn’t: highly sexed, sociable, extravagant with money, and yet it was an extremely successful partnership that lasted sixty years.”

Wodehouse’s own domestic contentment, supported by an endless succession of pets, mainly Pekinese, allowed him to write, and was as enduring as that of Bertie and Jeeves’s six decades together.

He reserved his wit and conversation for the page. When an uncharacteristically starry-eyed Evelyn Waugh met Wodehouse for the first time, he was disappointed to find their exchanges did not get beyond the inequities of income tax. And when Plum was invited to join the Round Table gang at the Algonquin, he complained, “All those three-hour lunches. When did these slackers ever get any work done?”

Although they came to life in 1915, Bertie and Jeeves were—and remained—men of an earlier age. Another Wodehouse devotee, Hugh Massingberd, put it:

I like to believe that Wodehouse’s Edwardian never-never land was not so far removed from what England might have been like in the 1920s if the apocalyptic Great War had never taken place.

It is often said that searching for models and muses for fictional figures is frivolous and self-indulgent and somehow robs the novelist of his genius. Yet Wodehouse would occasionally feed morsels to curious apostles. In Herbert Warren

Wind’s fascinating *New Yorker* profile in 1971, Plum insisted that when he was “living in London at the turn of the century a good many of the young men dressed in morning coats, toppers, and spats” and by the time he started writing his stories, “Bertie was a recognisable type. All the rich young men had valets.” He mentioned the amateur jockey Lord Mildmay (1909–50) as a model for Bertie, but in 1915 His Lordship was even younger than those monstrous younger brothers, Oswald Glossop and Edwin Craye. What this does indicate is that Bertie was not yet (was he ever?) fully-formed. It is also significant that the first full-length novel did not appear until *Thank You, Jeeves* in 1934, so he had time to evolve. Another inspiration (identified by Colonel Norman Murphy in his decades of exhaustive study of the truth behind Wodehouse’s fiction) was surely Plum’s chum, George Grossmith Junior, who as an actor embodied the Edwardian dude in musicals and comedies on the London stage in the early years of last century.

As for Jeeves, we know the name came from the Warwickshire fast bowler Percy Jeeves, whom Wodehouse saw play against Gloucestershire in 1913. But the character himself? J.M. Barrie had an extraordinary butler called Thurston who apparently read Latin and Greek as he polished the silver and would correct Barrie’s literary guests when they got their quotations wrong. Cynthia Asquith’s *Portrait of Barrie* refers to “Thurston, uncommunicative, inscrutable, puma-footed ... No one ever heard him enter or leave a room.” Uncannily like the shimmering Jeeves. But again the timing is not right. Thurston joined Barrie in 1922 and Lady Cynthia’s memoir was published in 1954 so perhaps Barrie’s butler had unconsciously assumed the mien of the by-then legendary Jeeves. A closer source might well have been two other fictional figures—Harry Leon Wilson’s *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1915), and Arthur Conan Doyle’s Austin, Professor Challenger’s servant in *The Poison Belt* (1913):

“I’m expecting the end of the world today, Austin.”  
 “Yes, sir. What time, sir?”  
 “I can’t say. Before evening.”  
 “Very good, sir.”

Yet all-in-all, Jeeves had no forebear; nor did he have an equal. As if he did not have enough on his plate, it was invariably Jeeves’s lot to drive the plot—with all those winning ingredients—a country house, its peppery owner, an icy consort, a glacial Grande Dame, the odd aunt and an odder uncle or two, perhaps a clergyman, and of course a butler; a series of breakfasts, lunches, teas and dinners, a few chums, a fiancée and, of course, the requisite

luckless, love-struck young couple. Add a cricket match, a game of golf, or a horse race, a break-in, a concert or fete. And, with Jeeves and Bertie perhaps in disguise, the flawless formula is plumb in place.

But what makes the novels sing is the Master's musical prose. The love interest with a laugh "like a squadron of cavalry galloping over a tin bridge"; the oft-quoted "I could see that, if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being grunted"; and "It was my Uncle George who discovered that alcohol was a complete food well in advance of medical thought." Vintage Bertie; the same Bertie who never utters a biblical or literary quote that he can get right, leaving it, of course, to Jeeves to correct him but never quite finish it. And yet, though "mentally negligible", Bertie is an unselfconsciously brilliant narrator. Wodehouse wrote in Bertie's voice more than any other and, although he would say that the absent-minded, hen-pecked, all-for-a-quiet-life Lord Emsworth (of Blandings fame) was his nearest *alter ego*, one must agree with the Wodehousian scholar Richard Osborne that there is much of Plum in Bertie.

Plum's only brush with scandal was certainly the result of a Bertie moment. In 1940 he was taken prisoner at Le Touquet by the invading Germans. Ethel recalled his arrest. He had ten minutes to pack. "I was nearly insane; couldn't find the keys to the room for the suitcase, and Plum went off with a copy of Shakespeare, a pair of pyjamas and a mutton chop." He was interned for nearly a year, finally in Upper Silesia. ("If this is Upper Silesia," he wrote, "what must lower be like?") After his release, he made, at the request of the Nazis, six amusing, apolitical radio broadcasts from Berlin to the United States, which had not yet entered the war. To the British under siege across the Channel this was either treason or collaboration. Inquiries by the British and later the French found no evidence to prosecute Plum; while scholarly examination since has established nothing more than foolish naivety. As Robert McCrum put it, "Jeevesian in his professional life, it was his fate to be Woosterish in Berlin." Wodehouse would never again set foot on English soil.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, politics almost never raises its ugly head to tarnish the timeless Edwardian glow of Wooster's world. *The Code of the Woosters* (1938), one of the best in the canon, does feature Sir Roderick Spode, leader of the Blackshorts; an

uncharacteristically up-to-date shot at Oswald Mosley but still a classic Wodehouse villain. And there is the celebrated appearance of Sippy Sipperley in the dock as Leon Trotzky in "Without the Option" (1925). Even in Plum's last novel, *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen* (1974), there are references to protest marches and civil disobedience.

But incursions into the real world are rare. Like politics and parents, death, dates and sex are alien. Beds are for nothing but sleeping, convalescing, or short-sheeting. Bertie is stirred, of course, but by nothing more carnal than Madeline Bassett's "blonde hair with all the trimmings" and Florence Craye's "wonderful profile". Love is a different thing. His fellow members of the Drones Club were stricken all the time—in *The Mating Season* (1949) the Master juggled no less than four infatuated couples. True, Bertie was not as susceptible as his chum Bingo Little, but he fell in love—with Lady Cynthia Wickhammersley, Angelica Briscoe, Pauline Stoker. Although, in Bertie's case, the state of betrothal does not always (or even usually) equal devotion and he *never* makes it to the altar. His Aunt Dahlia quipped that if the girls Bertie had been engaged to were placed end to end, they would reach from Piccadilly to Hyde Park Corner.

The arcane marks of a gentleman are taken as read. "Never trust a man who keeps billiard chalk in his waistcoat pocket." And in cricket, "a gentleman should not score more than half his team's total." (Try telling that to our batsmen.) There are of course weightier tropes. In *The Code of the Woosters*, Wodehouse lays down the two commandments upon which most of his Bertie plots hinge: Thou shalt not let down a pal; and Thou shalt not scorn a woman's love.

Appearances are all in this exquisite universe and Bertie's occasional sartorial lapses are one of the few causes of friction between him and Jeeves. Bertie's choice of a garish cummerbund, a white dinner jacket, an over-checked suit are almost capital offences:

"There are moments, Jeeves, when one asks oneself, 'Do trousers matter?'"

"The mood will pass, sir."

As Sophie Ratcliffe (who edited Plum's letters) observed, "Bertie's [heliotrope] pyjamas [are] carefully buttoned up to disguise true feeling."

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Wodehouse once remarked, “there are only two ways of writing a novel. One is mine, making the thing a sort of musical comedy without music, and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going down deep into life and not caring a damn.” Roger Kimball noted, “Most great artists plumb the depths; Wodehouse remained fixed, gloriously, on the surface.” As Evelyn Waugh saw it, Wodehouse inhabited a world as timeless as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Wodehouse himself said it was as if he was forever in his last year at school. It was, Waugh said, “as if the Fall of Man had never happened”.

For such an inimitably English writer, it is impossible to imagine him translated. Yet more than thirty Wodehouse titles have been published in a dozen languages—from Bulgarian and Hungarian to Finnish and French. A few titles are available in another sixteen languages. In his *Penguin Wodehouse Companion* (1988) Richard Usborne has fun with the French version: “I have just one thing to say to you, Wooster. Get out!” appears as, “Je n’ai qu’un mot à te dire, Wooster, f ..... le camp.” A particular favourite is the French rendering of “Loony to the eyebrows”: “complètement dingo”. In an heroic *hommage* to the Master, Jimmy Heineman commissioned translations of “The Great Sermon Handicap” into fifty-nine languages, including

Catalan and Afrikaans, Old Norse and Pidgin English, Sanskrit and Somali. Even Latin: “Bingo, ‘Jaevio enim’ inquit, ‘animus aleandi non inest’.”

In a letter to some admirers, Wodehouse wrote:

The world I write about, always a small one—one of the smallest I ever met, as Bertie ... would say—is now not even small, it is non-existent. It has gone with the wind ... In a word, it has had it. But I have not altogether lost hope of a revival.

Of course that revival never came and Plum died aged ninety-three, just six weeks after he was (rather like Prince Philip) so belatedly knighted.

The Master met his Maker on Valentine’s Day 1975. The timing was as perfect as his prose—it was invariably love that underpinned his fiction. As Bertie reflected (a rare phenomenon):

I wonder if you have observed a rather rummy thing about it—viz. that it is everywhere. You can’t get away from it. Love, I mean. Wherever you go, there it is, buzzing along in every class of life.

Mark McGinness is working in Dubai. He wrote on the *Queen* in the September issue.

## SIMON CATERSON

# A Century of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*

A century after publication, John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* remains the quintessential spy thriller. There is no need to rediscover this novel, since it has never gone away. No work of fiction published during the Edwardian period is more widely available in bookstores in as many mass-market and scholarly editions. The presence of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in popular culture has spread even further—the book’s title has a life of its own.

It is one of the first adult adventure novels I can remember reading, part of an early teenage thriller binge that included Jack Higgins, Ian Fleming, Frederick Forsyth and Wilbur Smith, and a phase followed by a lasting engagement with the likes of Eric Ambler, Joseph Conrad and John le Carré.

The writing career of John Buchan, who died in

1940, predates all of the other authors I have just mentioned except Conrad. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is the forerunner to countless subsequent spy thrillers and action movies where a lone hero is pitted against the forces of darkness, which is the scenario used by virtually all of them.

*The Thirty-Nine Steps* has spawned four feature-film adaptations, the first and best-known of which was directed by Alfred Hitchcock and released in 1935. The novel has also been adapted many times for radio, most notably for broadcast by Orson Welles’s Mercury Theatre in 1938. In recent years a comic stage version based on the Hitchcock film has been performed in many countries throughout the world, including South Korea, Russia, Israel, Poland and Australia, as well as enjoying a long run on the

London stage that, at the time of writing, continues.

A refreshingly uncomplicated tale of a manhunt that lasts a couple weeks, is set mostly in the Scottish Highlands and is told in around 40,000 words, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* has proved, so to speak, a runaway success. Indeed, the imperative of brevity and speed was something new and notable that Buchan brought to the thriller genre.

By way of comparison, *Rogue Male* (1939), a manhunt thriller by Geoffrey Household, seems somewhat static, with the fugitive protagonist spending a considerable time in captivity (during which he suffers prolonged torture at the hands of his Nazi persecutors) before literally going underground, hiding in a forest cave back in England while he awaits the arrival of his pursuer.

*Rogue Male* is an attempt at a psychologically complex manhunt thriller, and as such lacks the broad appeal of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. The fact that the protagonist in *Rogue Male* has an opportunity to assassinate Adolf Hitler but doesn't go through with it, apparently for arcane sporting or other reasons, marks him as a kind of reluctant action hero who simply would not fit in with the more direct, mainstream approach of Buchan. By definition in Buchan's terms, an action hero is as an action hero does.

Brisk and light compared with other classic Edwardian spy novels such as G.K. Chesterton's mystical *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908) or Erskine Childers's brooding *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is no less in tune with contemporary international political anxieties. Buchan began writing the book just before the First World War began and completed it after the war had started.

**T**he *Thirty-Nine Steps* is remarkably cinematic for a novel published in the early days of the silent-film era. Certainly the thriller formula developed by Buchan had a profound influence on Hitchcock, who knew Buchan and whose "wrong man" style of thriller is derived from the model of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Hitchcock's own film version of the book forms the basis for several of his subsequent Hollywood films, most notably the 1958 masterpiece *North by Northwest*.

In that film, as in Buchan's original, the protagonist, played by Cary Grant, is caught up in a wider international conspiracy and through a series of unfortunate events is obliged to avoid both sinister foreign agents and the local police. He realises

that he has become a decoy in a full-scale espionage operation designed to expose enemy spies operating on home soil.

The influence of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* on Hitchcock films such as *North by Northwest* may be seen not just in the manhunt theme common to both. In *North by Northwest* the Buchan influence is felt also in set-piece scenes such as the crop-duster attack upon the fugitive protagonist at the isolated bus stop. In the original novel, Buchan's hero Richard Hannay is pursued across the Highland wilderness by a monoplane.

This scene is typical of Buchan, and Hitchcock for that matter, in that it has great visual appeal as a self-contained spectacle without adding much to the story except to demonstrate the put-upon hero's capacity for survival and to dramatise the danger of the chase. Similarly, a James Bond or Jason Bourne film essentially is an amalgam of car chases, fight scenes and explosions punctuated by a tense confrontation with the arch-villain whose grand machinations go on behind the mayhem, or perhaps a dalliance with a female who may or may not be involved in the conspiracy on one side or the other. Any quiet scenes are used to make the most of exotic scenery or interesting buildings—there is never a dull moment.

Buchan, in the foreword to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, claimed to be paying homage to the pulp fiction of his time, which he describes as the type of "romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible".

Apart from a couple of brief delays due to capture and a drastically foreshortened bout of debilitating illness, Buchan keeps his hero Richard Hannay on the go. Non-stop spectacle and suspense offset any requirement for development of plot or depth of character, or rather these are worked in as the action is taking place.

In other words, the spectacle is the occasion for the narrative, rather than the reverse. The "kinetic" approach to storytelling, to borrow a term used by Australian film director George Miller, has a parallel in Miller's Mad Max films where everything we see and hear is geared to spectacle and the amount of exposition is kept to an absolute minimum. When organised cleverly, the effect is very impressive, though it can induce a certain impatience with other, slower thrillers.

It is interesting to consider how such a slight book (in the physical sense) that Buchan claimed

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*This belief in the power of one is the stuff of countless westerns and detective stories as well as adventure thrillers. It is one of the defining features of Western civilisation.*

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to have dashed off as a diversion during a period of illness proved so successful and came to exert such a powerful and lasting influence on popular culture. Originally setting the novel in the period before the outbreak of war, Buchan was obliged while writing the manuscript to change the ending once war had broken out.

The name of what promises to be the major female character is mentioned early on, only to be more or less forgotten. The character of the informant Scudder, who brings Hannay into the mystery, seems to have changed while Buchan was writing the book—a transition effected by simply having the original persona made out to be a clever disguise. Also, there is a reliance on sheer coincidence that is heavy even by popular thriller standards.

It seems to me that the improvised feel of the novel, the fact that often it reads like a first draft, can be viewed as a significant factor in its success. Like any profitable Hollywood blockbuster action film of today, what *The Thirty-Nine Steps* lacks in strict logic or even coherence it makes up for in sheer velocity and spectacle.

One obvious gap left by Buchan in the original novel that was filled by Hitchcock and all subsequent film adaptors was the absence of any significant female character. Buchan evidently contemplated a female character at the start of the book—the name Julia Czechenyi is tantalisingly mentioned twice—but apparently the thought went no further. Female characters not only feature prominently in modern thrillers but increasingly have dominant roles as women in real life are more involved in espionage. The female action hero's ascendancy in the Hollywood blockbuster is demonstrated in the latest *Mad Max* movie, where Max becomes part of the female hero's mission rather than the other way around.

In Hitchcock's film of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, Hannay is obliged to share his escape with a spirited woman after they are bound together by police handcuffs. This is the occasion for 1930s-style screwball comedy battle-of-the-sexes banter and also for the female character to show her capacity for ingenuity and survival as well as wit and tolerance. Similarly, though the relationship is more sophisticated, in *North by Northwest* the fugitive played by Cary Grant becomes romantically involved with a female spy played by Eva Marie Saint, a professional spy whose true role and allegiance, at least initially as far as he is concerned, appear uncertain if not hostile to his cause.

The non-Hitchcock film adaptations of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* similarly make up for the gap in Buchan's novel by including a strong female charac-

ter who shares the adventure with Hannay. In the most recent screen version of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, produced by the BBC in 2008, she proves herself Hannay's equal as a member of the British secret service who, it turns out, is working undercover. The film ends with her moving on to her next mission as a professional spy just as Hannay is about to leave for the Western Front.

Another aspect of the novel that seems unrealised, and which film-makers have worked to clarify in different ways, is the nature of conspiracy into which Hannay has been plunged. At the start of the novel it appears to be a nebulous worldwide conspiracy involving super-rich bankers and oligarchs who profit materially from the international conflicts they covertly engineer. Quickly, however, the immediate threat to Hannay and to Britain is crystallised in an attempt by German spies in England to steal Admiralty naval plans. For the sake of the story, the full implications of a vast global conspiracy seem to have been jettisoned altogether. One hydra's head at a time is enough to deal with.

Richard Hannay may be viewed as the prototype for innumerable thriller heroes—the honourable outsider, a kind of latter-day knight errant. Hannay is a Scottish-born, African-raised mining engineer who also has some kind of military background. Being the first-person narrator, Hannay can control the personal information that the reader receives and thus can be humbly vague about exactly what he has done and is capable of, usually referring to such matters by way of brief asides in between action scenes.

Not unlike the typical Wilbur Smith white African bush hero, Hannay is an accomplished outdoorsman and is self-reliant, emotionally uncomplicated and chivalrous in a low-key manner. As an Edwardian, he is straightforwardly loyal to the British Empire, free of the jingoism of the Victorian era.

While he can get angry and even lose his temper, Hannay simply doesn't have the time to develop or express neuroses, nor can he afford to have any major flaws or weaknesses. He makes mistakes, but manages to extricate himself from dangerous situations by thinking quickly and acting decisively. He has what in the American military is known as situational awareness.

It is not surprising that Hannay on screen has been played by English actors with the ability to more or less project these characteristics—Robert Donat, Kenneth More, Robert Powell and Rupert Penry-Jones. None of them quite embodies the original Hannay, though Penry-Jones seems to me to come closest in his obvious athleticism, which

is *de rigueur* in actors playing thriller heroes nowadays anyway. The previous three actors playing Hannay, by comparison with Penry-Jones, might seem almost effete.

All, however, remain positive in their outlook. Despite all the evil conspiracies out there, it is worth reminding ourselves of that key feature of the modern thriller exemplified by *The Thirty-Nine Steps*—optimism. In contrast to the grim realism of, say, Joseph Conrad in *The Secret Agent* or John le Carré in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, the oppressive bureaucratic aspects of espionage never interfere with the flow of the action in Buchan's stories.

A similarly confident attitude to the difference that may be made by a free-spirited individual is evident in the James Bond and Jason Bourne novels and films, where the lone hero not only makes a difference but during the course of the narrative becomes a kind of force of nature. This belief in the power of one is the stuff of countless westerns and detective stories as well as adventure thrillers. It is one of the defining features of Western civilisation.

While the hero of Buchan's conception is a fairly ordinary man of action, the arch-villain in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* has characteristics that mark him out as the kind of monster who was to become

such a cliché in the James Bond franchise. In his study of narrative archetypes *The Seven Basic Plots*, Christopher Booker identifies what he terms the "Overcoming the Monster" plot, the earliest expressions of which in our culture include *Beowulf*. Although the members of the German spy ring being hunted by Hannay are adept at disguising themselves as ordinary Englishmen, their leader cannot conceal his extraordinary owl-like eyes.

Interestingly, the novel ends with Hannay leaving England to serve as a junior officer on the Western Front. Although Hannay was the only man who could have saved the day in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, after the German plot has been thwarted he is just another British soldier. It would not be long, however, before he is employed again as an independent secret agent in Buchan's follow-up adventure, *Greenmantle*.

Hannay appears in several further novels, eventually retiring in distinguished old age as Major-General Sir Richard Hannay. The character grew old in the imagination of its creator—in more than one sense, perhaps—but his exploits in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* are as energetic and engaging as ever.

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## HARRY GELBER

### The Sorcerer's Apprenticeship

*Kissinger: Volume One: 1923–1968: The Idealist*  
by Niall Ferguson  
Penguin Press, 2015, 1008 pages, \$79.99

Henry Kissinger's career has unquestionably made him one of the leading statesmen not only of the United States but also of the Western world for much of the last third of the twentieth century. That fact alone ensures that he has been, and will continue to be, the subject of unstinted admiration as well as virulent hatred. Both kinds of comments have centred on the two decades from 1960 to around 1980, when Kissinger was effectively in charge of the foreign policy of the world's greatest power.

To write his life story, he has commissioned Niall Ferguson, previously known for his major books—such as *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* and *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*—and for his lectures and television appearances. But this time he has

written, with meticulous care, the first half of what may yet turn out to be his masterpiece. In writing it, he has been able to make full use of the huge Kissinger archive—it weighs several tons—at the Library of Congress.

The story begins with the experience of the Kissinger family in Fuerth, northern Bavaria, and in what became the Third Reich before they managed to emigrate. Ferguson has identified at least twenty-three close family members who perished in the Holocaust arranged by Adolf Hitler, who believed, quite literally, that Jews were sub-human. The Kissingers were lucky. They had a relative in the United States who could help with money, visas and passports, so they were able to leave in 1938 and settle in the Washington Heights section of New York.

At school young Henry was notably studious. After the Second World War began, he joined the army, which in turn slowly recognised him as uncommonly able. He served in the 84th Infantry Division and went through the 1944–45 Battle of the Bulge, where he escaped injury. He then joined the Counter-Intelligence Corps, where he became a most effective hunter of Nazis. He even came across a Nazi death camp, an experience he never forgot, and managed to find, and "take care of", a group of ex-Gestapo officials trying to form a

resistance group in post-war West Germany.

From there his dedication to learning and the classics—plus the GI “Bill of Rights”—brought him to Harvard University, where his intellectual qualities, as well as his dedication to aspects of political thought, brought him almost immediately to professorial notice. His “adviser” immersed him in the classics of Western philosophy and literature with assignments ranging from Homer to Hegel, Stendhal and Dostoevsky, and, of course, Immanuel Kant. Kissinger’s senior thesis, unpublished at 35,000 words and titled “The Meaning of History”, seems to remain still the longest thesis ever written by a Harvard senior. It led, among other things, as Ferguson points out, to the idea of “democracy” as based on an inner conviction of choice, “between lesser and greater evils”, a choice that would assail Kissinger regularly during his period in public office.

He stayed at Harvard but became increasingly attracted to the links between ideas and philosophy on the one hand and practical (especially Washington) politics on the other. That included the issues around Western “containment” of the Soviet Union and problems of the control of nuclear weapons, especially once it became clear that the Russians had acquired thermo-nuclear weapons of their own. He came to public prominence in the middle and late 1950s when, as a mere assistant professor, he published his influential *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. This argued, among other things, that President Eisenhower’s strategy of mutually assured destruction as defence against the Soviet Union was less effective as a deterrent to Moscow than the threat of a limited nuclear war would be. Debate on the matter lasted for years.

Soon both Democrats and Republicans began to seek his advice. He found himself neither welcome nor comfortable as an occasional consultant to the Kennedy White House. Kennedy’s staff kept him away from direct contact with JFK, which badly limited his contributions. For instance, during the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Kissinger wanted the US to adopt much stronger positions with Moscow, while Kennedy, more wisely, could see Khrushchev’s defensive need to stem the flow of young and able refugees from East Berlin to the West. Altogether, Kissinger felt much more comfortable working for Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York, whom he admired.

That process reinforced the lesson that a mastery of history and philosophy was not enough.

He would have to learn to play real Washington politics. Such practical politics or applied statesmanship sometimes required compromises, even tactics from which one would prefer to stay away. Furthermore, as he later observed:

High Office teaches decision making, not substance. It consumes intellectual capital; it does not create it. Most high officials leave office with the perceptions and insights with which they entered; they learn how to make decisions but not what decisions to make.

In any event, he had no hesitation about criticising various aspects of government policy. For instance, the Kissinger diaries show that after visiting Vietnam in 1965 and 1966 he became convinced that the US could not win the war there; in any case it was folly to make war at all without any serious sense of a wider strategy. As things stood, there would have to be an attempt to start talks with Hanoi, a move that he tried to promote in 1967 with communications going through Paris and Moscow.

The book ends with Kissinger’s appointment as National Security Adviser to the newly elected President Richard Nixon in 1968, very much with Rockefeller’s agreement. As Ferguson notes, some critics have strongly accused him of secretly passing confidential information to both the Democratic and the Republican sides during the 1968 presidential election. The charge is almost certainly untrue as well as being at variance with what is known about Rockefeller’s recommendation of Kissinger to the incoming President Nixon.

We shall have to wait for the second volume to see details of the later agonies of America in Vietnam, and of Kissinger’s success in extricating the US. That extrication was coupled with promises to Saigon of continuing military and material aid to South Vietnam that Congress eventually, and against Kissinger’s strong resistance, refused to honour. It will be interesting to see what judgment Ferguson makes of these events, taking place, as they did, at a time when the Watergate affair was weakening Nixon’s political position and moving him towards resignation.

Not only that, but it may well be the case that, in time, the readership for Ferguson’s two volumes will find itself divided. On one side will be the dispassionate historians of the Hitler period in

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Europe, of modern Jewish history, of the Cold War and containment, and so on. On the other will be readers most interested in the achievements of the Nixon and Ford presidencies. For it is only in the second volume that Ferguson will get to deal with Kissinger's claim to historical greatness and thus with the standards by which statesmen should be dispassionately judged.

Kissinger's writings suggest several standards for judging the conduct of foreign policy: that a grasp of history is basic to any understanding of allies and rivals; that many (most?) foreign policy decisions are choices between greater and lesser evils; that leaders should stick to realism but not to a realism that is morally vacuous; and that guesswork is not helpful in making policy. As early as 1956 Kissinger had written acutely to a friend that "the insistence on pure morality is in itself the most immoral of postures". Or, as he put it later:

whenever peace—conceived as the avoidance of war—has been the primary objective of a power or a group of powers, the international system has been at the mercy of the most ruthless member of the international community.

None of that has prevented a host of Kissinger and Nixon critics from rushing to judgment on a variety of issues, ranging from an allegedly imperfect understanding of solutions for any given problem, to critiques and arguments based simply on loss of life. To be sure, for critics after the fact, hindsight almost always confers brilliance, but they almost never take account of critical details, such as the conditions of the time, or the personalities or moods of the decision-makers. As early as 1957 Kissinger noted (in his doctoral dissertation) that "no significant conclusions are possible in the study of foreign affairs ... without an awareness of the historical context". And so far as the public is concerned, "what 'really' happened is often less important than what is thought to have happened". Indeed, history is especially important for Europeans who, "living on a continent covered with ruins ... feel in their bones that history is more complicated than systems analysis". Put simply, as he also wrote in 1957, the most difficult choices in foreign policy are certain to be between evils, so the truly moral act is to choose the lesser evil even if it is politically the harder choice. Maintaining an equilibrium of power in the Cold War was always certain to require just such hard choices.

**K**issinger's ideas and actions in relation to many other places and events, such as Chile or Cambodia, Cyprus or Argentina, have also

attracted severe criticism. And it is obviously true that statesmen, including Kissinger, sometimes err. Yet we already know that the critics, too, can be wide of the mark. The right-wing General Pinochet staged a coup in Chile because the strongly left-wing President Allende had become increasingly dictatorial in an atmosphere that smacked of a coming Marxist revolution; even Santiago housewives were complaining that the army was doing nothing. Kissinger had to decide the attitude of the US to a domestic coup that was certainly going to occur whatever Washington's wishes, and that would damage US interests whether it succeeded or failed. Equally, critics of America's bombing in Cambodia damn the US—and especially Kissinger—for bombing on the Cambodian side of a Vietnamese border which Hanoi itself was ignoring so as to bring fresh troops and supplies securely into South Vietnam. An effort to halt North Vietnam's massive resupply to its forces in the South seemed an essential strategic move at the time. Inaction would have signalled to all sides America's eventual retreat.

Even that is not the essence of the matter. Ferguson is surely right when he writes:

Arguments that focus on loss of life in strategically marginal countries—and there is no other way of describing Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chile, Cyprus and East Timor—must be tested against the question: how, in each case, would an alternative decision have affected US relations with strategically important countries like the Soviet Union, China and the major western European powers?

The point that Ferguson is raising here is that any coherent arrangement for world order must give more freedom of action to the major powers which created that order in the first place and which act—often in combination—to maintain it afterwards. A case in point is the Security Council of the United Nations in which the five major states have been given, from the beginning, the power of veto and other privileges. There is no serious suggestion that minor powers should obtain the same advantages. A similar phenomenon might yet turn out to be a Sino-American agreement—whether tacit or documented—about uses of the ocean and the ocean-bed in the South China Sea, that takes little regard of, or consults with, the smaller states involved. Some of Kissinger's policies—whether interventions or inactions—in relation to side-crisis in the Cold War need to be seen in this context.

Kissinger has some truly great achievements to his credit, which we must wait to see Ferguson cover in detail in Volume Two. One is the way in which he contrived to withdraw America from the Vietnam quagmire (though he received little credit for it). Another is the achievement of the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the United States and the Soviet Union and the resulting SALT I treaty. That treaty significantly reduced the tensions inherent in the balance of terror. Less noticed, but perhaps no less valuable, was his continued conduct of “containment” (following the famous advice of George Kennan) in a period when the Cold War was truly a war. He sought to draw the Soviets into a web of economic co-operation at the price of a variety of diplomatic or political concessions.

More importantly, Kissinger’s most significant and dramatic achievement is the way in which, with the solid support of President Nixon, he achieved nothing less than a fundamental alteration of the entire global balance of power. Until 1970, that balance had had, at its core, the effort by the United States to “contain” the joint and allied communist powers of the Soviet Union and China (whose Communist Party Moscow had created and supported since its foundation in 1921). It was only after the death of Josef Stalin, whom the Chinese leader Mao Zedong had honoured as leader of the communist world, that Sino-Soviet tensions and fractures began to appear. They were accentuated by Nikita Khrushchev’s public criticism of Stalin in 1956 and his even more scathing critique of Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” at the end of the 1950s, followed by the “Cultural Revolution” of the 1960s. From the point of view of the USA, and of Kissinger, these events created opportunities for global change. In short, during the early 1960s US “containment” of the USSR-China combination remained standard and mandatory. Ten years later, and especially following minor Sino-Soviet military clashes in 1969 and President Nixon’s visit to Beijing in 1972, it became clear that the US now had better relations with China and with the USSR than these two had with one another. The world balance had fundamentally changed.

It is not in the least surprising that senior officials and potentates from all round the world even now, so many years after Henry Kissinger left public service, continue to beat a path to “Kissinger Associates” in New York to seek his advice. They want to learn from the Sorcerer himself.

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## PHILIP AYRES

### Joh the Over-Reacher

*Job for PM*

by Paul Davey

NewSouth Publishing, 2015, 306 pages,  
\$29.99

The second half of the 1980s was a bad time for Australia’s conservatives. Leadership of the federal parliamentary Liberal Party was becoming a two-player game of musical chairs, its political discourse a mechanical decrying of “the Hawke socialist government”—a government doing more to reform Australia’s economy in liberal directions than the conservatives had done for years. A New Right in the shape of the H.R. Nicholls Society (formed in 1986 by former Secretary of the Treasury John Stone, Peter Costello, Barrie Purvis and Ray Evans) and similarly-minded organisations and individuals in business, agriculture and mining were pressuring the federal Opposition to adopt more radical positions on industrial relations and tax: deregulation of the labour market, individual employment contracts, abolition of the arbitration system, a flat tax.

Then in early 1987, on cue, a catalyst for radical change emerged in the form of Queensland National Party Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, bent on intervening in federal politics under the ambitious slogan, “Joh for PM”. Like a snatch of music with a dying fall, this was quickly down-keyed to “Joh for Canberra” and even that faded away. By the end of the year all was silence.

Aside from temporarily fracturing the Opposition coalition of Liberal and National Parties, the Joh campaign achieved *less* than nothing, since it not only consolidated the Hawke Labor government but *grew* it. Paul Davey, federal director of the National Party at the time, has now published his insider’s account of Joh’s push on Canberra. Reading it is like hearing again a comic song whose implausible lines you hoped you’d forgotten.

Until 1987 Joh Bjelke-Petersen had it all his own way in Queensland: a one-house parliament with no checks and balances, a well-oiled political machine, a generous way with money in paper bags delivered on demand to friendly facilitators. Queensland was booming under one of Australia’s outstanding regional populists. This man, however, was not made for greater things, not some Huey Long or Donald Trump requiring to be traduced or assassinated. Unfortunately perhaps, there was really nothing

for the establishment to be afraid of. When it came to federal politics Joh was all bluff and bluster, and few were bluffed. Speaking of the Coalition leaders Howard and Sinclair, he said in November 1986, after winning big in the Queensland elections, "They'll work with the policies I set or I will work against them, and I've told them that." He'd told them that.

He was being encouraged by elements in the New Right to go into federal politics and become prime minister, but how that was to be accomplished was never spelled out. A lot of money was being dangled as bait. Bill Hayden heard about it: "A secret club of land developers and their mates have put up \$20 million so that he can run around Australia peddling snake oil." To become prime minister, however, Joh needed majority support in state and federal National Party organisations, not to mention majority support in Liberal Party organisations, an impossible dream. The first step in this hopeless quest would be bumping Ian Sinclair off as federal National Party leader and extricating the Party from the Coalition. Never mind that outside of Queensland the Party was never going to be a majority vote-getter. Never mind that history had shown a conservative could only become prime minister as a Liberal leader backed up by a coalition arrangement.

Joh first had to secure control, if he could, of the federal council of the National Party with a view to changing the rules and making its decisions binding on the federal parliamentary party, and at the same time force an end to the Coalition. Needing a policy that would divide the Nationals from the Liberals, he chose tax, launching his policy at Wagga Wagga on January 31, 1987: a twenty-five-cents-in-the-dollar flat tax, unsupported by any goods-and-services or value-added tax (an anathema). The Nationals had been attracted to this idea for some time, so it seemed it would be well received by the Party. If the federal Coalition members would not support the policy, he would field his own "Joh candidates" against them at the next federal elections. But as Paul Davey asks, "How could a state premier endorse candidates for a federal election, especially beyond his own state? Who and where were these candidates? It made no sense."

Howard and Sinclair were warning Joh to keep out of the federal scene if he could not support them, and the New South Wales National Party was telling him they and not he would be selecting their candidates. No matter, Joh told the press on February 3, "It's like the old bumble bee—he's not supposed to fly, but he still flies. I've done it, it's launched, it's on the way." Two days later he was

being interviewed by an ABC reporter, who asked, "If the National Party in Canberra won't do what you want will you leave it?" "Lead it, I will lead it." "I said leave it." "Don't be stupid. Don't be stupid otherwise I will not talk to you. You know I'm not one of those that run away. I am Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, a National Party Member of Parliament for forty years and Premier. What I am doing in Queensland I am now going to do for Australia." If Howard and Sinclair would not do his bidding he would by-pass them. Anyway, he added, "Nobody supports Sinclair."

On February 28, 1987, the Queensland National Party passed a resolution at its central council meeting at Hervey Bay, backed by its state president Sir Robert Sparkes:

That the National Party of Australia (Qld) fully supports the move by Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen to attain the Prime Ministership so that he can put in place an anti-socialist Federal Government equipped with appropriate policies, and the will to implement those policies, which are so patently necessary to save this Nation from the economic and political ruin into which the Hawke Socialist Government is plunging us.

Joh-for-PM sub-committees would be set up across the nation—in effect a new national political movement in embryo.

Howard described Joh as "a wrecker", Doug Anthony called the idea "absurd". As Davey writes:

Any attempt by Queensland to endorse candidates in states where an affiliated National Party organisation existed would be unconstitutional and such candidates would not be able to run as candidates of the National Party of Australia, or National Party, which were the party names registered under the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

Even the Queensland Nationals in Canberra were soon reported to be wavering in their support of the Hervey Bay resolution, with only one of them clearly dissociating himself from the Coalition. It was a poor start.

Accordingly, with the push just a couple of weeks old, Sparkes started to float the more moderate goal of "Joh for Canberra", while Joh himself continued to tout the idea of "Joh candidates" running against establishment Nationals at the next federal election. However, as the Nationals' federal conference loomed his rhetoric was sounding increasingly hollow. The federal body was so unsupportive that Sparkes told its management committee on March

27, 1987, "There is no intention on our part to run candidates against sitting National Party Members anywhere—it's unfortunate Joh's been saying otherwise." It was a major back-down. The weekend conference was in most respects a triumph for Sinclair, though Sparkes remained adamant that the Coalition must break. Federal Council did back Joh in any bid he might make for a seat in federal parliament, but spelled out that he would have to toe the party line. Peter Nixon, the Nationals' former federal leader, met with him on the sidelines:

I was the only one Joh would talk to. I tried to reason with him, explain to him that he could never become prime minister unless he was a Liberal, and that there was no guarantee that he would even become leader of the National Party.

A new Coalition agreement was stitched up between Howard and Sinclair in an attempt to take some of Queensland's objections into account, but failed to win National party-room support. Accordingly the Coalition broke on April 28, 1987.

Civil war among the Nationals was destined to continue for a while yet, but Joh's side was looking weaker by the day. His statements seemed ever more disconnected from reality. As prospects for an early federal election increased (for why would Hawke *not* take advantage of civil war among his opponents?), Joh declared, absurdly, that it was he alone who would be delivering the Nationals' policy speech: "That's the only one that's going to win the election for us." On May 27 Hawke predictably called the early election, for July 11.

With most of Queensland's Nationals still behind him, Joh announced that his "Joh candidates" would be standing in Victoria and South Australia, and of course Queensland, for the Senate and the House of Representatives. He engaged John Stone to develop a credible flat-tax policy, but who, aside from Stone, would be the big-name backers of the Joh campaign? Various prominent names from sport, showbiz and commerce were mooted: Ben Lexcen, Bob Ansett, Dick Smith, Greg Chappell, Ray Martin, Charles Copeman. None of them came across. A meeting was held at Melbourne's Windsor Hotel at the beginning of June with Ian McLachlan, the popular and widely respected head of the National Farmers Federation, to bring him in as a major name, but he declined the invitation. Within days of this rebuff Joh was announcing that he himself would not be seeking a seat in federal Parliament.

Sparkes did his level best to put a good face on things:

I am pleased to be able to report that a meeting took place between the Premier and John Howard today and that the whole philosophical orientation of the Liberal Party had moved to the right (largely you would agree due to the pressure from Sir Joh) and that the Liberal policies, especially in relation to tax and industrial relations, were fairly similar to those of the Premier ... In all these circumstances we can justifiably say the Joh for Canberra move has been an extremely well worthwhile political exercise that has made a major contribution towards advancing the cause of conservative politics in Australia.

Not.

On June 13 John Stone's flat-tax policy was released. But the political circumstances were now unfavourable to anything radical. Davey points out:

Because of the differences between the Stone policy and that of the federal party, Sinclair was in no mood to give it carte blanche support: "It has no status within the federal parliamentary National Party except that it is a series of recommendations that a number of members from Queensland presumably would support and will be advocating. It is not the policy of the federal parliamentary National Party."

If his policy had been sidelined, however, Stone himself was almost alone in gaining from the Joh caper. He ran successfully in the election as a Queensland candidate for the Senate and later became the party's Senate leader.

Meanwhile, Joh's own contributions made the election campaign ever more anarchic. One instance was his broadcast criticism of Labor's slogan, "Let's stick together":

Who wants to stick together with them and get your stick feet, you know, if you get, stick foot on sticky paper, you get both of them on, you fall over and Mr Hawke asks us to stick with him. You put your foot on sticky paper with him, he's, and Keating, his government's got their feet on sticky paper, my word they have.

Someone once observed for a general truth that "The style is the man himself."

There was precious little momentum left. Joh independents stood for a number of seats in several states but did poorly. The elections were a stunning triumph for the government, a record eighty-six seats and a third term—a first for a Labor prime minister. Sinclair made the obvious point: "It is

because of Joh this election was called and he and nobody else has to accept responsibility for that defeat.”

Meanwhile Joh’s demise as Queensland Premier was fast approaching—his party room was deserting him, he’d fallen out with Sparkes, and the Fitzgerald inquiry was turning up all sorts of dirt on his administration. In any case he’d lost his political touch some time back. On December 1, 1987, having lost control of his government, he announced he was resigning as Premier and member of parliament, effective immediately.

Paul Davey has put together a readable first-hand account of this farcical campaign. Apart from strengthening the government and further demoralising the opposition, which quickly re-established itself as a coalition, Joh’s federal ambitions had few significant consequences. His campaign stands as a detached, dramatic but parenthetical slice of National Party history, worth recording if only for its unspoken moral: over-reachers suffer the fate their lack of judgment and self-knowledge merits.

*Philip Ayres is the biographer of Malcolm Fraser, Owen Dixon, Douglas Mawson and Sir Ninian Stephen.*

## ROBERT MURRAY

### Ordinary People’s History

*Kin: A Real People’s History of Our Nation*

by Nick Brodie

Hardie Grant, 2015, 370 pages, \$29.95

Nick Brodie, in *Kin*, has attempted, generally successfully, to tell the history of Australia through its mostly unsung “average Australians” with an extended history of his own family dating back more than two hundred years.

The nearest he comes to fame among his forebears is a candidate for the “real” Man from Snowy River. But over a dozen generations their life, times and sometimes faces are there as convicts, farmers, station workers, an Aborigine, a coach driver, butchers and bakers, nurses, teachers, wartime servicemen. At the top of this extended socio-economic scale are a country GP and a dentist—who learned his craft as an apprentice around 1900—and a Brisbane pioneer family who reached temporary prosperity and the local social pages.

His Brodie forebear was a young Scottish seaman who sailed into Sydney in the 1860s, married the daughter of a Danish-born Balmain boat-

builder, became a mildly prosperous Pacific trader, but was lost at sea in 1894. Nick Brodie knew little about this slightly exotic great-great-grandfather until he went through the newspaper files. But although acknowledging the politically correct view, he finds through Neil Brodie’s career that British influence in the Pacific islands was often beneficial for the locals in bringing more law and order and improved living standards to a troubled region.

Nick Brodie found pure gold in the ancestor stakes with his earliest Australian forebear, Thomas Kennedy, an Irish “Defender” and political prisoner, transported from Dublin to Sydney in 1796 for forceful political activism during the French Revolutionary crisis. Kennedy’s grandson was the Monaro stockman Jimmy Kiss, who Brodie sees as one of several on whom Banjo Paterson’s Man from Snowy River might have been based.

Fittingly for a historian of Middle Australia, Brodie was born in Wagga on the Murrumbidgee and grew up in nearby Junee. Most of his kin lived in southern New South Wales or adjoining parts of Victoria, though there were Sydney and Brisbane branches. He identifies as Catholic, through a line coming down from Thomas Kennedy, but his family tree is strewn with Catholic-Protestant intermarriage and ethnic mingling, especially Irish-English.

One awkward kinsman is the Rev. William Dill Macky, the strident Ulster-born anti-Catholic stirrer, British super-patriot and evangelical hard-liner who was minister of Scots Church in Sydney in the decades around Federation. Brodie regrets this great-great-grandfather’s fanatical views but finds good points. The cleric argued forcefully that Aborigines were the intellectual equal of whites, at a time when Charles Darwin’s legacy put this in doubt. He was also a great supporter of troubled children. And, as is so often the way, Dill Macky’s apparently feckless father was of republican disposition, emigrated from rural Donegal to the Victorian goldfields, and was suspected of deserting his family.

The probability of an Aboriginal ancestor comes through James Kiss, an English ex-convict of more criminal background who became a small farmer on the Hawkesbury frontier around 1800 and is shown in the records as having children but with no mother named. This sort of situation arose often enough in those days; white and Aboriginal records were kept separately and inadequately; people of complicated background, like Aboriginal partners of whites, could fall through the administrative cracks. A son of this union married old Thomas

Kennedy's daughter, and the Monaro horseman Jimmy Kiss was their grandson.

Most of Brodie's immigrant forebears, though, were, like so many of us, from humble rural backgrounds throughout the British Isles, but mainly England, who came on assisted passages in the 1830s and 1840s, well-behaved and hardly noticed, an inconspicuous and often personal bridge between the older convict-era stock and the gold diggers.

"History from the bottom" and "people's history" have been long-standing aspirations for historians, but rarely get beyond hopeful ideas or abandoned theses. It is just too hard. There are too few records apart from the limited official ones; and when other records do exist they are so scattered as to bring to mind needles in haystacks. The contrast is stark with the rich official and newspaper records relating to big people, big issues and decisions, colourful statements, big troubles and tragedies. These inevitably bias the way the past is presented.

Nick Brodie's fine achievement in getting beyond the archivists has been assisted by the internet, especially the National Library's "Trove" tool for searching digitised newspapers. It has helped Brodie find his forebears in obituaries and accident reports, at war and peace, in school and livestock prize-giving, at country balls, playing sport, standing for councils, fined for misdemeanours. He has blended this material with copious official records, family records such as letters and reminiscences, and interviews with older kin. His training as an archaeologist no doubt helped.

Some tragedies and scandals emerge, but not many. Apart from the—all too common to most families—occasional examples of excessive drinking and gambling, his forebears have been too busy bringing up families, growing crops, driving vehicles, slicing meat and baking bread, fighting in the Boer War and two world wars. As well as mothering, his womenfolk have often been nurses or hospital workers. There was one nun. His parents were teachers.

In some, especially callow, eyes, Australian history is dull because there have been no revolutions, civil wars or invasions. To others it is confrontingly ugly, with whipped convicts, dispossessed if not murdered or stolen Aborigines, and a raped environment. *Kin* is much nearer the truth. It is about generally well-behaved ordinary people overcoming moderate setbacks, mostly liking each other, getting ahead a bit, helping make the world a little better.

A tough edit and an index would have helped. Brodie too often interrupts the strong family material with garrulous, preachy politically-correct

dissertations on the general history which are not always as accurate as they should be.

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*Robert Murray's own, far less ambitious, extended family history is Sandbelters: Memories of Middle Australia (Australian Scholarly).*

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## PETER SELICK

### The Liberating Church

*Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*

by Larry Siedentop

Penguin, 2015, 448 pages, \$22.99

If you go to Florence and visit the Medici-Ricardi Palazzo you will find, installed by Ricardi between 1682 and 1685, a cycle of frescos painted by Luca Giordano. The remarkable thing about this cycle is that there are no Christian references at all. The cycle begins with the Birth of Man but we do not have the Creator reaching out to touch Adam as in the Sistine Chapel, we have Father Time in the background, we have blindfolded Fate with the globe of the world in her hand and we have many figures that a classics scholar would easily identify as coming from Greek and Roman antiquity. In other words a narrative derived from ancient Greece has replaced the Christian narrative. The cycle bears witness to one of the outcomes of Renaissance thought, that the glory of ancient Greece should rival that of Christendom.

The Renaissance was followed by the Enlightenment in which, especially in France, a sceptical spirit arose that damned Christian culture and would replace it with pure autonomous rationality. The figures of Voltaire, Diderot and the Baron d'Holbach come to mind. During the French Revolution clerics were murdered *en masse*. Notre Dame in Paris was renamed the Temple of Reason and the date reverted to Year One.

Even in quiet England, Christianity was attacked by David Hume in his *Natural History of Religion* and by Edward Gibbon in the controversial chapters XV and XVI of his *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. We could add, in more recent times, Bertrand Russell's silliness about the faith and our own dear demented new atheists. It seems that Christianity is fair game for intellectuals outside the discipline of theology, especially if those intellectuals have gained fame in other disciplines.

The following quotation from Virginia Woolf, writing to her sister in 1928, illustrates my point:

I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is. I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God.

These are examples of an undeclared civil war in Europe that pitches secularism against Christianity. However, church historians, especially those engaged in the field of the history of ideas, are beginning to hit back and have demonstrated that the accepted narrative of the Church's involvement in European civilisation is almost completely wrong.

Such an academic is Larry Siedentop. *Inventing the Individual* belongs to the genre of the history of ideas, much like Tarnas's *The Passion of the Western Mind* or Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. Siedentop, a fellow of Keble College, Oxford, gives us an accessible journey through the transformations of the self from the pre-classical Western family, through ancient Greece and Rome and the rise of the Church in Europe to the sixteenth century.

The theme that runs through the book and gives it its coherence is the transition between the natural inequality of pre-Christian Europe and the equality of persons fostered by the Faith. In the pre-classical world, the head of the family, the paterfamilias, or the head of the tribe were the only persons to whom self-government was attributed. The position of the paterfamilias was religious: he was the priest of the family who guarded the sacred hearth and presided over appropriate offerings to the gods. All the people in subjection to him were non-persons who were not believed to have minds of their own.

In the classical world of Greece, the only persons who were deemed to be fully human were males who were trained in the faculty of reason. This placed such a person at the top of the great chain of being that determined one's place in society. Women, children, the uneducated, workers and slaves were essentially non-persons since they were not self-determined. They could not be so because

action was deemed to spring directly from reason: "there was no ontological gap between thought and action", nothing that we would identify as the will. This does not mean that ancient psychology was fundamentally different from our own, but that the culture did not recognise intention as a separate identity from that of reason. Thus, while we recognise reason as instrumental, the ancients thought of it as the essence of a person.

One who could not utilise reason could not be a person in the sense that a citizen was a person. This reflected the prioritising of the intellect and reason by the Greek philosophers. Siedentop calls this "natural inequality" because it conformed to what was understood as the natural hierarchy of beings that accorded a place for everything. A person was determined by his position in this hierarchy for life.

With the rise of the polis and the necessity for broader government this hierarchy was maintained with the recognition of citizens as those who were from elite families and who were trained in reason and oratory. Such citizens ruled with the help of divination from the gods, signs in the heavens, oracles, animal entrails or whatever. The machinery of government was intertwined with a great panoply of religious notions. In Greek and Roman culture reason existed side by side with a mythological consciousness that limited the knowledge of reality and eventually rang the death knell for these cultures.

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*Rather than the Church promoting superstition and irrationality, it used reason to build a workable legal system on Roman foundations with the added insight of Christian egalitarianism.*

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Siedentop marks the change that lay at the root of our present understanding of persons, not to the

Renaissance with its harking back to the thinking of the Greeks, nor to the European Enlightenment with its much-vaunted rediscovery of reason and empiricism, but to the influence of one who is outside of much contemporary history writing: St Paul.

St Paul saw that persons were not determined by their birth or education or position in life or race but that all stood before God as independent souls. Paul broke with the ancient world when he proclaimed: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Paul demolished the hierarchy of being with reason at the top when he wrote:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:20–25)

Siedentop elaborates: "Paul's conception of the Christ introduces the individual, by giving conscience a universal dimension. Was Paul the greatest revolutionary in human history?"

You can see how the new religion that overtook the ancient world destroyed that world forever. There could be no going back to belief in the obviously invented pantheon of gods. These were all swept away by the Christian proclamation of the triune God that combined the historical with the transcendent and opened a world of introspective consciousness for all. The church saw itself as being in the business of the cure of souls and produced a revolution in the understanding of the self.

As the effect of Christianity on Europe deepened, society was transformed by example. The early monastics modelled an interior life of prayer, discipline and self-denial. Where the ancients lauded the man of oratory and action, the early monastics modelled a life of reflection, of interiority. The government of the later monasteries provided an example of democratic government, with the higher positions established from below. The emergence of the Vatican as an independent state with courts and administration modelled the establishment of similar mechanisms in emerging nation-states. All of these developments relied on Christian egalitarianism, of society consisting of individual souls and the development of the inherent rights of those souls. Indeed, the incarnation of Jesus, in whom God came among us as an individual, was the "ultimate support for individual identity".

Again and again Siedentop illustrates how the modern world emerged not in spite of the Church but because of it in almost every detail. Compared to the achievements of the Church, those of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were derivative rather than original. For example it was William of Ockham (1287–1347), a Franciscan friar, whose razor we are familiar with, who established the idea of empiricism, that we know through experience and not because of innate ideas of the eternal Platonic forms. Ockham introduced the idea

of contingency in the natural world that showed the necessity of scientific measurement and the impossibility of obtaining knowledge of the objective world by *a priori* reasoning. He thus laid the foundations for natural science three hundred years before the beginning of British empiricism. It turns out that John Locke's understanding of the mind as a clean slate was not original.

This account of Church history from earliest times to the fifteenth century is a must for anyone who wants to know how we came to be as we are. Siedentop's conclusion is that the Church gave us our understanding of the self and secular liberalism. The latter comes as a surprise because many of us in the Church, including myself, have railed for years about the damage done by secular liberalism. A summary statement tells much of the story:

The roots of liberalism were firmly established in the arguments of philosophers and canon lawyers by the fourteenth and early fifteenth century: belief in a fundamental equality of status as the proper basis for a legal system; belief that enforcing moral conduct is a contradiction in terms; a defense of individual liberty, through the assertion of fundamental or "natural" rights; and, finally the conclusion that only a representative form of government is appropriate for a society resting on the assumption of moral equality.

This is a compelling picture but it does not explain how the gift of the Church of liberal secularism has become such a desert in our time. This is not a criticism of the book, but recognition that more must be said, that today we live within the gift of liberal secularism but stripped of its origin in Christianity. We have taken secular liberalism as our salvation, and it is so, but it has led us to a freedom that looks more and more like a void. We have taken hold of the outcome of Christianity while, at the same time, refusing its content. Thus, in our freedom we still suffer from what John Carroll has called "the ordeal of unbelief". We live in a time conditioned by Christianity without Christ.

This book is a welcome counter-blow to the undeclared civil war waged in Europe between secularism and Christianity. Those on the side of secularism are fond of a narrative that places the Church in opposition to reason and a promoter of superstition, a high irony considering its use of reason to establish essential social institutions and the devastation it wrought on Greek and Roman religion that was superstition to the core.

Eighteenth-century history writing gave

us a bias against Scholasticism, read at a very superficial level, and promoted the Renaissance and the Enlightenment over against the Dark Ages purportedly brought to us by the Church. Siedentop shows us how, even with the plague and the barbarian invasions, the Dark Ages were not dark at all but a ferment of theological, legal and philosophical activity that laid the foundation for modernity. “The conventional interpretation also relates the emergence of liberalism to a new skepticism bred by the interest in and sympathy with antiquity.”

Siedentop demonstrates, with a vast understanding of historical research, that the conventional interpretation is almost entirely mistaken. Rather than the Church promoting superstition and irrationality, it used reason to build a workable legal system on Roman foundations with the added insight of Christian egalitarianism. It used reason to elucidate theology, at times borrowing from Greek thought and at other times rejecting it. The Church was the prime enemy of superstition, especially that of Greek and Roman religion—yet modern thinkers accuse the Church of superstition and acclaim the rationality of the Greeks.

The conclusion that the Church was responsible for secular liberalism will not ring true for many. There are of course many instances when the Church behaved violently to unbelievers in a most illiberal manner. For example, in 782 the Christian emperor Charlemagne beheaded 4500 Saxon non-Christians outside Bremen. We could make a long list of terrible acts carried out in the name of the Christian God. If we return to Florence we could recount the response of the Church to art that did not reflect the Christian ethos in the activity of Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) a Dominican friar who delivered many paintings to the flames in the famous “bonfire of the vanities”. The two paintings of Botticelli that now hang in the Uffizi, *The Birth of Venus* and the *Primavera*, both treating pre-Christian subjects, were saved. We do not know how many were lost. In an ironic turn of fortune, Savonarola himself was consigned to the flames. Where then the Church’s liberalism? Indeed where now is the liberal spirit in the Roman Church, which refuses communion to the divorced?

Siedentop’s history is of how the Church fulfilled the liberal aspiration of St Paul over a period of 1500 years. It took time for the Church to be conformed to the gospel, as it takes a lifetime for the individual. Progress is only made through introspection and confession. It is absurd to think that the gentle Galilean was the source of cruelty and illiberalism, but believable that it took so long for our hearts to soften to his witness. Accusers of the Church fail to

separate the gospel of grace from the use of religion in the hands of evil men and women.

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*Peter Sellick is an Anglican deacon working in Perth with a background in the biological sciences. An earlier version of this review appeared on the On Line Opinion website.*

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## PAUL MONK

### The Future of Religion

*The Religion of the Future*

by Roberto Mangabeira Unger

Harvard University Press, 2014, 480 pages,

US\$49.95

Roberto Mangabeira Unger is a polymath of Brazilian extraction teaching at Harvard University. He has had an extraordinary career in the United States and in Brazil and has written many books. His 2014 book *The Religion of the Future* is a remarkable offering in several ways and ought to serve as the point of departure for a major global debate about the nature of religion and its place in the twenty-first century. The book is deeply informed by the best scholarship on the history and philosophy of the world religions, intimately acquainted with movements in twentieth-century theology and philosophy, and unflinchingly radical in its originality and socio-political vision.

Unger has a remarkable pedigree. His maternal grandfather, Octavio Mangabeira, became professor of astronomy at the Polytechnic School in the Brazilian state of Bahia, gained mass popularity after delivering an inspired public lecture on Halley’s Comet in 1910, and ended up, in the 1920s, becoming Brazil’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, before falling foul of the dictator Getulio Vargas and suffering years of imprisonment and exile. He returned to Brazil in 1946, re-entered politics and became a senator in 1958. Octavio’s brother Joao Mangabeira founded the Brazilian Socialist Party. Their sister Maria founded a religious order. Both of Unger’s parents were intellectuals. His mother, Edyla Mangabeira, was a poet and journalist. His father, Artur Unger, was a German immigrant to the United States, where he became a successful lawyer.

Roberto Mangabeira Unger was born in Rio de Janeiro on March 24, 1947, when his parents, who were US citizens, were visiting Brazil. He grew up in New York, on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, but

would spend summers in Brazil with his grandfather, Octavio. These summers, he later testified, deeply shaped his understanding of politics. But his whole extended family was rich in influences that can be seen in his prolific, radical and wide-ranging writing. He was a leader of the Critical Legal Studies movement in the United States in the 1970s. He has written extensively on political theory, law and the nature of the self, always with an eye on what can activate human emancipation. His latest work, with cosmologist Lee Smolin, is *The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time: A Proposal in Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

*The Religion of the Future* begins with a sweeping reflection on the religions that sprang from what Karl Jaspers, in the mid-twentieth century, called the Axial Age: the centuries in the middle of the last millennium before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. In a tradition going back at least to Max Weber, Unger classifies the great belief systems of the world according to their existential orientation with regard to the human condition. Buddhism (and the Greek ethical philosophies of Platonism, Stoicism and Epicureanism) he sees as seeking to “overcome the world”, by attaining a state of detachment, serenity and benevolence. Confucianism he sees as seeking to “humanise the world” by ennobling and formalising human relations in a world otherwise without meaning or purpose. The “Semitic monotheisms” (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) he sees as “struggling with the world”; seeking to console humanity for the flaws in its condition and redeem it in the name of a higher order of things.

Unger’s perspective on all these religions is critical, but not polemical. He exhibits empathy for what each seems to be striving to do. His scholarly understanding of their sources is as lucid and impressive as that of his great precursors like Weber, Jaspers and Toynbee. He argues that the existential orientations they offer will always remain human possibilities. In none of these crucial respects, therefore, can he be classified as anti-religious or any kind of secular vandal bent on the demolition of cultural traditions. Certainly there will be those who adhere to any one of the faiths he discusses who will want to put in a special case for their own set of beliefs. But the dispassionate reader is unlikely to find Unger crass or offensive in his general attitude towards religion as such or to any religion in particular.

Nevertheless, his vision is both radical and revolutionary when it comes to the work religion needs to do and the philosophical or metaphysical foundations on which it must from now on seek to place

itself. In these respects, his argument is certain to appear confronting to believers in any of the major religions and almost all of their more contemporary offshoots. He claims boldly that the modern sciences have now made clear beyond credible dispute that we must build for ourselves a religion “beyond wishful thinking”. There is no deity running the universe with our good in mind, he claims. There is no possible way for us to grasp why we are here, only that we are. And there is no afterlife to compensate in any way for the shortness, incompleteness or pain of the brief lives we have. This reality is all the more confronting, he argues, because we are “insatiable” in our appetites, imaginations and potential.

The perspective thus sketched out, in the opening pages of his book, has various elements in common with some of the most famous modern philosophers, from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to Heidegger and Sartre. But one of the notable features of *The Religion of the Future* is that Unger delicately and lucidly distances himself from all of these thinkers in articulating his own position. He rejects Schopenhauer as too pessimistic and too prone to a kind of solipsism which offers no commitment to grappling with the world as it is. He rejects Nietzsche’s “Prometheanism” as a neo-paganism with no serious moral content. He also rejects as sterile Heidegger’s neo-pagan worship of the radiance of times past and the mystery of existence itself. And he rejects Sartre’s radicalism as anarchic and irresponsible, because it fails to acknowledge the human need for institutional structures and meaningful rituals. He calls such anarchism, in fact, “the Sartrean heresy”.

Our mortality, our groundlessness and our insatiability, Unger claims, are ineradicable flaws in the human condition. No religion can do away with them, though each tries to come to terms with them or console us for them in different ways. Nor can the sciences overcome these flaws, because they are existential constants that knowledge of the world can illuminate but can never eliminate. Consequently, he argues, we need a religion that acknowledges these realities unflinchingly and builds itself unyieldingly on the granite foundation of existential realism that they provide. We might choose to turn away from these truths and try to shelter within the porches of the old religions, but we cannot in good faith do so much longer. We need, therefore, to rethink, refashion and reanimate our religious cultures in the light of the harsh realities that modern science and critical philosophy have brought home to us. We are a species of conscious animal on a small planet far out on a spiral arm of a galaxy in the middle of a cosmos

that has given birth to us, but has no interest in our well-being.

Unger's belief that something along these lines *should* happen is well-founded. His apparent confidence that it *will* happen is less well-founded. His enunciation of how human social order should be pragmatically refashioned to take account of the three great existential constants and unleash human desire to fulfil its boundless potential is breathtaking in its boldness, wholly abstract in its reasoning and baffling in its complete failure to address practical obstacles, strategic wisdom or possible compromises with existing political and religious institutions. His program is spelled out in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of his book—"Religious Revolution Now: Its Occasions and Instruments", "Deep Freedom: The Politics of the Religion of the Future" and "Becoming More Human by Becoming More Godlike: The Conduct of Life in the Religion of the Future". These chapters are worth reading and I read them very closely. But I read with a persistent sense of wonderment at Unger's unwillingness or inability to ground his poetic vision in any kind of immediate, plausible program.

Part of the problem is that he seems to have set out to simply provide a new vocabulary and worldview within which such a program might begin to take shape, rather than setting out to provide such a program itself. Another and more troubling problem, however, is that he pulls away from both scientific and social reality in the name of his "religion of the future" as if his new religion could be grounded purely in his critique of the old religions and the suggestiveness of his neologisms. He treats each of the old religions as if they had sprung from pure thought, the exemplary lives of their founders and the social need for what they offered. He fails to ground the phenomenon of religion itself in the long sweep of human evolution, as for example Roy Rappaport did in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (1999) or Robert Bellah in *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Palaeolithic to the Axial Age* (2011). Although Unger rejects all the metaphysics of the old religions, he at no point writes of human beings as *evolved* creatures. Instead, he consistently describes us as "embodied spirits", a vague term wide open to abuse or misunderstanding.

A further consequence of Unger's rejection of a specifically naturalistic understanding of humanity

is that he at no point so much as attempts to reconcile his enthusiasm for unleashing and fulfilling the "insatiable" in humanity now with the ecological implications of even the current standards of living of seven billion human beings on the planet. The release this year of Pope Francis's encyclical on climate change and inequality, *On Care for Our Common Home*, has generated a wide spectrum of responses, some of them highly critical. Unger's "religion of the future" seems to call for unbounded access to goods and services, unbounded liberties for individuals and strenuous demands for egalitarianism all at the same time. Yet he offers even *less* explanation than the Pontiff's encyclical as to how exactly all these desiderata are to be achieved. Nor does he dwell upon any but the haziest idea of the human future on Earth, because he insists that we

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*There is no deity  
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should concentrate on being liberated "now". He often sounds like a new version of Herbert Marcuse preaching to the hermits of the Egyptian deserts.

He is writing at a time, of course, in which debate about the nature and future of religion is considerable. The old religions have not disappeared and secular society is, in a number of ways, floundering. Islam, in particular, is aggressively seeking to re-establish itself. The new little book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*, a dialogue between the

atheist Sam Harris and the Islamic reformer Maajid Nawaz (2015) is, as Ayaan Hirsi Ali declares, an example of the kind of honest and civil dialogue that is badly needed. It would be interesting to see either or both of them in dialogue with Unger about "the religion of the future". His arguments would surely strike Harris as dangerously anti-rational and Nawaz as dangerously anti-Islamic. But an honest and civil dialogue should at least be possible. The question is, what happens with regard to less civil interlocutors and where would Unger stand if and when the winds of violence and fanaticism blow? He never makes this clear in his book.

Mark Riebling's new book *Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War against Hitler* (Basic Books and Scribe, 2015) is a splendid and ground-breaking study in this problem. It is a highly illuminating new work on the vexed question of Pope Pius XII and the Third Reich, which shows the Pope struggling to reconcile his moral with his institutional and political commitments between 1939 and 1945.

Riebling's history is rich in the human and institutional complexities that Unger entirely fails

to address. Eugenio Pacelli (Pius XII), he points out, was a highly sophisticated, deeply religious man who was both an accomplished papal diplomat before he became Pope and a man of profoundly humane moral principles who saw Hitler as a satanic figure and was appalled at both Nazi anti-Semitism and the Nazi persecution of the Catholic Church in the name of a crude neo-paganism. Riebling recounts how Wilhelm Canaris and his fellow anti-Nazi conservatives within the Black Orchestra were sickened by Hitler's campaign to exterminate the Polish clergy and reached out to the Pope as an ally in the hope of bringing Hitler down in 1939. There is no such gripping, realistic scenario anywhere in Unger's book, which gravely weakens it as a vision of the "religion of the future".

Unger does not articulate clear or tangible moral principles, only sweeping existential desiderata. There were reports, in mid-October this year, of "civil war" at the pinnacle of the Catholic Church over moral teaching, with thirteen cardinals, including Australia's George Pell, warning Pope Francis that the Church is in danger of collapsing, like liberal Protestant congregations, because of mooted compromises over both moral and dogmatic teaching. They may be correct. Whether such a "collapse" would be a good or a bad thing, of course, is a matter on which opinions differ very widely. But Unger ought to have pondered in far more serious and practical terms how his proposed religion of the future would either infuse and renew institutions such as the Catholic Church, or replace them with newer, more soundly based and durable institutions. He does not do this. Indeed, he airily insists that all institutions need to be sufficiently plastic as to be ongoing experiments in emancipation. Whether in terms of moral principles, organisational coherence, ritual practices or soundness of belief, this looks deeply problematic. It would have been reassuring to see Unger at least acknowledge this.

Given both the book's sweep and its flaws, it isn't easy to enter a satisfactory net judgment on *The Religion of the Future*, but three conclusions seem to me inescapable: the book is too long and learned to be read by those most in need of rethinking their religious beliefs; it is too abstract and hopelessly utopian to be taken up in any but the loosest rhetorical manner by either religious reformers or the makers of public policy; and yet, in many ways, Unger is telling core truths and demonstrating poetic imagination in ways that are both refreshing and admirable. We need the kind of synoptic vision that he offers; a new "synoptic gospel", if you like. We need the animated intel-

ligence and generosity of feeling he exhibits. There are good reasons why we could do with an inspiring "religion of the future" and why the old religions are inadequate to the realities with which we now live. Paradoxically, Unger tells us at the end that no religion was ever founded by a priest or a scribe; only by the charisma and exemplary lives of prophetic figures. Yet he has offered us a large book. Does he see himself as some kind of philosophical John the Baptist?

The most explicit account he provides of how he expects to be read is in a concluding "Note on the Three Orientations and the Idea of the Axial Age". In his own words:

In the early parts of this book, I explored three major spiritual orientations exemplified by the world religions. I did so for the purpose of preparing the ground for the defence of a way of thinking that goes beyond what these orientations have in common.

My argument can be read as an essay in the philosophy of religion, except that it is itself religious, and not simply an inquiry undertaken from the safe distance of uncommitted speculative thought. It might also be viewed as a theological text, except that it is a kind of anti-theology.

He draws upon the work of Weber and Jaspers on the sociology of religion, but distances himself from them. He claims that Weber's work on "rationalisation" and that of Jaspers on the "Axial Age" were merely dubious attempts by "the self-professed party of Enlightenment in the North Atlantic world" to cast itself as the beleaguered heir to all that was reasonable and restrained in history, against the storms of violent irrationalism that the twentieth century had brought forth and to give themselves a respectable genealogy. He repudiates, he tells us, the idea that religion is "the hazy penumbra and occasional ally of philosophy". Rather, he claims, "the task of religion begins where the instruments of the party of Enlightenment lose their efficacy".

This stand is likely, on the face of it, to appeal to many dogged adherents of the old religions, who like to believe that their dogmas and spiritual raptures derive from a sphere beyond the reach of reason and science. It is also likely to appeal to those countless adherents or founders of contemporary cults or faddish notions who imagine that they are being transcendent when they are simply losing their grip on reality. He claims to be challenging the old religions as well as the Enlightenment, however, and appears oblivious to the risks:

My argument about these past religious revolutions, about what they had in common as well as about the contrasting directions that they set, is motivated, directly and transparently, by a single purpose: the defence of another direction for the future. To take this direction, we must break with that common ground, undertaking religious revolution with new content and in new form. Nothing could be further from the intentions of the proponents of the Axial Age thesis.

He concludes that “the commanding purpose of the religious revolutions of the past was not to advance a disinterested view of the world. It was to rescue mankind from its lack of imagination and of love.” It isn’t altogether clear whether, in ending his large book this way, he wanted to imply that he had wasted his time, being a mere scribe, prepared the way for commencing his public life as an exemplary visionary, or opened up the ground on which the rest of us might hear and heed the call of imagination and love issued by as yet unseen visionaries.

Does he believe that the old religions can be revolutionised from within by imagination and love and come to form a cluster of renewed religions for the future, offering refreshed versions of their old existential stances? He doesn’t tell us. Does he believe that the literalist and militant advocates of the old religions, most fearfully in our time the Islamists, are apostles of imagination and love with access to truths that transcend those of the sciences? He takes no position on Islam specifically and makes no mention of religious fanaticism or dogmatism. Does he believe that his religion of the future is more likely to arise among unbelievers in the marketplace—where Nietzsche had his madman proclaim the death of God to the general scepticism and amusement of his listeners—or in the afflicted Muslim world, where armed fanatics are currently attempting to expel Christians, Jews and other “infidels”, to crush apostasy and to suppress moves towards female emancipation? He does not make any mention of these things. Does he believe his religion of the future can begin in our schools and take the next generation by storm? He demands a revolution in education, but makes no reference whatsoever to current or prospective curricula.

Although often puzzled, sceptical or frustrated by *The Religion of the Future*, I never gave up, and read it word for word to the end. I recommend that all those interested in the prospects for religious belief in the contemporary world read it and use it as a foil to their own thinking. Although there are many flaws in Unger’s approach, his vast intellectual energy and passionate insistence on social

and political openness are consistently engaging and, at their best, quite compelling. The man is clearly immensely well-read, and all the wonderful attainments of his family are evident in his manner and concerns. Still, I believe we need to ground an assessment of the future of religion in terms far more closely linked to the natural world, the “crooked timber of humanity” and the cautious wisdom of modern secular culture than Unger allows. I have sketched out such a vision in my own new book, *Credo and Twelve Poems: A Cosmological Manifesto*. Yet I can imagine enjoying a long and civilised exchange with Unger about the differences in our thinking and the vast scope for further thought. I hope that both our books will find readers among those whose religious beliefs are very different from either his or mine. Such readings and exchanges, I would like to think, will *give* us the religion of the future.

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## HELEN ANDREWS

### Of Cowards and Patriots

*The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle over a Forbidden Book*

by Peter Finn & Petra Couvée  
Vintage, 2015, 368 pages, \$22.99

*Twilight of the Eastern Gods*

by Ismail Kadare  
Grove Press, 2014, 224 pages, \$29.99

When *Doctor Zhivago* reached number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list in November 1958, the book it displaced from the top spot was *Lolita*. Nabokov was not pleased. He did not think much of Pasternak as a novelist, and to make matters worse, he felt bound to keep his low opinion to himself for fear of seeming jealous. “Had not *Zhivago* and I been on the same ladder,” he griped in a private letter, “I would have been glad to demolish that trashy, melodramatic, false, and inept book, which neither landscaping nor politics can save from my wastepaper basket.”

Nabokov was right that *Doctor Zhivago*, as literature, is nothing to crow about—not that the author of *Lolita* was in a position to look down his nose at a book for owing its success to extra-literary considerations. Pasternak does not rank with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. He nonetheless deserves to be classed with such perfectly creditable writers as, say, Margaret Mitchell. Indeed, *Gone with the Wind* may be the closest thing to an English-language equivalent of *Doctor Zhivago*: a sweeping romantic epic set against the backdrop of a civil war, with enough sympathy shown for the losing side to attract the ire of the politically correct. Both books transitioned very well to the big screen, and in neither case was that entirely a compliment to the literary quality of the source material.

Yet during the Cold War *Doctor Zhivago* was transformed from a Siberian soap opera into a worldwide symbol of resistance to tyranny. The story of how this occurred is the subject of *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle over a Forbidden Book* by Peter Finn and Petra Couvée.

The book's road to international fame began in 1956, when the Khrushchev thaw led Pasternak to hope that his newly completed first novel might find a Soviet publisher, despite its criticisms of Bolshevik excesses. His friend Kornei Chukovsky, who had more experience with the Moscow literary bureaucracy, was less naive. He knew that *Doctor Zhivago* would be suppressed, thaw or no thaw. But he also knew that Khrushchev would be wary of handing the West an easy propaganda victory. According to the gossip Chukovsky had gathered by September, "the current plan is as follows: to stem all nasty rumours (both here and abroad) by putting the novel out in three thousand copies—thereby making it inaccessible to the masses—and at the same time proclaiming that we are placing no obstacle in Pasternak's path".

This plan would have saved the Moscow apparatus a world of trouble. Unfortunately for them, they did not proceed with it. No Russian edition of *Doctor Zhivago* had yet been published when the novel appeared for the first time in the West in November 1957, in Italian translation from a manuscript Pasternak had managed to smuggle out. Nor had one been published by the time of the World's Fair in Brussels in the summer of 1958, which 16,000 Soviet citizens attended. More than

500 copies of a Russian-language edition, which had been commissioned and bulk-purchased from a Dutch publishing house by the CIA, were successfully distributed in Brussels, discreetly wrapped in brown paper.

Five days after the World's Fair closed, the Nobel committee announced that Pasternak had won that year's literature prize, after having been a regular nominee for more than a decade on the basis of his poetry. By that point there was no chance for Moscow to neutralise the book's propaganda value by releasing a censored "authorised" edition. Their only remaining option was to discredit Pasternak, which they did, through a concerted campaign of denunciation and by forcing him to turn down the Nobel. Khrushchev himself scripted the speech that signalled the beginning of the anti-Pasternak

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*All week, whenever  
his narrator turns  
on the radio, he  
hears yet another  
statement condemning  
Pasternak: from the  
Tashkent clergy, from  
the people of Qipstap,  
from the North Sea  
whaling fleet.*

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frenzy; a mid-level apparatchik delivered the address, but the leader's signature barnyard style was detected in the charge that Pasternak was lower than swine since "a pig never makes a mess where it eats or sleeps". The CIA, for its part, reacted by commissioning another batch of Russian-language editions to be smuggled behind the Iron Curtain. In one instance, operatives lurking on the sidewalks of Vienna hurled pocket-sized copies through the windows of a Soviet student delegation's bus.

The CIA angle is played up in the book's subtitle, but to their credit, Finn and Couvée adopt a

neutral tone in discussing the agency's involvement. Unlike some recent writers, they see nothing fundamentally improper about the idea of spies waging a literary campaign—at worst, they find it a bit comical. Even at the time, it was widely known that the US government funded art and literature that promoted liberal values (the magazine you are reading was among the beneficiaries). Most of those who knew about it, or suspected it, figured that if the work itself was good, the source of the funding was no cause for scandal. In this particular case, the CIA was never in contact with Pasternak directly, so Finn and Couvée do not regard their efforts on his behalf as compromising.

Langlely, CIA headquarters, may even be the closest thing this book has to a hero, since it certainly isn't Pasternak. The author comes off badly from the very first chapter, which details how he broke up his first marriage by stealing his best friend's wife. Having married that woman, he later left her for his mistress, Olga Ivinskaya, on

whom the character of Lara was based, though like Zhivago, Pasternak never divorced the mother of his children. There were usually other women in the mix, too, including a German penpal whom Finn and Couvée delicately describe as “a poet who worked as a masseuse”; she made the trek out to Pasternak’s dacha in 1960, to Ivinskaya’s great annoyance. Critics like Edmund Wilson have interpreted *Doctor Zhivago* as a sensitive soul’s reaction to totalitarian conditions, but it could just as easily have been a sensitive soul’s reaction to a love life in disarray. The novel’s central theme—*A man must follow his vital force!*—is the sort of thing a dissident might say to a tyrant, but it is also what a straying husband says to his long-suffering wife.

Pasternak was rather cowardly in his handling of this romantic muddle. He kept delegating other people to break things off with Ivinskaya so he could go back to his wife. Once he tried to enlist Ivinskaya’s fifteen-year-old daughter, who quite rightly refused. He never had the nerve to break up with her himself, so he continued to muddle along, splitting his time between both women. On his death-bed Pasternak refused to see his mistress—not out of any belated scruples, according to Finn and Couvée, but because “he simply could not bear the stress and the pitched emotion of an Ivinskaya visit”.

To be a coward with women is not the blackest sin in the catalogue, but it does make it harder to forgive Pasternak for the times when he was less than brave with the Soviet government. When word came down that he was about to be expelled from the country, Pasternak allowed Ivinskaya to persuade him to send “Nikita Sergeyevich” a contrite letter of not-quite-apology. Khrushchev responded by calling off the campaign against him, declaring, “Enough. He’s admitted his mistakes. Stop it.” To the West, Pasternak seemed a martyr, but his fellow Russian writers, even the liberals among them, had some sympathy for the opinion of the novelist Valentin Kateyev. “He has a splendid flat, a dacha, a car; he’s rich, he lives high off the hog,” Kateyev grumbled to Chukovsky. “You see him as a victim. Well, save your sympathy.”

Among the writers who would willingly have traded places with Pasternak in 1959 was a young Albanian who had come to Moscow at the age of twenty-two to study at the Gorky Institute for World Literature. Ismail Kadare’s years of study coincided with the *Zhivago* affair, and his autobiographical novel *Twilight of the Eastern Gods* gives an ant’s-eye view of the drama that complements Finn and Couvée’s more sweeping account.

One attraction of Kadare’s novel, which Finn

and Couvée’s history lacks, is suspense. The week that Pasternak won the Nobel buzzed with uncertainty, and students at the Gorky Institute were perfectly situated to catch every rumour from their position on the periphery of Moscow’s literary world. As soon as the news broke, a meeting of the Writers’ Union was called and delegates were summoned from all the People’s Republics. As the meeting loomed, gossip raged: Would Pasternak himself show up? Would he reach an accommodation with the authorities? If so, would that mean turning down the prize? “If it’s not wrapped up by eight tonight, the campaign will get even nastier,” a fellow student assured Kadare. “Apparently Chukovsky is going to call on him at two this afternoon to try to persuade him.”

A cross-check with Chukovsky’s diaries, published in 1991, reveals that Kadare’s friend was well informed: he did call on Pasternak that afternoon. “I told him about the notice I’d received from the Writers’ Union inviting me to attend an emergency meeting. Just then a courier arrived with the same notice for him.” Pasternak retreated to his bedroom, stricken, but when he came down, he refused to commit to turning down the prize. The most he would agree to do was to write a letter explaining his actions, which he drafted but did not send—which was just as well for him, for it declared, “Higher powers command me to act as I do. I feel that the Nobel Prize recently granted me can only gladden the hearts of all Soviet writers.”

The pillorying therefore went ahead as scheduled, with many of Kadare’s classmates taking a turn at the podium. Among the more vehement, he records, was a friend who “had told me the previous day that Pasternak, despite his turpitude, was worth a hundred times more than any of the other runts of Soviet literature”.

Kadare makes it a running joke that all week, whenever his narrator turns on the radio, he hears yet another statement condemning Pasternak: from the Tashkent clergy, from the people of Qipstap, from the North Sea whaling fleet. And then, suddenly:

On fine morning the radio began broadcasting reports on the achievements of the collective farms in the Urals, about summer retreats, about arts festivals in one or another Soviet republic, about the abundance of the fisheries, about contented young people in the steppe near the Volga—but it uttered not another word about Pasternak.

The obviously orchestrated abruptness of the campaign’s end might have been disillusioning to

young Ismail if he had not already been so cynical about the Soviet world and its literary scene. The purpose of the Gorky Institute was to teach provincial writers from across the communist world, from Greeks to Buryats, to be good social realists. Unsurprisingly, this ideological straitjacket provoked resentment. Kadare tells of a special ritual, *plot-sprew*, in which the students would get drunk and tell each other the plots of all the novels they would never be allowed to write. “They will write other things, often the exact opposite.”

That was a prophetic prediction in his own case, for upon his return to Albania, Kadare quickly learned to compromise with the regime of Enver Hoxha. He wrote poems in praise of the dictator and buried subversive themes under so many layers of symbolism in his excellent novels that some readers (including Hoxha) failed to detect them. In his defence, Albania was more oppressive than almost any other communist country at the time; if Kadare had been even a fraction more subversive than he was, he probably would have been shot.

The only remaining option was emigration to the West, but Kadare, like Pasternak, refused to be parted from his native country. By stubbornly refusing to follow the path of freedom into exile, these two writers fell short of the Western ideal of the uncompromising dissident artist—but then, the depth of their love for their native lands may have been what allowed them to write novels worth reading in the first place.

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*Helen Andrews contributed “Australia and the Post-Colonial Novel” in the October issue.*

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## ANDREW STUTTAFORD

### The Making of a Few Mistakes

*Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings*

by Owen Hatherley

Allen Lane, 2015, 624 pages, \$49.99

Owen Hatherley’s fascinating, if frequently wrong-headed, *Landscapes of Communism* is a blend of sermon, history and travelogue wrapped into an interpretation of the architecture of communist rule. The best way to approach it is through its antechamber, Hatherley’s *Militant Modernism* (2008), a snappy paean to modernism. That Zero Books, the publisher of *Militant Modernism*, included a page proudly distancing itself

from the “cretinous anti-intellectualism” and “banal conformity” of “late capitalism”—the last a term that is pose, not description—gives a suggestion of what to expect. But credit where credit is due: the fact that my copy is disintegrating after only one reading is a nice touch. When hymning the praises of an architectural style so prone to dereliction, a poorly-made paperback is not a bad place to do it.

Like its rambling, much longer successor, *Militant Modernism* veers off in unexpected twists and turns that would have made the duller modernists frown, but, politically, it cleaves to the old (party) line. There “is always the possibility of another outcome, where [today’s] system based on destruction, injustice and barbarism can finally be given its long overdue burial. The dormant Socialist Modernism can, if nothing else, offer spectral blueprints for such a future.”

Born in 1981, shortly before history was supposed to have ended, Hatherley can, despite occasional lapses into undergraduate polemics, be a playful and entertaining writer. A propagandist, yes, but he’s erudite and sharp too, aware of the ironies of, well, *late* communism and ready to acknowledge some of the failures (and far, far worse) that went before.

A “red diaper” baby and grandbaby (to borrow the American phrase: his parents belonged to Militant Tendency, a peculiarly nasty offshoot of the British Left; his grandparents were members of the Communist Party), he clings to the millenarian faith of his forebears, now metastasised into something more hip in this age of “terminal” (oh, the longing in that adjective) capital. In *Militant Modernism*, Hatherley laments the disdain with which Britain’s brutalist architecture is treated, but finds some consolation in the thought that it is dormant, not destroyed, “ready to be recharged and reactivated. This rough beast might still slouch towards a concrete New Jerusalem.”

His fervour has not cooled in the years since he wrote that. In *Landscapes of Communism*, Hatherley describes the museum in Moscow dedicated to the poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky, a shrine that plainly delights him. He notes that it is the only “revolutionary memorial” he has come across that argues that “revolution might be a rather exciting thing, one that would transform the world ... for the better. Worth doing. Why not try it.” Sadly, the excitement proved too much for Mayakovsky. Unhappy with the way things were going in the Soviet Union, he shot himself in 1930.

Then again, Hatherley explains that his book “uses the term ‘communism’ as a matter of convenience”. He does not “consider that [the] societies [of the old ‘socialist camp’] fit the description in any

meaningful sense". Ah yes, the old it-hasn't-been-tried-yet, a stale, unconvincing excuse insufficient to overcome the objection that the only credible route to "real" communism, an ideology that rejects almost everything that we understand about our species, has to be that "boot stamping on a human face—forever".

That's not how Hatherley sees it. He has little time for schadenfreudians (such as me) who enjoy visiting the relics of Soviet empire ("counter-revolutionary tourism", he calls it, not entirely inaccurately). The remnants of what he clearly views as a noble, if profoundly flawed, experiment should be regarded with more respect. That's not to claim he won't concede that, as the non-admission goes, "mistakes were made", big and small. Contemplating the dacha settlements scattered across the Russian countryside, he observes how, "like many Soviet ideas, it is so obviously right and so obviously botched". *So obviously right.*

**L**andscapes of Communism is based on what Hatherley saw, "reading history through buildings", while wandering with his Polish girlfriend, the writer Agata Pyzik, around the cities of the old empire (Warsaw, where he lives some of the time, Moscow, St Petersburg, Kiev, Prague, Riga, Tbilisi, the former East Berlin and many more), but it reveals two distinct "landscapes", not one. The first is exterior, the cityscapes that communism left behind. The second, in some ways more interesting, is interior, a glimpse of the mind of a true believer constructing a narrative that allows his faith to survive the facts that should have consigned it to, as the saying goes, the dustbin of history. When prophecy fails, it rarely makes much of a difference: Marxist or Millerite, believers will keep on believing, and reality will count for very little.

Thus Hatherley, no exception, asserts that the sculptors who once designed "glowering Lenins and muscle-bound workers now devote their talents" to Soviet-style representations of the likes of "Ukrainian fascist leader Stepan Bandera" and Jozef Pilsudski, Miklos Horthy and Karlis Ulmanis, the dominant figures in pre-war Poland, Hungary and Latvia respectively. "None of them [were] 'democrats' in any sane sense of the word", writes the author who refers in another passage to "an experiment in radical democracy" in Tito's Yugoslavia.

It's a while since I was in Poland and I have never visited Ukraine, but the only statue of Ulmanis (an

authoritarian, certainly, but relatively benign) that I have ever spotted in Riga, the Latvian capital, is a modest, almost jaunty effort, a bit like the one of New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia in Greenwich Village. Again, I may not have been looking hard enough, but the nearest thing I saw to a statue of Admiral Horthy, an infinitely more compromised figure, during a recent trip to Budapest was a smallish bust encased in protective plastic, timidly sheltering in the entry of a church.

But (possibly: there are a number of Pilsudkis in Poland and Banderas in Ukraine) exaggerating infestations of reactionary statuary is a trivial matter compared with a depiction of past and present twisted by a determination to show that a kinder, gentler communism (or something like it) is not only possible, but preferable to the "neoliberalism"

(of course!) that allegedly prevails today. Thus the huzzahs for Tito's Yugoslavia, in its heyday "one of the most admired countries in the world" apparently, a country where communist massacres were unknown (tell that to the Slovenes), and where boldly refashioned economic management was eventually brought low with the help of (naturally!) the IMF.

This perspective extends into Hatherley's distorted—and relentlessly bleak—depiction of Eastern Europe's more recent history, a time and a place that somehow never seems to merit the somewhat

more sympathetic gaze he casts over the USSR. Transition from Moscow's rule has been tough, brutal even, but he appears unwilling to accept that the greatest part of the blame lies with the system that created so much social and economic ruin in the first place rather than with those left to pick up the pieces after its demise.

There is a darker side still to Hatherley's flight from truths incompatible with his dream. To be sure, he is forthright in his condemnation of many of the crimes of communist misrule, but there are denials (East Germany was "shabby, undemocratic, but hardly totalitarian"), sly evasions and telling silences too, not to speak of the tasteless jeering at the "bodycounters carrying their Black Books [of Communism]" that together hint at something more chilling at work.

And so, in a way, does Hatherley's impatience with architecture that looks back, whether it's the often impressionistic recreations of historic Eastern European city centres destroyed in the Second World War or the eclectic traditionalism—a precursor,

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*With his devotion  
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maybe, of the postmodern—of high-Stalinist architecture. With characteristic cleverness, he connects the two, although the understandable urge to restore *something* out of so much wartime destruction ought to need no explanation. Well, perhaps it might to a writer so sympathetic to Brecht's notion that we should "erase the traces" of the past. Those are the three words with which Hatherley begins *Militant Modernism*, three words all too descriptive of what the Bolsheviks set in motion in 1917.

With his devotion to the absoluteness of modernism's breach with history, it's no surprise that Hatherley finds so much to admire in the architecture of revolutionary Russia, put together in what he describes as "twelve years of artistic, literary and scientific ferment, a decade comparable to the Renaissance in its intensity and wide-ranging effects", a "Renaissance" which, he omits to mention, many of Russia's best and brightest either fled or did not survive. He does concede that "restrictions were placed on democracy, the press and freedom of assembly". *Restrictions*.

A fan of Konstantin Melnikov's Rusakov Workers' Club, described by Khrushchev, a sounder judge, as "ugly as sin", Hatherley celebrates the unkempt geometry of this era as well as its more dreamlike constructions, both built (Moscow's glorious Shabalovka Radio Tower) and unbuilt: Vladimir Tatlin, take a bow. This was architecture, not *parlante*, but *hurlante*, yelling the millennial moment, triumphant, all change, blood and fire in concrete and steel, the buildings of a New Jerusalem built, as utopias must be, on the bones of sinners, "former people", those who stand in the way.

But when that millennial moment, as always, turned out not to be, Soviet architecture began to look back to something older, to styles that reflected the power structures of a steadier nation sustained by faith in a radiant future that would dawn—one day. Lenin's mausoleum, Alexey Shchusev's masterpiece, was a monument that, blending constructivism with echoes of "ancient, despotic ritual", foreshadowed the horrors that lay ahead (an architect of Bray, Shchusev also designed Moscow's spectacular Kazansky Station, a project commenced under the tsars).

Hatherley writes perceptively and well on the buildings of Stalinism, most notably Moscow's

mad high-rises, and their siblings in the colonies, in Riga, Kiev, Bucharest and Warsaw, a response to Manhattan, to be sure, but with an undeniable echo of the cathedral too: Moscow's centre "is encircled by six advancing skyscrapers, each with a towering, scraping spire, all of which bear down on you, paranoid and threatening, like an Inquisition; try to escape and another is waiting for you, wings outstretched, at the Lenin [Sparrow] Hills."

Inevitably, the famed Metro systems—and not just in Moscow—get their shout-out, if one that comes awkwardly from an evangelist of modernism. But so they should, their "munificence of scale", a preview of what had been promised, "microcosms of a communist future you can walk through, smell and touch", a slice of heaven on earth. "The Metros are," writes Hatherley, "also exemplary spaces of the transformation of the everyday, taking two kinds of rituals—those of religion, with ... sacred vaulted spaces, created atmospheres and representational icons, and the mundane daily rituals of waiting for trains [and] getting to work ..."

Hatherley, no denier of the Stalinist nightmare (if unprepared to confront its deeper implications—that boot, that face—for those who would build New Jerusalem) seems more comfortable with the blander brave new world of the Khrushchev era and beyond, a landscape with less "despotic rococo" about it in all senses, a landscape more easily, if still inaccurately, described as the product of a vision that, however imperfectly realised, was rational and humane. It's a landscape that still calls out to him with its mirage of what could never have been, a landscape of an ugliness, both literal and metaphorical, that he frequently appears to overlook.

It remains to Ms Pyzik, born during the last years of People's Poland, and a leftist herself, to sound a note of doubt with a comment, which, to his credit, Hatherley repeats. She recalls that it was "incredibly depressing" spending her early childhood living among the modernist tower blocks of one of those Warsaw housing estates that so define our notions of the Soviet space. She would never, she said, do so again under any circumstances.

There's a lesson there.

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*Andrew Stuttaford, a contributing editor of National Review, has a website at <http://andrewstuttaford.com>. He wrote on the euro crisis in the July–August issue.*

## GARY FURNELL

## Naples, under the Sun

*My Brilliant Friend**The Story of a New Name**Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay**The Story of the Lost Girl*

by Elena Ferrante

Europa Editions, 2012–2015, about \$30 each

Kierkegaard thought that those who made their desire for personal stability and social equality into an absolute, with no reference to the transcendent, were ignoring the rather important fact that they lived in a temporal world and “time is the very medium of differentiation”. In Elena Ferrante’s magisterial fiction quartet, the Neapolitan series, the presupposition seems to be that the temporal is all that exists—the eternal is scorned—so there is an urgency to achieving stability and equity here and now; but both remain tenuous because the differentiating flow of time constantly changes the conditions of reality. Although in different ways—through love and family, work and study, activism and politics—all of the many characters seek to grasp these elusive gifts, none can keep hold of them. The presuppositions held by an author, or their characters, need to be uncovered because they give the reader an idea, too often unconsidered, of the nature of the world into which the author is trying to entice them. For me, this interrogative process added a level of depth to the fascination of reading Ferrante’s long, brilliant narrative.

The four novels carry the narrative through four stages of life. *My Brilliant Friend* begins the story of Elena (Lena) Greco and Raffaella (Lila) Cerullo from their childhood to adolescence; they’re intelligent girls of very poor families in post-war Naples. Early in this first book, a key episode defines the relationship between the friends: playing near the rusting grill of a frightening neighbour’s cellar, the girls swap dolls. Lila shoves Elena’s doll through the grill and into the dark stink of the cellar. Elena does the same to Lila’s doll. Holding hands, the brave girls search the cellar but can’t recover the dolls. A pattern is established of unpredictable action, response, and an ambivalent but necessary togetherness.

*The Story of a New Name* follows the girls through late adolescence and the years of marriage for Lila and university for Lena. *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* details the failure of Lila’s marriage, her battles with employers and with the local

Camorristi, the Solara family. Lena has success as a fiction writer and cultural commentator; she marries, has affairs, and raises her daughters.

In these first three novels, Lila and Elena’s lives are deeply affected by men: bullied by boys, pursued by admirers, pursuing men themselves, their roles governed by fathers, brothers and husbands. The men are easily offended, quick to anger, and violent. They are also protective, hard-working and often generous, but the only day Elena had her father’s total attention was when they went together into the city centre so she could learn her way to college. *The Story of the Lost Girl* chronicles the decades of Elena and Lila’s middle to old age, when they have greater control over their own lives but find themselves more alone in their struggles.

The story is told by Elena, the accomplished writer. She was inspired, as she often was, by an action of Lila’s: at sixty-six years old, Lila vanished after the determined removal of every trace of her existence. Not even a hairpin of hers remained in her flat. After sixty years of tumultuous friendship, and furious at this final example of Lila’s capriciousness, Elena was not going to let her get away with the disappearance and wrote the four novels to preserve Lila’s history and their interwoven existence.

The novels are dramatic, traumatic, crowded with minor characters, and paced like thrillers. I did not once find myself pausing to admire any lyrical qualities of the prose, but many times I admired the exceptional skill of the storytelling. In one of her very rare interviews (the name “Elena Ferrante” is a pseudonym and the author’s identity has not been made public), Ferrante said she wrote the novels quickly, surprised at her own facility and ability to muster so many characters, and that her main concern was the story, not the style. She borrows storytelling techniques freely from all genres, including thrillers, to ensure the reader wants to turn the page. She succeeds. The pace is brisk, there’s taut dialogue, and each chapter, as a rule very short, has some drama that propels the story and ends at a point that had this reader eager to continue. I read all four books in three weeks, and that concentrated immersion in the characters and their story compounded, I’m sure, the mesmerising effect of the novels.

I wondered, whose writing does this remind me of? As in Dickens’s novels, the characters, especially the poor, have almost an excess of liveliness. If someone knocks down one of Dickens’s characters, he or she clambers back up with a scowl and a witticism. When one of the Neapolitan poor gets knocked down, male or female, they jump up spitting, punching and cursing. There is the same

vigorous sense of dignity and abundance of energy. And as with Dickens, there is a concern for the poor together with a portrayal of the broader class structures and changing social conditions. Unlike Dickens, however, in Ferrante's novels comedy and wit are rare; I think there's a lack of realism here because the life of every person is rich with humour and farce if only we'd see it.

Sometimes the characters' emotional energy reminded me of Dostoevsky's frenetic characters: excitable, always involved in some contention, with an intense and often contradictory inner life. For example, nearly all the Neapolitan women are subjected to slapping and beatings, yet it is the women themselves who scorn gentle, meek men who don't violently correct a shameless wife, girlfriend or daughter. And the women punch each other in the face and threaten to kill each other as if it's normal behaviour. At other times, especially through the comments of Lila, I could hear echoes of Charles Bukowski's fictional *alter ego*, Hank Chinaski. Like Chinaski, Lila is creative but it's only a means to make money and gain a little stimulation. It doesn't mean anything more and it won't cheat death. Like Chinaski, Lila is alternately gentle and violent, wise and vulgar; she is acerbic, pragmatic, unsentimental. Also like Chinaski, she lives in a

world of particulars, of discrete concretion, devoid of any sustaining metaphysical framework.

It's not surprising then that Lila has a recurring ontological/psychological crisis: she senses that the borders of the particulars around her, including herself, are dissolving into a horrid amorphous state where all individuation is annihilated. It first occurs when she is a teenager, but increases in severity as she gets older. It affects her view of the world. In *The Story of a Lost Child*, she puts Elena's concerns into a nihilistic perspective when Elena appeals for help:

"Don't discourage me. In my job I have to paste one fact to another with words, and in the end everything has to seem coherent even if it's not."

"But if the coherence isn't there, why pretend?"

On another occasion, Elena has to make a decision about sending her youngest daughter, Imma, to her father in Rome. Lila tells her to send her away. Elena reflects:

She seemed to be saying: Imma would be better off and so would you. I replied: If Imma leaves, too, my life will no longer have meaning. But she smiled: Where is it written that lives should have meaning? So she began to disparage all that struggle of mine to write. She said mockingly: Is the meaning that line of black markings that look like insect shit?

When I finished the last novel, I straightaway read Ecclesiastes because there were echoes there, too. Ferrante's novels gave individual expression—in the lives of Lila and Elena—to Solomon's magnificent essay on the puzzle of life lived under the sun, the way things change but don't change, the turmoil of people's hearts, the flow of time washing any achievement away, the frustration of wanting to know and remain but being unable to discover certainty or attain stability. Elena may hesitate to say it although she discerned it, but Lila would proclaim it because to her it was obvious: All is vanity! Futility! Chasing the wind!

All the authors I've cited here to help me locate the achievement of Ferrante are male. Ferrante identifies with feminism, but in her writing she says she wants the scale, the energy, the adventure, and the muscularity that men rather than women typically display in their fiction. I think she achieves this goal and that's one reason her novels are celebrated. They are unmistakably written in a woman's voice, Elena's, but the tone is visceral and tough.

The scale of the ideas embodied in the novels is ambitious, as you would expect in a complex series whose narrative extends over sixty years. Friendship between women, personal identity, social mobility, feminism, motherhood, marriage, family roles and family violence, secularism, sociality, changing sexual mores, masculinity, crime, working conditions, loss, love, the counter-culture and political subversion are all expressed in the urgent action of the many storylines and characters that intersect, circle around, and meet again. Elena's counter-culture ideologies tend to get their comeuppance in the novels, but I expect that the Neapolitan books will be ransacked by various ideologues who will overlook the obvious contradictions in order to claim support for various causes.

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*Ferrante is aware that a story must be true to itself and not to ideology. She has said that, when writing fiction, "at every step there is above all the risk that a story's honesty will be clouded by good intentions".*

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For example, in *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, Elena builds her reputation as a social commentator through her feminist writing and lectures. She has a thesis that the Genesis creation account locks women into a definition that is intrinsically related to men; women exist only as men allow them to exist and men can claim a religious fiat for this state of affairs. She encourages women to find their own definition; to create themselves independently of men. Yet at the same time as she travels Europe presenting this thesis to audiences of women, she abandons her two young daughters and her gentle husband, Pietro, in order to begin an affair—distressing to all, especially her daughters—with Nino, a feckless, self-centred intellectual who, no shock here, is seeing other women as well as Elena. Lila warned her about Nino; Carmen warned her; I tried to warn her. All ignored. To her credit, Elena sees the contradiction; to her discredit, she does little about it because she likes the recognition of being a radical-type celebrity and she needs the money.

Ferrante is aware that a story must be true to itself and not to ideology. She has said that, when writing fiction, “at every step there is above all the risk that a story’s honesty will be clouded by good intentions, hypocritical calculations, or ideologies that exalt sisterhood in ways that are often nauseating”. Ferrante is clear about the integrity of storytelling and the foibles of humanity, especially once we start presenting our own interpretations as universal truths.

Ferrante also has clear sight for the world of children, especially young girls. The friendship between Lila’s daughter Tina and Imma, Elena’s daughter by Nino, is portrayed with a sensitivity that is a wonder. Both children are present to the reader in a rare way; precocious, generous Tina and slower, more vulnerable Imma, eager to have Tina’s affection and attention. The skill with which Ferrante portrays these two little children, especially the vivacious Tina, makes what happens to Tina all the more wrenching. It is unresolved, cruel in its effects on Lila and Enzo, her partner in business and life, and it’s a black void in the last novel that I resented Ferrante imposing on the story.

Of course, my response demonstrates that Ferrante’s storytelling instincts were correct. Perhaps Ferrante herself doesn’t know why the story demanded the distressing event—she knows stories have a unfathomable trajectory of their own—but it does precipitate the conclusion of the story: Lila becomes withdrawn and eccentric; she and Enzo break up; Lila neglects herself and loses her eye-catching elegance; her visions of the deliquescent nature of reality become more terrifying.

She is offended by Elena’s successful book about their friendship, written contrary to Lila’s desire for privacy, and she completely ignores Elena’s entreaties to spend time together now they are in old age, “when we are in need of closeness and solidarity”. Then she vanishes. Elena remembered that Lila had spoken of her desire to disappear. Somehow Lila, Elena’s lifelong brilliant friend, had found a way to do it.

At the end of the quartet of novels, Elena, settled in Turin, reads the papers in the park and walks the labrador she has acquired for company. Men are no longer attracted by her; she has lost her figure. She still has a literary reputation and she delights in the beauty and accomplishments of her daughters and grandchildren—when she sees them. One day, a package arrives. It is the two dolls that young Elena and Lila had lost. Elena knows that Lila is still alive. She also knows she will never see her again.

This epilogue left me feeling bereft. My throat and chest ached. I went for a walk. I telephoned my children just to talk. I missed them and my dearest friends who all live hundreds of kilometres away. I was aware of the ineluctable mystery of my own life and, at heart, the unknowable, mysterious being of the people I loved. It has been a long time since I was so affected by fiction. I then read King Solomon: “The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share it.” And again:

One event happens to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, the clean and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice, as is the good, so is the sinner; and he who takes an oath, as he who fears an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

In the years before she disappears, Lila studies the history of Naples, the city where she was born and never once left. She discovers that it was built on garbage dumps, sewer pits, blood-soaked gladiatorial arenas, scenes of corruption, pretension and greed. From the post-war years through to the new millennium, Naples has changed and Lila sees the new business towers constructed in the city centre; but she realises all the changes are based on what never changes: selfish ambition, violence, lust for power and pleasure. Lila knows criminals have significant power in Italy, just as they’ve always done, although now they wear suits,

sit in parliament, and spout liberal sentiments in glib sound-bites.

*Gary Furnell, a frequent contributor of non-fiction and stories, wrote on the novels of Barbara Pym in the November issue.*

## DEREK PARKER

### Turkish Horizons

#### *A Strangeness in My Mind*

by Orhan Pamuk  
Hamish Hamilton, 2015, 624 pages, \$33

#### *The House in Smyrna*

by Tatiana Salem Levy  
Scribe, 2015, 160 pages, \$28

#### *The Secret Son*

by Jenny Ackland  
Allen & Unwin, 2015, 336 pages, \$30

At one point, the key character is Orhan Pamuk's sprawling novel *A Strangeness in My Mind* muses that Istanbul is like the centre of the world, a conjunction of frontiers between continents, between history and the present, between what has been lost and what has been found. The theme of cultural and psychological borders recurs throughout *A Strangeness in My Mind* as well as two other new novels connected to Turkey, *The House in Smyrna* by Brazilian-based Tatiana Salem Levy and *The Secret Son*, the debut novel by Australian writer Jenny Ackland. Pamuk, Levy and Ackland are also determined to push the frontier of narrative methods; as a result, all three books are difficult, but all three repay the effort.

*A Strangeness in My Mind* is a vast story, with a strong element of epic soap opera and a streak of weird humour. The main character, Mevlut, represents Turkey's struggle to balance its long and rich history with the need to build a modern, Western-inclined society. He is a country boy who is swept into the capital, along with his extended and rather strange family, by the social currents of the latter third of the twentieth century. In Istanbul, he becomes a street-food vendor but his real love is selling *boza*, a traditional fermented drink that contains alcohol, but not so much that it breaks the Koranic prohibition. *Boza* can be seen as a metaphor for Turkey's twin obsessions: setting rules and finding a way to get around them. Mevlut's mean-

derings around the city allow him to discover its layers and facets, its deep past and ongoing conflicts. A good number of pages are spent on street-food culture, and how it has shifted as the city's social demography has evolved and Western fast-food offerings have crept in.

Pamuk, who has won the Nobel Prize for literature although he originally trained as an architect, has explored the organic nature of cities before, in his novels *The Black Book* and *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*. But those novels told the story of Istanbul through Westernised characters, and here he is seeing the view from the inside, infusing it with the odd sense of melancholy that the Turks call *huzun*. Mevlut, like Pamuk, likes old things: stones worn smooth by touch, back alleys, faded colour. Over the years he watches a different city emerge, a place "dreadful and dazzling at once", with new dreams and new politics.

Part of Mevlut's sense of feeling that the world has played an unfunny joke on him comes from his early, flailing attempts at romance. He first falls in love with a young girl, sending messages through his brother. But their elopement plans take the wrong path: the brother inadvertently delivers not the object of Mevlut's affection but her older sister, Rayiha. Sorry, Mevlut, that's life: more *huzun*. But the two of them manage to make a decent relationship out of it, and plain Rayiha turns out to be clever and strong. They try, and partially succeed, to create a circle of calm despite the increasing clamour of the city changing around them and Mevlut's eccentric family.

If this sounds like a fairly straightforward novel, it isn't. There are multiple narrators (mainly Mevlut's family), often contradicting and shouting over one another. This can make an already long book—over 600 pages—seem chaotic at first, even though Pamuk helpfully provides a cast list. But once the reader has got the hang of it the structure is more like one of the city's mosaics, using shards and pieces to build a complex picture that only falls into place at a certain distance.

Some readers might also find the lack of a clear conclusion difficult—the closest the book comes to a happy ending is that one of Mevlut's daughters manages to overcome the strictures placed on women to graduate from university. And then she announces she is going to move away. *Huzun* again, but there is also Mevlut's gratitude for what life has given him in the way of quiet revelations and unexpected gifts.

*The House in Smyrna* is a shorter work but no less dense, in its way, and no less about frontiers and the crossing of them. Tatiana Salem Levy's parents

were Turkish Jews who moved to Brazil, eventually ending up in Portugal (Tatiana was born in Lisbon) to escape the military dictatorship. Levy uses the pieces of her parents' lives as the background to the novel, which is told in truncated, alternating passages, jumping between times, places and unidentified narrative voices.

The starting point is an unnamed young woman lying in bed, wasting away to disease and despair. In an attempt to rally her, her grandfather gives her a key, which he says is the key to the door of the house he left in Smyrna, a town on the western coast of Turkey. The story spurs her recovery and sets her on a journey to discover the truth of her family by tracing their steps. She is uncertain how much this will help her settle her own confused identity, and there are several meditations on how personality is formed by the intersection of events, travels and imagination.

Woven into her wandering is the story of the young woman's parents, idealistic communists who were persecuted and tortured for their political views. There are imaginary conversations between the young woman and her mother, who has identity issues of her own not resolved even by death. There is also the arc of a transgressive sexual relationship between the protagonist and a man who at first appears to have wandered into the book from *Fifty Shades of Grey*. But the point eventually emerges, and the relationship illustrates the woman's sense of loss and confusion. She likes to pull sheets over her lovers' faces, and her own, emulating a burial shroud, for example. She remarks to her mother that she writes about pain because it is all she really knows. Not pain in the actual sense, but wounds of the soul, a feeling of guilt and hollowness. It is the malaise of affluence, the nature of being the offspring of refugees. Comfort, security, possessions: they can seem meaningless, even insulting, when put against the travails of previous generations.

Her eventual arrival in Turkey is about crossing a psychic frontier more than a line on the map. She is surprised to feel at home here, healed by the age and ambiguity of the country. She visits a mosque, not as a search for faith but to try and understand how it fits into the culture. She is eventually turned away but finds a community of women in an ancient bath-house, and here the narrative idea of image-driven sections works particularly well. She feels she has reached some sense of self when a taxi driver tells her she has "a Turkish face". She carries that sense with her when she leaves the country, and there is a sudden burst of violence that gives way to solace—perhaps not redemption for the future, but at least acceptance of the past and the present.

The tessellated method of storytelling allows Levy to cover a great deal of ground, both physically and mentally. The downside is that incidents often end just as they are getting interesting (this is especially a problem with the scenes of her parents in Brazil; it can look as if major events are being trivialised). *The House in Smyrna* is certainly a challenge to read, but that is part of its point. All frontiers are difficult to cross.

Unlike Pamuk and Levy, Jenny Ackland is new to the business of novel-writing, although she has published a number of stories. She writes with surprising authority and is not afraid to push the limits of plausibility. The central premise of *The Secret Son*, for instance, is that Ned Kelly had a son called James, who was raised by his mother in the country town of Beechworth unaware of the identity of his near-mythical father. It's possible, one supposes—but on the other hand whether it is truth or fiction does not really matter (as is the case with much in this novel).

As it happens, James grows up to be a rather bookish, gentle sort of fellow who nevertheless finds himself on the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915. In a moment of kindness, he saves a young Turkish soldier; when James is later wounded and left for dead after the evacuation, that soldier saves him and takes him to his home town, the mountain village of Hayat. James comes to like and then love the place. The dreamlike quality of the village and its people is underscored by the all-knowing and mystical Aunt Berna, a woman who can see patterns of fortune in things as ordinary as beans, or in the trees of the hills. It is Berna who acts, more or less, as the narrative anchor.

For James, the question first seems to be whether his life in Australia was more real than his life in Hayat. But over time he comes to understand that the real issue is whether one can lead a good, meaningful life regardless of the place, the circumstances, and one's genes.

Yet James's story is only one part of the book. Another narrative, set in more recent times, takes place alongside it, telling the story of Cem Kologlu, a young Turk travelling from Melbourne to Hayat, his family village. On the way he links up with an historian seeking the truth about the Kelly connection. Ties between the two men, and the people and the place they seek, slowly emerge. Some are more believable than others, although what might be far-fetched coincidence might actually be the silent hand of destiny.

There are debts to repay and secrets to uncover, with Berna watching over it all. One realises how Australian the Kelly myth is, and how strange the

story of the man in the iron mask must seem to other peoples, let alone an isolated place with a unique culture of its own. A writer less brave than Ackland might have balked at mixing these elements together but she makes it work, and the end of the complex story is at once unexpected and apt.

Ackland has a good eye for telling details: the gentle plod of a donkey, the smell of tea and figs from the village houses, the precarious position of the houses on the hillside. The parts of the book that take place elsewhere are less strong but this is hardly a fatal flaw. After all, one place in a novel is as real as any other, or perhaps none of them are.

If these three books are about the frontiers of culture and psychology, they are also about the frontier of modern writing. Multiple narrators, unreliable voices, stories that break apart and then come together again: this is the leading edge of the novel form. It demands energy and attention from the reader, and a willingness to suspend belief that goes beyond that of more traditional writing. Equally, the common theme of sustaining one's identity while all that supported it is drifting away can be confronting: here, there is not much in the way of happily ever after.

Despite their complexity—perhaps because of it—*A Strangeness in My Mind*, *The House in Smyrna* and *The Secret Son* are solid achievements, each in its own way. They are full of the mystery of a new landscape and the pleasures of the familiar, of connections and the unexplained, of the distant horizon and the home. They are, in the end, much like life.

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*Derek Parker is a freelance writer and novelist based in Melbourne. His latest book is the novel **This Tattooed Land**.*

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## MICHAEL WILDING

### An Appallingly Undeniable Vision

*Going Out Backwards: A Grafton Everest Adventure*

by Ross Fitzgerald & Ian McFadyen  
Hybrid, 2015, 185 pages, \$26.95

Thirty-five years ago I took the first of Ross Fitzgerald's Grafton Everest novels from a publisher's heap of unread manuscripts. I found it an unmitigatedly vulgar, politically incorrect, tasteless and offensive slapstick farce set in an allegedly fictional university. "Publish it," I recommended.

"Nothing else has captured the world of academia so convincingly."

In the intervening years the universities have accelerated their headlong rush into degradation, and Fitzgerald has continued to chart their decay. The University of Mangoland, now rebranded as UniMang, runs "an integrated, cross-collateralised and diversified series of enterprises" including MangoSuper, Mangoland Cellars and GoManGo Tyre and Brake Services. UniFresh feminine hygiene products are labelled as developed by the university, though in fact only the label was so developed, a graphic design student assignment, not the product.

Grafton Everest is now emeritus professor of Lifestyles and Wellbeing. His daughter has completed her PhD in pole dancing. His old flame Annie Angel has received her PhD and a professorship for a one-woman avant-garde nude performance piece and is now Dean of Global Studies.

The university offers degree courses in Tectonic Change, Peace Studies, Apocalypse Studies, Phone Apps and Future Genders. History, Mathematics, Chemistry and Law are still available, though only at diploma level. Most of the courses are delivered on-line via licensing arrangements with international universities. Tenders are called from private enterprise to provide teaching courses.

But Grafton has now entered politics as a federal senator. The possibilities for satire are irresistible and they are gleefully made use of. The Senate is awash with single-interest parties—the Orgasm Party, the Involuntary Euthanasia Party, the Australian Beer Drinkers Party, the Brownies, and such like—all of which have done deals with the two major parties. Grafton, his loyalties undeclared, is wooed by both to commit his vote. Tectonic Change and the danger of Crustal Sliding is the hot topic, with the chattering classes expressing anxiety about the effect of vibrations, aircraft landings and jogging unless action is taken.

Grafton's duties as a politician are not onerous. When he delivers his maiden speech, "he saw that only the President, a couple of clerks and a tired looking *Hansard* reporter were left in the chamber". He is appointed chair of the commission to review university teaching staff, with the aim of sacking half of them, a prospect that appeals to him. He dutifully appears on ABC television's *Bathroom Cabinet*, in which political journalist Yolanda Yabbie visits politicians' bathrooms to discuss their health, beauty and medical issues. The national broadcaster's other jewel in its crown, *QED*, Grafton found too tedious to watch, though he discovered that being on it was effortless, like being on a runaway train. "Every time you formulated something to say on a

topic, the discussion moved onto something else.” He realised the participants “were just fodder: they had no more control over the final product than a pine log being fed into a wood chipper”.

As for his essential Twitter and Facebook posts, his blog, and his contributions to the press, these are all dealt with by his attractive young personal assistant Petra. It is an ideal world for Grafton, neither having to write his tweets or speeches, nor to read them when they appear. But others do, or are purported to. “Grafton, almost everything you say on Facebook gets hundreds and thousands of likes.” This is achieved by the university paying Indian companies to get half a million people to say they like his posts.

Petra’s naked charms are revealed towards the end of the book when she attempts to engage in some sex therapy with Grafton. Earlier Grafton is painted in the nude—the female artist naked, Grafton himself clothed. A couple of naked trainee pole-dancers disport themselves in his house. This year Murdoch’s *Sun* newspaper called an end to its topless page-three female persons, and Hugh Hefner accepted that nudes were no longer to feature in *Playboy*. But Fitzgerald and McFadyen refuse to surrender to the pressures of political correctness, and there is no shortage of female nakedness in Grafton’s world.

But in the interests of balance—and Fitzgerald and McFadyen know the importance of that in modern media—Grafton is operated on for prostate cancer and ends up impotent. In an attempt to resuscitate his hopes of sexual performance, he volunteers as a subject to an experimental drug trial at the university, supervised by Professor Horton, Grafton’s long-time patron, a shadowy figure involved in the security services of the secret state.

In addition there are bikie gangs (and the attempt to outlaw them), a bat-borne virus that turns people into werewolves, and an attempt to assassinate the prime minister, the hugely obese former lover of Grafton’s, now turned lesbian, possibly as a result of his earlier attentions. On the margins lurk unlikely figures like Bevan Fudd, Tim Flummery and Judy Gillies. We see a large display of French Empire clocks in the National Museum of Labour and Unionism, a small part of the collection of former Prime Minister Kent Pauling’s collection. A ceiling fresco depicts the creation of the Modern Party showing Edmund Goss Whitman, naked and swathed in a cloud, arm outstretched, handing a cappuccino to a muscular board-shorts-wearing Adam.

The book is delightfully awash with such verbal and visual innuendoes and insights. No doubt offensive to many readers, and cheerfully excessive in its

scattergun satire, *Going Out Backwards* is a most engaging and readable romp, marvellously combining McFadyen’s comic skill as creator of *The Comedy Company* and Fitzgerald’s somewhat more tragic expertise as a professor of History and Politics, and political columnist for the *Weekend Australian*. They have produced an appallingly undeniable vision of the way we live now.

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*Michael Wilding’s latest books are Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall: A Documentary, winner of the 2015 Colin Roderick Award, and a memoir, Growing Wild (Australian Scholarly Publishing). He is emeritus professor of English and Australian Literature at the University of Sydney.*

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## NEIL McDONALD

### When Shakespeare Wrote

*1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear*

by James Shapiro

Simon & Schuster, 2015, 448 pages, \$39.99

*1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*

by James Shapiro

Faber & Faber, 2006, 464 pages, \$19.99

When my generation began teaching and studying Shakespeare we took the editions of the plays for granted. Little or nothing was taught about the Quartos that appeared in Shakespeare’s lifetime or the Folio edition of his plays published in 1623 shortly after his death. I recall one imperious English mistress proclaiming, “We are studying this text”, as though that resolved any inconsistencies in the edition her students were studying. Even less was taught about Elizabethan playing conditions.

At the height of the dominance of the F.R. Leavis doctrines imposed by Professor Sam Goldberg at the University of Sydney in the mid-1960s the emphasis was on close textual analysis leading to the “right” conclusions. This was supposed to encourage “discrimination” but was unsullied by any consideration of historical context. As for Shakespearean studies, the idea that the printing of various editions in Elizabethan and Jacobean England might represent significant alternative versions of the works was barely considered. In a long passage at the end of his “Essay on *King Lear*” where he discusses the interpretation of the King’s

death scene, Sam Goldberg failed even to mention that there is an alternative version of the same scene in the Quarto.

Of course there were splendid open-minded scholars who were masters of close textual analysis who would deftly evoke the historical background of the works they discussed. You just had to find them. Bill Maidment, a formidable critic of Goldberg, was one. He always asked about a work: What did it mean when it was created? What does it mean now? What does it mean? This allowed for both historical criticism and a rich exploration of modern resonances. I took this to heart when I was made responsible for the Shakespeare curriculum as part of a team-teaching program at North Sydney Boys' High in 1967. It seemed to me that relating the texts that we heard enacted in the splendid Marlowe Society and Caedmon recordings to original stage conditions would enrich our students' experience of the plays.

Not surprisingly my father—who constructed a scale model of the Globe as a teaching aid—and I were both seduced by the John Cranford Adams and Ronald Watkins theories of staging that had become very influential in the UK and America. Adams had assembled every piece of evidence he could find about theatres in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to incorporate in a scale model. As we found out later, he had not dated his sources well; but there is no denying Adams created an elegant and beautiful conjectural reconstruction. But the model was in many details inaccurate.

Watkins was a teacher at Harrow who had persuaded the school to build a stage based on Adams's conjectures after a flying bomb hit the school's speech room in 1940. Here he put on school productions recreating Elizabethan staging. Watkins wrote *Moonlight in the Globe* and *On Producing Shakespeare* based on these productions. Adams and Watkins made valuable contributions to our understanding of Shakespeare's stagecraft, as much by provoking scholars such as Leslie Hotson, Bernard Beckerman, Richard Hosley and J.L. Styan to come up with alternatives as through their own ideas. Watkins was, however, brilliant in his discussions of the language of the plays.

For a young teacher it was very exciting. As well as introducing an innovative method of teaching Shakespeare, at least for Australia, I was adjusting my arguments to the new conjectures about Elizabethan theatres being debated in England and America. When I came to teach a stagecraft course at Mitchell CAE my father constructed another model based on the new evidence and a few conjectures of our own. These experiences led me to believe that the best way to approach an artist is

through his own period. This is why I find James Shapiro's *1606: Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* and its predecessor *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* so fascinating.

Each book is an intellectual and artistic biography of a single year in the life of the playwright interwoven with a detailed narrative of the events of 1599 and 1606 as they might have influenced Shakespeare. *1606* deploys a wealth of research about the theatrical companies and performances at court including a magnificent description of Queen Elizabeth's palace at Whitehall, where many of the plays were staged. Using contemporary anecdotes and surviving law court records Shapiro describes the personalities and turbulent adventures of some of the other playwrights and actors.

Shapiro observes that one of the reasons these encounters were so deadly was that they were of necessity skilled fencers. Indeed, although it is not mentioned in the book, there is reason to believe Shakespeare might have been a formidable swordsman himself. In *Romeo and Juliet* he is clearly familiar with Italian fencing and the climax of the duel in *Hamlet* is the Prince's execution of a difficult manoeuvre to disarm Laertes and seize his baited rapier. Did perhaps Shakespeare choreograph the fights himself? The original direction—"in scuffling they exchange rapiers"—seems perfunctory; there would have had to be a lot more to the action to satisfy an audience that included trained swordsmen.

According to Shapiro, any idea about what Shakespeare might have been like as a man was lost in the late seventeenth century when his daughter died. But you can, he argues persuasively, try to understand how he thought. Shakespeare would have been present at the great preacher Lancelot Andrewes's sermon justifying Essex's campaign in Ireland. Two strands of Andrewes's argument found their way into the play Shakespeare was writing to open at the Globe five weeks later: "the theological justification for an aggressive offensive war and the need for those who go off to war to purge themselves from sin". "Can I with right and justice make this claim?" asks Henry V of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The reply is a long legalistic sermon that in the right actor's hands can be very impressive. But as we know from the previous scene, the Archbishop wants to distract the King from implementing a bill to take over church land and go off to war. Indeed Shapiro insists *Henry V* has to be understood against the background of the Irish expedition. There is no exact equivalence—Henry is not the Earl of Essex—but there are subtle resonances.

Similarly, the dispute about the ruler's responsibility for the souls of his followers in the

haunting scene when Harry goes among his soldiers in disguise (“A little touch of Harry in the night”) comes direct from the sermon. However, in the play the issue is never quite resolved. Moreover, the fact that in 1599 England was at war not just in Ireland but facing the threat of another Spanish Armada shapes the plays that Shakespeare was to write later in the year. Shapiro includes a splendidly lucid account of the Irish expedition and its implications for Shakespeare that segues into a powerful chapter on the invisible Armada. As Shapiro puts it, describing August 1599, “the time is out of joint, the threats multiple and uncertain”. This was the atmosphere Shakespeare evoked for the opening of *Hamlet*.

The play was of course familiar—a ghost, a revenge plot, but with a series of extraordinary soliloquies revealing the main protagonist’s dilemmas. Just what the Elizabethan audiences saw at any particular time remains a mystery. Shapiro believes the two existing versions, both the second Quarto and the Folio, are too long to have been performed in public theatres of the time. Moreover, Shakespeare had second thoughts. The climax of the great soliloquies is, “How all occasions do inform against me,” with Hamlet observing Fortinbras’s army and concluding he has to act like a beast to achieve his overdue revenge. Shakespeare came to believe, Shapiro argues, that this was too dark. So he cut the soliloquy and toned down the disturbing Fortinbras, who in the Second Quarto is as irresponsible and dangerous as Claudius describes. In the Folio there is a softer, more accepting Hamlet. In Shapiro’s words for the character, “death is both certain and inevitable”.

This is cutting-edge scholarship. According to Shapiro there are at least two valid versions of the play and since 1599 appeared, the two-volume Arden edition has been published. Here all three surviving versions, including the garbled so-called Bad Quarto, are given immaculate editing. Still the debate continues. Some scholars still believe a single edition of the play can be created; and what happens when the two good texts are conflated? Nearly twenty years ago Kenneth Branagh did exactly that in his script for arguably the greatest film *Hamlet* to date. Personally I could have done without Ophelia’s drenching and the nineteenth-century setting. But with an open director/actor like Branagh who registers every detail of the dramatic action you get a richer, more complex work than even Shapiro envis-

aged. Nevertheless, 1599 is both good criticism and excellent Tudor history.

Better still, there is now a successor, 1606: *William Shakespeare and the Year of Lear* (US title, with better design and reproduction of illustrations: *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*). 1606 chronicles the year during which Shakespeare created *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shapiro begins with the composition of *King Lear*, which he believes began in January when the King’s Men, as they now were, needed new plays for the Court.

The first recorded performance of *King Lear* was at Whitehall on Boxing Day 1606. Like so many of the plays that year it was influenced by the Catholic plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament. Shapiro argues that Edmund’s use of a letter to discredit his brother Edgar may have been influenced by the letter warning of some kind of catastrophe that led to the search of the cellars of the Houses of Parliament and the arrest of Guy Fawkes.

Intercepted letters are a major plot device in the play, with the villainous Edmund making his fortune with one letter and being unmade by another. Dividing or uniting kingdoms was a major issue for the new King James. He wanted to unite his former realm with Britain but the English Parliament was proving obdurate. Just where Shakespeare stood on the issue can’t really be deduced from Lear’s misguided division of his kingdom. Here the play is more a domestic tragedy although, like so much of

Shakespeare’s best work, pointedly relevant to his audiences.

However, the play most influenced by contemporary events was *Macbeth*. When I was trying to teach Shakespeare historically, the link between the treatise on equivocation found in the papers of Father Garnet, the Jesuit confessor to the conspirators, and the Scottish play was particularly relevant. But until I read Shapiro I did not realise how relevant. Throughout much of 1605 there had been a continuing debate about whether mental reservations or half-truths were lying. This occurred not only at Garnet’s trial but also at the trial of another Jesuit, Father Galloway. Their adversary was the Attorney-General, the formidable Sir Edward Coke. The Jesuits were brave men but no match for Coke’s forensic skills, and he was able to argue persuasively that an equivocator could never be believed. The jury agreed and both men were

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*Shapiro is right to see these plays as reflecting and commenting on the bleak despair of England in 1606. There is even reason to believe at least one play was found too dark for its audiences.*

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hanged, drawn and quartered.

Shapiro points out that there was also a significant link between Coke and Shakespeare. As propaganda for his ill-fated rebellion Essex had commissioned a performance in the Globe of *Richard II*. Coke had been called upon to examine the play for treasonable material and had exonerated both the playwright and the actors. It is therefore not surprising that Shakespeare found in equivocation a powerful symbol of deception and evil for *Macbeth*. The Porter even parodies the evidence from the Garnet trial, sharpening the original audiences' awareness of Macbeth's equivocations a few moments later. And of course the temptations of the Weird Sisters "palter with us in a double sense".

Again this is good criticism and perceptive Jacobean history. Shapiro is right to see these plays as reflecting and commenting on the bleak despair of England in 1606. There is even reason to believe at least one play was found too dark for its audiences. The First Quarto of *King Lear*, with the old King dying in despair at the death of Cordelia, is believed to be the version played at court. The Folio seems to embody a revision, with Lear in his last moments believing Cordelia is alive.

The book closes with Shakespeare at last completing *Antony and Cleopatra*. According to Shapiro, the love story was initially thought to be too close to Elizabeth and Essex. By a delicious irony, in 1606 the new play reflected something of the nostalgia for the great days of the old Queen.

We can be grateful to James Shapiro for illuminating how in 1599 and 1606 a great playwright created a succession of masterpieces unparalleled in the history of English literature.

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*Neil McDonald will resume his film column in the January-February issue.*

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## PATRICK MORGAN

### The Gap Between Literature and Life

*There Is Simply Too Much to Think About:  
Collected Nonfiction*

by Saul Bellow

Viking, 2015, 532 pages, \$43.50

Authors like Les Murray and David Malouf read a lot, and as a result produce stimulating essays. Saul Bellow, the best American novelist of the past half-century, confesses, "I am of course an

autodidact, as modern writers always are," and this posthumous selection of essays puts him among the best commentators too.

As the book's title explains, we are today so bombarded by foreground chatter, crises, information overload and media blitzes that we're constantly distracted: "Each of us stands in the middle of things, exposed to the great public noise." So taken up are we by public events that our very personalities have been, as Bellow shows, appropriated by our own history: "waves of disintegrative details wash over us and threaten to wear away all sense of order and proportion". Wordsworth believed the world is "too much with us"; T.S. Eliot said he didn't read the newspapers because they were too exciting.

Nineteenth-century Romantic writers allied themselves with nature against society. But, as Bellow says:

Romantic enthusiasm (resistance to bourgeois existence) was largely discredited by the end of the nineteenth century. The twentieth inverted romanticism by substituting hate for love and nihilism for self-realization.

Many writers in our time still stand apart, adopting a superior, adversary attitude to society, the writer as scourge of society. Sometimes they even ditch literature, and go for power and celebrity status. The public roles of authors like Norman Mailer, Jean-Paul Sartre and Gunter Grass overtook their writing.

The presence of authors in universities and at literary festivals adds to this temptation. Bellow comments:

Hostile to institutions, anti-authority by tradition, [writers] are not likely to be tranquil in their university sanctuary. Bad conscience leads them to take exaggeratedly radical attitudes. But this radicalism of gesture turns out to be immensely popular. A large and growing public shares the uneasiness of writers and welcomes this show of radicalism ... But it is only the *manner* that is radical. Few things can be safer, more success-assuring, than this non-threatening radicalism, dangerous to no one and relying, at bottom, on the stability of institutions.

Ideology under the guise of "deep reading" dominates literary criticism. This Bellow satirises by imagining a professor asking why Achilles drags the body of Hector around the walls of Troy. A modern student, wised up on postmodernism, might reply: "Well you see, *The Iliad* is full of circles—shields, chariot wheels and other round figures. And you

know what Plato said about circles. The Greeks were all made for geometry.” The professor thanks the student for this “beautiful thought” but adds: “Still, I always believed that Achilles did it because he was angry.” When classic literature was derided in universities and replaced by courses on post-colonial writing, Bellow famously asked: “Where is the Papuan Tolstoy?”

**I**n this disturbed, ideology-driven world the writer, Bellow believes, must discard preconceived super-structures, immerse himself in mainstream life, absorb a lot and draw his own conclusions. He has to create his world from the ground up, putting it together as a coherent whole by an act of imagination, not cognition. In this way distraction is overcome and “It All Adds Up”—the title of Bellow’s previous collection of essays.

Under the pressure of modern life our personalities can become flaky—we no longer have the comfort of a stable, pre-determined personality. Bellow was himself a bohemian liberal and a non-observant Jew. But, destabilised by a world crumbling around him, and liable to crumble himself, he would, he tells us rather unexpectedly:

fall back instinctively on my first consciousness [Jewishness], which has always seemed to me to be the most real and most easily accessible. But our meddling mental world puts all such realities in doubt. To turn away from those origins, however, has always seemed to me an utter impossibility. It would be a treason to my first consciousness to un-Jew myself.

In his essay on Philip Roth’s novella *Goodbye, Columbus*, Bellow shows how the book’s satire is deficient—Roth stands apart and looks down on bourgeois life as philistine and materialistic. This in Bellow’s view constitutes a facile opposition between spirit and worldly goods. By contrast, in the great novels of Bellow’s middle period (*Herzog*, *Humboldt’s Gift*, *Mr Sammler’s Planet* and *The Dean’s December*), the satire works because it is internalised and self-deprecating, not egotistical like Roth’s.

In *Herzog*, Bellow exploits to great comic effect the gap between literature and life. When a moment of truth comes, all your reading and learning are of no use to you:

What is he [Herzog] to do in this moment of crisis, pull Aristotle or Spinoza from the shelf and storm through the pages looking for consolation and advice? I meant to show how little “higher education” had to offer a stricken man.

Herzog tries, however ludicrously, to make sense of his shattering experience, to put the pieces together, and to painfully build up again a serviceable personality. We now know from the biography of Bellow that the novel’s genesis was his wife leaving him and his own difficulty in coping with this. So writing the novel was probably therapeutic for him as well as Herzog, getting it off his chest.

Bellow was a liberal mugged by reality. He came to agree with the Congress for Cultural Freedom view of the Cold War, even though he had some differences with leading Congress figures like Sidney Hook:

Activists like Hook made a difference. Their contribution to victory in the Cold War can’t be measured but must be acknowledged. It was Hook, not Sartre, whose views prevailed and should have prevailed.

Bellow has a lovely easy fluid style in these essays, relaxed, unpanicky, musing and meandering among his thoughts, expanding on key passages from literature that have meant much to him, and conveying all this to his audience in an unhurried, conversational tone, which is by turns witty, sly and ironical. It’s a joy to meet a mind which gives you such a lift and a reassurance that sanity may prevail.

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*Patrick Morgan, a contributor of long standing, lives in Gippsland.*

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## DOUGLAS HASSALL

### The Noble Art of Affirmation

*Constance Stokes: Art & Life*

by Lucilla Wyborn d’Abrera

Hill House Publishers, 2015, 234 pages, \$95

**A**ll those who take an interest in the history of art in Australia will rejoice at the appearance of this well-written, informative and sumptuously produced book on the life and work of a painter who has rightly been described by Dr Anne Summers as “one of our country’s finest artists”: Constance Stokes. If Stokes’s is not a name that springs immediately to mind as precisely that, it is no fault of the artist, nor of her works, but is instead due to certain vagaries of the cultural history of Australia in the twentieth century and which applied to the art of painting here especially.

It is not that Constance Stokes's paintings were not given considerable recognition in the first part of her career, say up to the 1960s. Nor was she necessarily the victim of those wearisome ideologues always ready to consign this or that painter, or indeed any other type of professional artist, to the non-status of "former persons" as in Soviet parlance. Largely, it was more the case that others attracted more and sustained attention at certain key periods of this artist's career, which was to a major extent limited in terms of pictures during her child-rearing years. Stokes was, latterly in her career, for far too long unduly neglected and marginalised, before being periodically "re-discovered". A similar phenomenon is familiar from the careers of certain great singers: Florence Quartararo's for instance, and to some extent, Anita Cerquetti's, or that of Australian-born Margherita Grandi; whose names went into comparative eclipse, only to be later acclaimed as stupendous talents, and recordings of whom now feature at the forefront of the history of singing.

One may pursue the musical analogy a little further and note that Professor Joseph Burke, the distinguished occupant of the Chair of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne in the period 1947 to 1979, described Constance Stokes's art in terms of the "nobility of mood" which her works evoked. In his introduction to the Retrospective Exhibition of Stokes's works held at the Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery in Victoria in 1985, he wrote:

Consider also the delight of our own eyes, not only in the controlled luxury of richly warm colours, but also in the discovery of those enfolding lines that simultaneously define contour and express volume, a sensuous pleasure that accompanies the nobility of mood. This ... is not at all what might be expected from one of the most private and retiring of Australian artists, for it can be expressed through powerful thrusts and even expressive distortions of monumental shapes ...

Those words from that eminent gentleman capture the essence of the gifts in Constance Stokes's art: particular qualities of colour and of line loom large therein. Her draughtsmanship always remained superb and the colours in her works, from early to late, are remarkable.

Constance Stokes has not gone unnoticed in the annals of art history in Australia. She had significant recognition from critics and the art-buying public in her early years as a painter and as Dr Summers has noted, Stokes was selected along with prominent Australian artists including Arthur Boyd,

William Dobell, Russell Drysdale, Donald Friend, Sidney Nolan, Lloyd Rees, Jean Bellette and others, to exhibit in the show of "Twelve Australian Artists" held in London during Coronation Year 1953. As well, she has been referred to in books such as Eagle and Minchin's *The George Bell School: Students, Friends and Influences* (1981); whilst the references to her in the text there were not detailed and the illustrations of her work limited to only two picture photographs, that was admittedly more a history of an art school than of the many individual artists involved with it.

The various texts cited in the notes to the narrative in the book under review also evidence the importance of Constance Stokes and her artistic achievement in twentieth-century Australian art history and the development of art here. Chief among them hitherto was Dr Summers's book *The Lost Mother: A Story of Art and Love* (2009), which did much to revive attention, not only to the artist and her works, but to their significant place in Australian art.

This new book, by the artist's daughter Lucilla d'Abrera, goes much further and provides us with a detailed and carefully assembled account of Constance Stokes's life, her early training and the development of her artistry and how she made a career in the art world of an earlier epoch when that was by no means an easy thing to do—especially in Australia. However, this is no mere family-based biography; it is a duly researched and very well crafted account of the artist's personal life and artistic development, enlivened by material drawn from the Stokes's extensive legacy of letters and diaries of her European experiences in the turbulent 1930s, after winning the NGV Travelling Scholarship in 1929. It also benefits from a helpful selection from period family photographs. In addition, included are two fine essays by Jane Clark and Felicity St John Moore, who provide detailed critical appraisals of the Stokes's works.

Stokes was born Constance Parkin in 1906 at Miram in rural western Victoria. After schooling at the Genazzano Convent in Kew, she trained at the NGV Art School in Melbourne under L. Bernard Hall from 1925 and later at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. In 1932, she studied in Paris under André Lhote, who mentored various Australian artists. In 1933, she returned to Melbourne and married the businessman Eric Stokes. They set up home in premises in Collins Street, where she had a studio. Her work had been noticed by George Bell and by Sir Arthur Streeton, who described her *Portrait of Mrs W. Mortill* as a "rare attraction" and "liquid and lumi-

nous". Stokes's picture *The Village* (c. 1933–1935) now in the NGV's collection, was exhibited in the Contemporary Art Society's inaugural exhibition and later at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Her early exhibitions met with considerable success, both from the critical point of view and also in terms of good sales of pictures to collectors such as Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch, who provided enthusiastic encouragement for the arts in Australia.

In 1940, she became part of the Melbourne Contemporary Artists exhibiting group founded by George Bell. In 1946, the art critic Alan McCulloch described works exhibited by Stokes as "rich and opulent pictures". Of her *Girl in Red Tights* (c. 1948) which was included in the 1953 Coronation Exhibition, Professor Burke wrote that with it, Stokes had "announced the pursuit of the classical ideal as [her] aim ... [and that the picture] with its Venetian richness of colouring, ably sustains the monumental harmony of the classical tradition". Sir Phillip Hendy, the Director of the National Gallery in London, identified this remarkable work as "the best picture in London that week" and Sir Kenneth Clark, who had first met Constance Stokes at Melbourne on his visit there in 1949, held a luncheon in her honour at London during Coronation Year.

These were signal indications of Stokes's importance in the mainstream narrative of art in Australia. Despite some noisy criticisms in Australia when the 1953 choices were announced, the roll-call of key names was not random or accidental, nor mere curatorial whimsy. It represented a considered judgment as to which artists were most important in assembling a representative offering of the best achievements in painting in Australia at that time. It must be recalled that the various festivities surrounding the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II provided an important occasion for what we should now call the "showcasing" of cultural achievements in all of the Commonwealth countries, including Australia. Various books and articles were written in the United Kingdom on such themes, notably Ian Bevan's edition *A Sunburnt Country* epitomising and sketching Australia, for the benefit of the British public and for the planners and entourage of the enormously successful Royal Tour of the Queen's Pacific Realms in 1953 and 1954, which

also provided another boost to patronage of the arts in Australia.

In 1949, Sir Kenneth Clark had already described Stokes as "the greatest draughtswoman of the century". Yet in the art world, there are always those critics who delight in the easy quip to traduce a well-earned reputation. Thus, in her earlier inter-war period, one critic had written that Stokes "had already [displayed] the dangerous facility of a Royal Academician". That, of course, is precisely the sort of snide deprecation which some people applied to the works of such indubitably great artists as John Singer Sargent and Augustus John. The possession of such "facility" is no doubt partly a matter of natural talent in drawing and painting, but enhanced by formal training; yet it too often engenders a negative reaction from those who like to fancy themselves *avant-garde*. It ought to be recognised as a mark of distinction, not a cause for objections by onlookers who are often themselves quite incapable of such "facility". This brings us to the vexed questions of how and why Constance Stokes's name and achievement became obscured in the later phases of her career, even though, especially after her husband's early death in 1962, she continued to paint and exhibit works of great beauty of line and colour.

One way to tackle this is, as Dr Summers has noted, to trace the extent to which Stokes and her works were mentioned (or oth-

erwise) in standard texts on the history, development and appreciation of Australian art during the twentieth century. It is telling that the late Robert Hughes's book *The Art of Australia* (1966) does not make any reference to Stokes; and the Art Gallery of New South Wales has the dubious distinction of not holding in its collections any painting or drawing by Constance Stokes: a small but significant artefact, perhaps, of the traditional Sydney–Melbourne rivalry. James Gleeson's *Australian Painters* (1971) omitted Stokes. Despite a very favourable review of Stokes's solo exhibition in 1964, Bernard Smith in his major survey *Australian Painting* (1962) made no reference to Stokes other than his listing of the fact of her inclusion in the 1953 Coronation Exhibition in London.

Worse, as Dr Summers notes, Max Germaine's *Dictionary of Women Artists in Australia* "inaccurately describes Stokes as a 'traditional painter'"

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*The possession of such "facility" is no doubt partly a matter of natural talent in drawing and painting, but enhanced by formal training; yet it too often engenders a negative reaction from those who like to fancy themselves avant-garde.*

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and Richard Haese, in his *Rebels and Precursors* “dismiss[e]d her and fellow artists Isabel Tweddle and Clive Stephen as ‘technically proficient [but] never enterprising’”. Anyone familiar with the work of Tweddle, another much under-rated artist who is still not as widely known as she should be, will readily see that Haese there does not tell anything like the full story. Indeed, there are some links with Stokes’s work in the lyrical colour palette favoured by Tweddle in her still lifes, landscapes and portraits.

It was Alan McCulloch, in his influential tome *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, that *vade mecum* of art scholars, critics and collectors in Australia, who gave Stokes real credit for her artistic achievements and placed her role in the development of modernism in Australian art in its proper context and significance:

a leading figure in the modernist movement in Victoria, her early paintings include still life and classically conceived figure group studies, as well as the open line drawings of nudes for which she is best known. Later her palette lightened, also her themes, which became more decorative.

McCulloch had praised Constance Stokes’s works as far back as 1946; and the revised edition of McCulloch’s *Encyclopaedia* (1994) also features an illustration of Stokes’s *Two Seated Nude Figures* (1958).

Professor Burke had listed Adrian Lawlor, Laurie Thomas and Patrick McCaughey as others who discerned the high quality of Stokes’s work. It should also be remarked here that Constance Stokes received scholarly published notice much earlier in her career. She was mentioned, in her then maiden name of Parkin, by William Moore in the first volume of his *The Story of Australian Art* (1934). Later publications listing significant Australian artists did not omit her—for example, Skinner and Kroeger’s *Renniks Australian Artists* in 1968 referred to Stokes’s works in “oils, ink, figures, portraits” and her painting in Victoria, England and France, her studies with Bell and at the Royal Academy and with Lhote in Paris, as well as her work being exhibited in the London Show and Venice Biennale in 1953 and inclusion in state and regional collections. Stokes’s works and activity were discussed in more detail by Janine Burke and June Helmer in scholarly books published in the 1980s.

It is odd and unfortunate that, perhaps due to the vagaries of marketing and other factors, whilst some artists such as Grace Cossington Smith have

(quite rightly) been brought to wide public notice, the career of a key artist like Constance Stokes was allowed to fall into the shadows. In her, we have a painter who played a major part in the development of Modernism in Australia, who deserves to be restored to a place of proper recognition; and Lucilla d’Abrera’s new book achieves just such a restoration.

*Constance Stokes: Art & Life* is a handsome and indeed necessary addition to any good collector’s library on Australian art. In addition to the extensive, generous and well-reproduced colour plates and drawings, the layout, typography and binding of this book are a *tour de force* of quality, well beyond what one usually gets for its price.

In addition to the main text, the book includes as appendices two perceptive and scholarly essays on the art of Constance Stokes: “Old Masters, New Painting” by Jane Clark, and “Her Own Space” by Felicity St John Moore. These essays not only complement and extend the story of the artist’s life and work as told in Lucilla d’Abrera’s narrative, but also stand in their own right as important and well-researched accounts of key aspects of Stokes’s career. Jane Clark’s essay provides a detailed and carefully considered account of Constance Stokes’s artistic development, from the beginning of her training, through her years in London and Paris, her return to Melbourne and her work to about 1951, and noting the several important religious works that Stokes painted, such as *The Baptism* (c. 1950). Felicity St John Moore’s essay focuses on Stokes’ involvement with the George Bell School and in particular her drawings, but also the influence on her work of Henri Matisse, especially in her later portrait works.

As well as these essays and Lucilla d’Abrera’s narrative, the book also includes detailed lists of exhibitions and acquisitions, and a bonus by way of eight pages of full colour plates of works in pastels and other media by Constance Stokes from her family’s collection, followed by a full list of paintings and drawings. Despite constant predictions of the death of the book, that publishers such as Hill House are able to provide the public with such superb volumes on art does us all a great and gracious service. This is a book to be treasured—a just tribute to an artist of the front rank, whose role as one of our leading Modernists should never be forgotten.

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*Dr Hassall will have further contributions on art in Quadrant in 2016.*

## Cheese

Tonight I shall open the packet of cheese  
that has been sitting  
on the shelf of my fridge  
since the weekend.

I have eyed it once or twice (*en passant*),  
but I must have been waiting  
for a special occasion.

Tonight's the night.

Not that I'm doing anything special tonight.  
I rarely do anything special  
but that's another story.

I have just sliced through the thick, plastic bag  
and exposed the cheese.

The packet's got one of those little kangaroo logos on it,  
so I must be supporting Australia by eating this cheese—  
that's got to be good.

The packet says the cheese is "sharp"  
but it would be funny  
if I cut myself on a piece of cheese.

The packet also says the cheese is "crumbly".  
I do like a crumbly cheese,  
but I hate it when it crumbles everywhere  
and you lose half the cheese on the floor.

Oh well, here goes!

I'll think of Ben Gunn while I eat my first piece,  
now there's a man who liked his cheese.

Actually this cheese tastes pretty damn good,  
particularly with these crispbreads I bought.  
And it goes very nicely with this Clare Valley riesling.  
This may turn out to be quite an evening.  
Later, I might even write a poem about cheese.

## You

I remember everything  
about that afternoon.  
And then,  
as I was leaving,  
how you told me  
that if I had been  
ten minutes earlier  
I would have met  
your other lover.

*C.R. McArthur*

# James McAuley: Strength in Weakness

## An Exploration of “At Bungendore” and “Parish Church”

In his book *The Catholic Imagination in American Literature*, Ross Labrie makes the following important observation about religious writers:

Clearly, for the writer who is a believer, the temptation to distort experience in order to accommodate a religious vision must at least be taken into account by both writer and reader, as it must be in the case of any writer whose point of view has been shaped by a powerful ideology. The best writers will be those who test their ideologies against experience, something that Catholic writers, with their incarnational theology and consequent dedication to the world, ought to, in theory at least, be prepared to do. In these writers, the fiction and poetry will often end with a lingering, unresolved air of complexity—even if the moral foundations of the universe have been made adequately clear to the reader.

James McAuley knew the temptation to distort experience to make it conform to a religious vision, but at his best—and he was at his best a lyric poet, rather than an epic or polemical poet—he resisted it. His poetic power, to recall St Paul, was made perfect in weakness, embodying “the lingering, unresolved air of complexity” of which Labrie speaks. Whereas his public persona was aggressively self-assured, his private and poetical self was questioning and searching, embodying the truth of W.B. Yeats’s dictum that “out of the argument we have with others we make rhetoric; out of the argument with ourselves, poetry”. The outspoken and vociferous public polemicist, McAuley becomes in his best work contemplative and tentative, swayed by a sincere receptiveness to human emotion and suffering, and by the slightest changes in the natural world—of seasons, of light and shade, of day and night—as he becomes one of

the finest recorders of its beauties.

He was that rare creature in twentieth-century literature—the public poet actively and intimately engaged in the major political events of his country, on the conservative side of politics. By the mid-1950s, McAuley had been received into the Catholic Church and would become a staunch defender of the faith. A Cold War warrior, he worked at the grass roots of B.A. Santamaria’s movement, rallying support at elections, distributing literature, meeting with politicians, cardinals and archbishops in an effort to rid the labour movement in Australia—which he, along with most of his coreligionists, supported—of its communist elements. And he was founding editor of *Quadrant*.

All this is a far cry from the young student radical who, years before, had sympathised by turns with the communism and the libertinism espoused at the University of Sydney by Australia’s most famous philosopher, John Anderson; from the jazz-loving, piano-playing agnostic who played the organ for Sydney’s Theosophical “Liberal Catholic Church” and who was almost as enamoured of French Symbolist poetry as he was of young women, and who—one biographer claims—helped one of these women procure the abortion of his own child.

Notwithstanding the major religious and ideological shift McAuley’s life took in the 1950s, there is a remarkable continuity in his poetic sensibility across his career, which draws from and responds to the “despair, older than any hope [he] ever knew” (as he so devastatingly describes it in “Because”). Two short poems, written respectively at the beginning and the end of McAuley’s publishing life—the first the poem of an agnostic, the second the poem of a Catholic—suggest the nature of the essential argument or tension animating his entire body of poetry. The first poem, “At Bungendore”, comes from McAuley’s first published collection of verse, *Under Aldebaran*, released in 1946:

Now the white-buskined lamb  
Deserts his ewe and bawls;  
The rain spills from the dam;  
A far-off bird-cry falls.

So harsh the bough, yet still  
The peach-buds burst and shine.  
The blossoms have their will;  
I would that I had mine:

That earth no more might seem,  
When spring shall clot the bough,  
Irised by the gleam  
Of tears, as it does now.

The second poem, "Parish Church", is the last poem from *Time Given*, published in 1976, the year of McAuley's death:

Bonewhite the newborn flesh, the crucified,  
The risen body; bonewhite the crowding faces.  
Green, crimson, yellow, blue and robes are dyed,  
The wings and armour, the skies and heavenly  
places.

We used to sing at Easter in the choir  
With trumpet and harmonium and drums,  
Feeling within our hearts new-kindled fire.  
Now I'm the only one that ever comes.

I bring with me my grief, my sins, my death,  
And sink in silence as I try to pray.  
Though in this calm no impulse stirs my breath,  
At least there's nothing that I would unsay.

The first stanza of each poem sets a scene. In "At Bungendore", a lamb deserts its mother and cries; his cry is then answered by that of a far-off bird. In the second poem, the eucharistic flesh of Christ is represented in the major phases of Christ's earthly sojourn: birth, death and resurrection, and is responded to by the crowding faces of the communicants and by the angelic wings—corresponding to the bird of the first poem—in the skies.

In the first three lines of the second stanza, in both poems, the poet uses images of celebration: in "At Bungendore", these images celebrate natural fecundity—peach buds "burst and shine" and the "blossoms have their will"; in the first three lines of the second stanza of "Parish Church", the images celebrate the liturgical, grace-filled fecundity of Easter, as the "new kindled fire" of the Paschal candle fills the hearts of the congregation. In both cases, there is an opening out and triumph of life over death. Just as the harsh bough gives rise to the bursting buds, so the wood of the Cross is followed

by and inextricably bound up in the Resurrection. The stages of progression in the second poem parallel those of the first, with the difference that in the first poem it is a natural progression from the birth of the lamb to the hard wood of the bough to the bursting blossom, while in the second it is movement from Christmas (the birth of the lamb of God) to the Crucifixion (and the wood of the cross) to the Resurrection.

"Parish Church" charts the movement of faith already inscribed in and implied by the forces of the natural world in "At Bungendore". Natural joy corresponds in the first poem to supernatural joy in the second, climaxing respectively in line seven of each poem, in the bursting buds and the Easter fire. As each poem continues, however, from its eighth line (the fourth line of stanza two), joy gives way to anxiety and introspection. At the precise same point in these two poems, therefore, written almost thirty years apart, in the fourth line of the second stanza, the poet introduces the first person—the "I" of the poem who, meditating upon the scene, recognises his essential separation from its unfolding joy:

The blossoms have their will;  
I would that I had mine.  
(*"At Bungendore"*)

Feeling within our hearts new-kindled fire.  
Now I'm the only one that ever comes.  
(*"Parish Church"*)

Although Easter in the southern hemisphere is celebrated in autumn, its seasonal liturgical images continue to be drawn from spring. It is therefore the full joy of spring—natural and supernatural—that the speaker feels unable to enjoy, and this becomes the theme developed in the third and final stanza of each poem.

In "At Bungendore", the third stanza expresses the will of the poet:

That earth no more might seem,  
When spring shall clot the bough,  
Irised by the gleam  
Of tears, as it does now.

He cannot look on the clotting, bursting joy of spring except through tears—the earth is "irisid by the gleam / Of tears", an image that suggests that the tears are not an incidental feature occasioned by a grief unrelated to the season, but that they emerge with the season each year, even in response to it.

In "Parish Church" the dynamic is slightly different—the speaker's sadness arises from his isolation and from the memory of earlier Easters

when the parish church seemed more vibrant and alive with the joy of the season. But there are similarities, again, between the poems at this point. The tears in “At Bungendore” through which he sees the earth have their counterpart in the catalogue of offerings the speaker brings to the liturgy in “Parish Church”—“I bring with me my griefs, my sins, my death”. These colour his experience of Easter, as the tears in the earlier poem colour his experience of spring, and are realities more usually associated with Good Friday than Easter Sunday. In “At Bungendore”, the speaker expresses a wish unfulfilled—almost a prayer—and here, in “Parish Church”, he *tries* to pray. As the irised gleam of tears simultaneously reveals and distorts the spring world around him, so here the attempt to pray simultaneously connects him with the supernatural Easter—he objectively recognises the significance of the feast—while showing his distance from its animating spirit. It is an attempt to pray, rather than a prayer (“No impulse stirs my breath”). The only consolation for the speaker is small but profound: “At least there’s nothing that I would unsay”.

When one reads “Parish Church” in relation to “At Bungendore”, one may be inclined to ask: What ostensible difference did Christianity and the Catholic faith make in the life, thought and feelings of James McAuley? There is little separating the essential mood and atmosphere of each poem; if anything, the despondency of “Parish Church” is greater than “At Bungendore” because it is contrasted not merely with natural joy but with the virtue of hope. Indeed, McAuley offers his readers little consolation—the great drama and joy of the Christian life seem reduced here to, at most, a sigh of relief—“at least there’s nothing that I would unsay” (a double negative at best)—rather than an exhalation of the Holy Spirit. The observation of spring in the first poem, and the memory and lived experience of Easter in the second, are overwhelmed by pathos, radically altering the usual associations we have with these seasons. How should we interpret this?

It’s important to recognise, I think, that just as

the task of the lyric poet differs from that of the novelist or dramatist, so it differs from that of the priest or the teacher. The Christian poet is not under any ethical obligation to articulate positive, comforting thoughts, nor to express the feelings we might believe he, as a Christian, *ought* to feel. Helen Vendler’s musings on the subject of ethics and lyric poetry, from her study of Shakespeare’s sonnets, are worth bearing in mind:

As I see it, the poet’s duty is to create aesthetically convincing representations of feelings felt and thoughts thought ... Whether or not we believe that such should have been the speaker’s feelings and thoughts is entirely irrelevant to the aesthetic success of the poem ... The ethics of lyric writing lies in the accuracy of its representation of inner life, and in that alone.

The authenticity of “Parish Church” as a representation of inner life is confirmed by the way it so clearly disrupts the moral and spiritual certitudes of the poet’s public persona, even as it inevitably extends our understanding of what it means to be a person of faith in a world increasingly faithless. It is clear also that the emotional drama of both poems lies precisely in the speaker’s sense that his emotional response to the situation before him is somehow awry. He does not “will” his feelings. Tension is created by the separation of the objective and subjective elements represented. To return to Labrie’s idea, the moral foundation of the universe is abundantly clear—the objective element resides in the

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*The Christian poet is not under any ethical obligation to articulate positive, comforting thoughts, nor to express the feelings we might believe he, as a Christian, ought to feel.*

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conventional connotations of natural and supernatural springtime in each poem—while the “lingering unresolved air of complexity” resides in the speaker’s sense of distance from this foundation. McAuley felt and represented the tragedy of this distance like no other Australian poet.

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## “That’ll be the Day”

Pretty soon the last of those who  
Listened to Buddy Holly on records  
And sang to “Peggy Sue” on the radio  
Will be dead.

And then Buddy will be dead.

Really dead.

Of course, historians will dig him up  
And listen to old recordings as with  
Marcus Aurelius’ “The Meditations”  
And Al Jolson.

But that’s a different love.

Not our love.

As we die, Buddy dies. And blankets  
Fold over a man, a creative talent  
A voice, a beat, a time, a plane crash  
And a pioneer.

“That’ll be the day ay ay  
When I die.”

## Kepler-452b

It’s a long way away, but it is there.

A telescope way out in the Cygnus constellation  
Sent strings of zeros and ones, describing Kepler-452b.  
It’s a little further from its star than we are  
But, theirs is a little hotter than ours.  
It’s in the Goldilocks zone, not too hot and not too cold.

It’s a long way away, but it is there.

It’s a bit bigger than Earth, so  
The gravity will be about double. Not  
Impossible but not the place for jogging.  
Its atmosphere is twice as thick. An  
Interesting feature, not a problem.

It’s a long way away, but it is there.

It was a world without violence or weapons  
Where the trees think and the cows vote (green).  
Back home we prepared a colonizing force, when  
They sent a message. They’d been fooling around. If  
We ever returned, they’d turn Earth into a cantaloupe.

*Saxby Pridmore*

## Divinely Oriental

Critics have sometimes said the best recording of Giuseppe Verdi's Egyptian opera *Aida* is by the Vienna Philharmonic under Herbert von Karajan, released by Decca in 1959 with Carlo Bergonzi as the Egyptian General Rademès and Renata Tebaldi as the eponymous imprisoned Ethiopian princess. It was a near-perfect combination of von Karajan at his Viennese height, Bergonzi and Tebaldi's chemistry as the lovers, and producer John Culshaw's studio mastery. Of course, there are also various recordings of Leontyne Price, who became the *Aida du jour*. The London Symphony Orchestra under Erich Leinsdorf features both Price as *Aida* and, in one of many productions, Plácido Domingo as Rademès.

These old warhorses may have found their match, however, in a new studio recording of *Aida* performed by the Italian Orchestra e Coro dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia under British-Italian conductor Antonio Pappano. *Aida* debutants Jonas Kaufmann and Anja Harteros play Rademès and *Aida* respectively. Bass-baritone Erwin Schrott is Ramfis, mezzo-soprano Ekaterina Semenchuk is Amneris, and Marco Spotti plays the King of Egypt.

The three-disc set is available now from Warner Classics. It's already receiving airtime on Australian radio—and with good reason. *Gramophone* describes it as a “magnificent achievement that gives enormous pleasure”. The *Times* calls it “the perfect *Aida* ... An incredibly visual rendition of the work”, and *BBC Radio 3* said it was a “triumph”. This is all high praise for one of the most regularly staged operas in the world, written by one of the most frequently performed opera composers.

Kaufmann, the leading man, has become somewhat of an opera celebrity in recent years. His concerts are expensive, the advertising adorned with

fashionable photographs of what some are dubbing his “golden smile”, and the programs, of course, are replete with blockbuster arias. The forty-six-year-old German deserves it: he sells tickets and is, as the music writer Zachary Woolfe says, “the most important, versatile tenor of his generation”. If there's one word to describe Kaufmann's style, it is *muscular*. His talent is apparent throughout this release. “Celeste *Aida*”, the *romanza* from the first act, exemplifies Kaufmann's approach—powerful, nuanced, and recognisably “Kaufmann”.

None of this is to say that the remainder of the cast are overshadowed. The German-born Harteros has a good deal of experience in Verdian opera, taking leading roles in *La Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *La Forza del Destino*, *Don Carlo* and *Otello*. This is her first *Aida*, however, unlike Semenchuk, whose experience and confidence are apparent, and who perhaps offers the most identifiably Verdian performance of the soloists.

The stars of this release are Pappano and his orchestra. The Orchestra e Coro dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia has what Pappano describes as “*cantabilità*”, a singing quality, and in this release explores all the nuances and richness of Verdi's orchestral writing. This ensemble seems to have a deep understanding of the Italian tradition—in recent years the group has been awarded for its recordings of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, Verdi's *Requiem*, and Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. *Aida* will no doubt contribute another notch.

The recording itself was made in February 2015, in the cavernous 2800-seat auditorium at Rome's Parco della Musica—a modern space with acoustics ideal for capturing the epic scale of Verdi's score. Perhaps it is the quality of the recording—very few full operas are given studio treatment any more, so the best comparators are usually decades old—but this *Aida* is so pristine and immaculate, so well-crafted, that it almost threatens to dampen the sheer visceral, emotional force of Romantic opera. But there is more to this opera to enjoy than a celebrity tenor and twenty-

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Verdi: *Aida*. Pappano/Orchestra e Coro dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Warner Classics, 2015.

four-bit digital recording.

Verdi composed *Aida* in 1870 and 1871 after the Khedive of Egypt commissioned an opera from him to mark the opening of the Khedivial Opera House in Cairo. The story came from the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, was given prose treatment by Camille du Locle, and translated into an Italian libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni. For the uninitiated, the plot is not summarised easily—they never are—but Naxos provides the most concise synopsis of the libretto:

In the Egypt of the Pharaohs there is war with Ethiopia. The Ethiopian King's daughter, Aida, has been captured and is now a slave in the service of the Pharaoh's daughter, Amneris. Radamès loves Aida but is loved by Amneris. He is appointed general of the Egyptian army and in the second scene of the second act returns in triumph, to be rewarded by the unwelcome hand of Amneris in marriage. Aida's father, Amonasro, has been taken prisoner, his life spared at the intercession of Radamès. In the third act he induces his daughter to help him discover the plans of the Egyptian army, which she does in a meeting with Radamès, their conversation overheard by Amonasro. Aida and Amonasro take flight but the apparent treachery of Radamès is now revealed and he is condemned to death, to the dismay of Amneris. In the final scene he is immured in a stone tomb, where he is joined by Aida. As they die, Amneris, above the tomb, prays for peace for her beloved Radamès.

It is, in short, a complicated love story set some time in ancient Egypt; Verdi wasn't overly specific on these matters. Nevertheless, the literary critic and activist-scholar Edward Said devoted a significant portion of his 1994 polemic *Culture and Imperialism* to an analysis of Verdi's *Aida*. Said correctly identified *Aida* as an Orientalist work. This is completely unremarkable—the Romantic repertoire abounds with excursions into lands near and far, such as Western composers' fascination with aestheticising the exotic. Rossini's *Ricciardo e Zoraide* is set in the Nubian city of Dongola, now the capital of northern Sudan, Mozart's *Il re Pastore* is set in Lebanon, Purcell's *Dido* is the Queen of Carthage (Tunisia), Handel's *Porro* takes place in what is now Pakistan, Delibes's *Lakmé* is Indian, and so on and so forth. What Said claimed, however, was that *Aida* was an imperialist opera that attempted to reinforce a Western perception of the

East as "an essentially exotic, distant, and antique place in which Europeans can mount certain shows of force". The bizarre charge was that *Aida* was complicit in colonial expansion into Egypt in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Said was so fixated on demonstrating that imperialism is the central theme of Western culture that he forgot to consider the opera itself. He might have delved into one of the many Verdi biographies to learn that, politically, the composer was an anti-imperialist and a nationalist, and, insofar as he had an input into his libretti, was more interested in the private dramas that tended to unfold within public happenings. What Said also missed was that Romantic exoticism was rarely more than superficial—some chromatic notes here, a fancy set-piece there. Even Mozart's opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, set in Turkey, features Ottoman instruments and Janissary military marches. There is no Egyptian music or instrumentation in *Aida*. Verdi was shown an Egyptian flute while he was working on the opera, but chose not to incorporate it into the score.

As the historian John MacKenzie wrote, if the opera is Orientalist, "it is not through the music at all, but through the production values which have ever created a fantasy land of Egypt, influenced by the French Egyptologist Mariette". Rather than producing the cultural machinery of imperialism, Verdi—and most others who drew on the East for inspiration—were paying homage, albeit in an often superficial way. Although the use of chromaticism and unusual modes is a marked feature of the opera—but even this could be interpreted as Wagnerian rather than Oriental—some of the most arresting musical moments of *Aida*, such as the famous Triumphal March, are thoroughly European and Italian.

In fact, perhaps the most explicitly Oriental part of this release is the packaging. Centred on a dark background of hieroglyphs, "Aida" is rendered in soft gold Art Deco typography—a reference to the Egyptian revival style of the 1920s. (As the musicologist Micaela Baranello has pointed out, however, the whole design is reminiscent of Abba's *Gold: Greatest Hits* album of 1992.) One needs to see a live performance in order to have the full Oriental Verdian experience, but in the meantime Pappano and company perform all of it marvellously on this recording.

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## Good for a Laugh

Picture this: on the side of a van in a busy street, a larger-than-life representation of the holy Prophet himself, stepping out on a journey, perhaps *en route* to Medina during the Hegira. He is carrying a heavy burden. Between him and a bystander, who seems rather taken aback by this apparition, a bubble contains the words, “How much to Ballarat?”

The van belongs to an “art courier” called Artist Moving Artists, and you can see the image on its website ([www.artistmovingartists.com.au](http://www.artistmovingartists.com.au)). But just before you check, of course the image doesn’t represent Mohammed. As if it would and the van still be driving freely around. Someone would have complained by now or sued under Section 18C citing Islamophobia. In some places—perhaps even here soon—the van would be torched or the driver decapitated.

No, the image represents Christ and He is carrying His cross, and for all the apparent ease with which He is depicted shouldering this burden, He is on His way to be crucified. The crucifixion of Christ, as *Quadrant* readers will not need to be reminded, but a lot of other people these days evidently do, is at the heart of the Christian religion. It and the scourging and the long trek up the hill to Calvary which preceded it are not only sacred redemptive events for Christians but in human terms a horrifying sequence of brutality and suffering. So of course to a certain mind they are a perfect topic to make fun of, a golden opportunity for satirising a bruised and bleeding man on his way to a cruel death.

I don’t know about Christians in general, but the deriding of Christianity that is all around today is usually water off a duck’s back to me. Even extreme examples of what used to be considered blasphemy, such as the *Piss Christ* affair some years ago, fail to move me. It’s not so much that I am good at turning the other cheek. It’s more that I think if some pathetic tosser can only attract public acclaim for his pseudo-art by dunking a crucifix in urine then taking a picture of it, he’s more to be pitied than censured. Botticelli didn’t need to do that.

Yet for some reason, when I saw the artist’s art-moving van, it knocked me. Why, I thought, are Christians singled out for a mockery which if applied to any other social group would be condemned as “hate speech”? Why indeed are Christians so hated? What harm have they done? Yes, I know about the Inquisition and the Wars of Religion but there has to be more to it than that. People who deride Christianity often trot out these or similar events as justification, but this is disingenuous. Such people as are *really* anti-Christian are not so on account of something that happened centuries ago. Indeed they might not have any clear idea why they dislike Christianity, and horror stories from the past help them explain it to themselves. “Just think of all the terrible suffering religion has caused,” you hear people say, as though they feel some sort of excuse is needed for their own less than charitable attitude.

At the risk of over-simplification I suspect the explanation is something on the following lines. There are people who loathe Christianity because of its opposition to their liberal progressive social agenda. Their ideas, being congenial to the media, are constantly diffused throughout the community; and this, combined with the growing indifference to religion characteristic of prosperous societies, helps create a climate in which to ridicule Christians is socially acceptable.

Christians are thus fair game for anyone who wants to draw attention to himself by creating a *frisson* of shock in a society such as ours which, for all its efforts, has not yet wholly expunged Christianity from its consciousness. If you have a product to sell, like the artist-removalist, publicise it by making fun of Jesus. Just like Andres Serrano, the *Piss Christ* chap (has anyone heard of him since, by the way? We’d soon hear about him, via his obituary, if he were to essay a *Piss Mohammed*.) Just like those awful ABC television drama scripts whose writers attempt to give vigour to their leaden dialogue by having everyone say “Christ!” or “Jesus!” every five seconds. The ABC, of course, is most solicitous towards the sensitivities of the select social groups it approves

of and puts up signs before certain programs warning viewers that they might be offended by this or that. Christians never merit this consideration from the national broadcaster, though it sometimes seems that there's little the ABC transmits that doesn't have the potential to offend them, if only in a program's implicit views and assumptions.

Insensitivity to what Christians hold sacred is now normal behaviour. I spent time in hospital recently and in a bed across from me was a loud-mouthed middle-aged man, glued to football matches on his overhead television, who shouted "Jesus!" every time something roused him to comment. Above on the wall (and presumably unmoved by his invocations) was a crucifix: this was a Roman Catholic hospital, but no one complained about this taking in vain the name of the founder of the religion which supposedly inspires the hospital in its mission, and neither to my shame did I. That's how people talk now. In pubs and other low places they always did, but polite society did not endorse such language in everyday life. Now no one cares.

They certainly don't care about the van with Christ on it. I rang the principal of Artist Moving Artists—his name is Drasko Boljevic and he works as an artist when he's not moving other artists' art—and he told me he knew of no one who'd been offended by the image. "Oh yes, there was one lady who said she didn't like it or something like that, but no one else and people have told me they think it's funny."

We know that if it were Mohammed on the van rather than Jesus not only Muslims would be protesting. More likely, in the race to have the image removed there'd be a photo-finish between them and our home-grown politically correct. But what if the van carried some image disapproved of by the latter only? What if it bore the words, "Send asylum seekers home", or "No wogs for Oz"? Gillian Triggs would have the vapours; the goons of No Room for Racism would have a field day. The cartoonist Leunig would produce a silly doodle showing the van as a Nazi death wagon. What if, more polemically, it asserted, "Feminism is a toxic heresy which has poisoned our culture"? What would the liberal-minded advocates of toleration who control the public discourse have to say about that? Imagine the

letters to the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Imagine the torrents of unladylike invective from Clementine Ford rising above the elderly squeaks of "Misogyny!" from Anne Summers.

Seeing that van made me wonder what it would stake for Christians, who are still quite numerous in this country, themselves to use a bit of muscle against those who make fun of what they hold sacred. It almost certainly won't happen, because Christians are obliged to show forbearance ("Do good to them that hate you") and, though they take a stand against issues they believe to be wrong and against the interests of society in general, defending their own faith is something they don't put much effort into these days. Mr Boljevic told me he had delivered artworks to churches and "no one complained" about the image on the van. (The last big skirmish, apart from *Piss Christ*, was a protest by churchmen in the 1950s against the Sydney Royal Easter Show opening on Good Friday. Notwithstanding the greater adherence to Christianity sixty years ago, that attempt to defend the solemnity of the day of crucifixion ended game, set and match to the Show, so much so that by 2014 a Royal Easter Show media release was able to boast of a "Right Royal Good Friday" at the Show, the "royal" having nothing to do with the King of Kings, but

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*Since the long-gone days when they were in the majority, Christians have been expecting that sooner or later they'll again become outcasts in a hostile secularised world. And it's happening before our eyes.*

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referring to the presence at the showground of the future head of the Church of England, the Duke of Cambridge, and his consort.)

One further reason why Christians will not turn on those who deride them, I suspect, is that since the long-gone days when they were in the majority, Christians have been expecting that sooner or later they'll again become outcasts in a hostile secularised world. And it's happening before our eyes. If, though, their patience at hearing their faith made fun of ever did snap and wrath turned to violence, how many of the mockers and sneerers would have the courage of the *Charlie Hebdo* team and keep at it and how many would quietly decide that, as with jokes about the Prophet, that's one place you just don't go.

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*Christopher Akehurst will be writing on Australian country towns in a forthcoming issue.*

# The Landscapes of Eddie Burrup

Elizabeth Durack's art has been an integral part of the Australian art narrative for seventy years. Her first exhibition, "Time and Tide", was held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1946. Her work evolved from simple line drawings, through lyrical watercolours, to part abstraction and allegorical paintings. It is said that Durack's work reached its peak in her last creative phase—the art of Eddie Burrup—and that this work transcends all that went before it.

Landscape is the defining focus of Australian art. It is distributed across the literary and visual disciplines, described over and over again in our paintings, novels and poems from the late eighteenth century to the present day. It is the overwhelming subject explored continuously by painters from Streeton to Arkley, from Heysen to Whiteley. It was the core subject of last year's show "Australia" at the Royal Academy in London, and yet it remains an elusive enigma which drives the possibilities of our people. The landscape here is significantly different from that in the rest of Western civilisation, yet our culture is based in the Western tradition and confined somehow to a process of enlightenment and development which requires us to see our landscape before we can see ourselves.

Landscape is also the defining focus of Australian Aboriginal art for the last 40,000 years. The cave paintings, the sand paintings, the body art, the Dreaming and the legends always circle landscape, as do the Tula Pintubi paintings. Landscape is a theme that Australian Aboriginal art and Australian Western art share. We believe that if we know who we are, then we might better know where we are going, and we seem to agree that the landscape will define who we can be.

Of course, *landscape* is a big word—it travels from the gum trees and droughts to the locked wards of the psychiatric hospitals. It describes our dreams as well as the Dreaming. It is seen from the air and travels in song cycles. We hear landscape in the songs of "home" as we yearn to be accepted

by "country" and thus to become. There is a landscape in the faces of outback sun-dried bush people as there is a landscape in Smith Street, Fitzroy, on a Friday night. It is such a big word, it is in danger of dispersion. Yet still we know the sort of country we are seeking to inhabit or which is seeking to inhabit us. The indigenous search for landscape is no less fluid than the Western search. Here artists differ in their descriptions because the traditional Aboriginal mind believes that the land owns us yet the Western mind believes that it owns the land.

If you are owned by the land you cannot stand still. You must move with the seasons and the water. You do not build houses when the land owns you, when you are part of the landscape, the country, the *Ngarangani*, the Dreaming. However, if you own the land, you build fences and farms, houses and towns. You are the product of the feudal system, the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, Magna Carta, slavery, emancipation and the Enlightenment.

The poet Barry Hill likens *The Songs of Central Australia* (translated by T.G.H. Strehlow) to the Book of Genesis. Elizabeth Durack composed images of the *Ngarangani* using the physical and political landscape to describe the Aboriginal spiritual afterlife. Influenced by Dante, and perhaps Doré and Goya, she created a series of works on paper and canvas which could be seen as translating the *Purgatorio* into *Miruwung Gajerrong*. She used only the earthen colours of the Aboriginal palette. She used her knowledge of Aboriginal lore and landscape.

The Eddie Burrup paintings are images of the landscape which owns its people, by a woman who owned the land of her pioneering forebears. They are a unique and valuable interpretation of the familiar yet isolated places of her upbringing. This is the landscape in which the Aboriginal Dreaming excludes those who own the land, yet includes a wild landscape of human figures, x-rayed animal spirits, plants, water holes, the subterranean and the

sky-borne, all whirling about in colour and line, like no other landscape ever painted in Australia.

The colours of these paintings seem to be electric and yet molten. There is something of Ian Fairweather, perhaps the Chinese calligraphy. Donald Friend is there somewhere, along with Sidney Nolan's "Leda and the Swan" and probably some of the stylists, Drysdale and Dobell. Yet these are wastelands set in the Aboriginal world, with Aboriginal images, seen from the air, map-like, detailed, abstract—the *Ngarangani*—Dante's Purgatorio with Eddie Burrup as her guide—Elizabeth Durack's Virgil. She painted places where few whitefellas had ever been, as if Dante were guiding her hand. They are wastelands and not wastelands, depending on what you know and who you are. Eddie Burrup loved Joyce; he was climbing on the shoulders of giants.

These landscapes are not paradise but they are survivable with small amounts of water and lean gathered food. They may redeem you and they are beautiful. I could see a Qantas jet wrapped up in *Lament for the Princess*—it would look sensational. I would choose *Signals from Howling Dog Rock* to be projected onto the Sydney Opera House during the next major celebration of our freedom.

The righteous who judge history make silent decisions about landscape and some may believe that human beings are anathema to earth, that they are alien and do not have the same integrity as other animals and plants. Yet because we are the most successful species, we have decided to make ourselves gods. We seem to have agreed to take control of the world. We believe we can control the landscape to prove to ourselves that we do not believe in gods or even God—we only believe in science and the science is settled. Durack's Eddie Burrup landscapes were painted at the confluence of where Aboriginal spirituality—the Dreaming—met Western lore, Western law and the Western environmental enlightenment. They are painted at the point where modern Aboriginal art met traditional Aboriginal art and also at the point at which Aboriginal art met Western art.

Durack painted under the pseudonym "Eddie Burrup", defining a point where both gender and race met. She had first-hand knowledge of both cultures to achieve this with some integrity. This is an archipelago of human thought and art which is profound and worthy of serious consideration.

These are landscapes of the afterlife constructed through an Aboriginal, *Miruwung Gajerrong*, perspective, through the mind, heart and hand of "Eddie Burrup" depicted as a vision of an ancient ontology, in a series of works on paper and canvas.

You could look at some of the Eddie Burrup series as paintings of powerlessness and doom. Yet perhaps, in others, the earth is attempting to take us to paradise. Perhaps the earth is adjusting to our confluence, our success, our racial perspectives, *oeuvres*, styles. The landscape would be far less a thing if there were not people to see it, to interpret it, to communicate across the centuries their visions of what they see. It is worth remembering, briefly, amongst all the clever misanthropy those who claim to love the landscape effuse, that we human beings, of all races, are also magnificent. Only a skilled painter with a highly intelligent mind and a knowledge of Western art, law and religion could have attempted to translate the fluid concept of the Aboriginal Dreaming into Western art. It was a brave and important thing to do.

It was brave because Durack painted under an Aboriginal name, and she knew this was "cheeky". "Cheekyness" is a much-admired Aboriginal virtue and Durack wanted to see if the Eddie Burrup

paintings would stand up in the Aboriginal market. They were not only accepted but applauded. Durack then publicly revealed her pseudonym to *Art Monthly* and was subsequently vilified. The work, however, was not copied from another artist. The landscapes she explored and painted remain unchanged in the historical record.

The traditional Aboriginal artists who painted the original cave paintings, the sand paintings, and developed the body art, were not known, because this work was done by the spirits, not men or women. So we have the paintings but not the artists. Aboriginal people could not have maintained faith in their song cycles and images if they had been created by mortal men. Aboriginal culture valued the art and the songs, but the artists and the poets were spirits, not human beings. What is more important, the painting or the painter?

At the centre of art is landscape and at the centre of landscape are the literal and abstract images of humankind's search for itself through narratives of what the ancient Greek philosophers called the first principle. Durack's Eddie Burrup paintings can be seen as a cross-cultural spiritual narrative

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*Durack's Eddie Burrup paintings can be seen as a cross-cultural spiritual narrative with the stated intent of achieving reconciliation.*

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with the stated intent of achieving reconciliation. They describe the penance and the purgatory and they describe a form of redemption for everybody. Reconciliation is a central aspect to Durack's Eddie Burrup series. The survival of the paintings fills the heart with hope.

A species which does not know where it is going and does not believe in God, could believe it is the master of the universe. Yet we fear that the landscape, the environment, nature, may consume our consciousness as a rising sea consumes a house. The

destination of human consciousness seems caught in either transformation or apocalypse. Is it possible that paradise seeks us as much as we seek paradise? What would paradise be without human beings, without consciousness, without a witness to its landscape? Our landscapes describe our knowledge of ourselves. Like magnets we attract each other, paradise and human beings. Through the maelstroms and the catastrophes, heaven seeks us.

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*Patrick McCauley lives in central Victoria.*

### **Toothpick Woman**

The toothpick woman  
left no footprints.  
She ran in the shower  
to get wet,  
knitted herself into a scarf  
before she pulled her body out.  
Even a sneeze would make enough breeze  
to knock her about.  
People often thought  
she wasn't there.  
She missed herself in the mirror  
when she combed her hair.  
At night her blanket hardly rose  
above her nose.

But toothpick woman changed,  
put on a little fat to fill her body in.  
She cast a shadow now,  
claimed a third dimension,  
gloried to see a roundness  
underneath her skin.  
In her mind a fire burned  
zeal and hope returned.  
No one could guess  
in the strangeness of her seasons  
such exultation  
for so small a reason.

*Nana Ollerenshaw*

### **In the Swim Again**

I dunk my head for a second baptism  
to retrieve the white quartz stone  
the children have thrown for diving.

Looking up in bright dappled light  
I see the agapanthus shine down  
on what would have been my funeral time

but for the long avoided cut;  
joining the shuffling queue  
for chest spread to wrap a present

stitched to ache, twinge then calm.  
This is second life. Are we sent  
back like those from myth for iconic quests?

Yet for most our roles seem set;  
no doubt new joys will emerge.

*Paul Williamson*

## Lucas Windfall

Lucas Windfall quit his cradle,  
took with him his sherry fiddle.  
I met him where the river flowed  
and woke into the trance he bowed.

Lucas bowed a slanting deck,  
I hornpiped on it for his sake  
and leapt so high in that no-place  
the stars were snowflakes on my face.

Lucas played me to the harbours  
where his tunes drew cut-throat neighbours.  
Our silly chins wagged at the sky  
as Lucas played his hush-a-bye.

Lucas bowed a merry girl,  
warm afternoons of sexual marl.  
The streamers from his fiddle string  
could prompt delicious tangling.

Lucas bowed a deeper reach  
where I could dance but had no speech,  
to tell what I could recognise  
when my true love returned my gaze.

A violin will tease excess  
from riffs of sheer exquisiteness  
where Lucas Windfall is not idle,  
conjuring liquid sense from fiddle.

## Tudor Song

Lucas Windfall led me on.  
In our bright plumage, like two swans,  
we played the seigneurs by our lake,  
behaving like we owned our luck.

Akimbo, Lucas said to me  
*You'll have a cheap celebrity  
unless some headsman holds your eye,  
and you outstare that gravity*

*to coldly see our lives in small  
and that this spoiler's falderal  
is where the lightness of our style  
must show the humour in its steel.*

We went dissembling through the town,  
played rebel verb to rabble noun  
where consciences in heron-grey  
gave commentaries on our blasé.

A headsman's axe has edge and face,  
his scaffold is a lonely place.  
But petty deaths brought us to squalor,  
filched the light from our high colour.

Yet Lucas Windfall showed me nerve  
in just that tact of suave reserve,  
that let me know I owned my luck  
as swans draw light upon their lake.

## Lucas Dogfox and the Violin

*Fiddle, fiddle, slow your pace,  
you'll have my nose outstrip my face.  
You'll have the hairs that tip my ears  
perceive the grinding of the stars.*

*Fiddle, hiccup and I'll sniff;  
your reels of tune are my what-if.  
I'm Lucas Windfall, alias fox  
we lope together in our mix.*

Fiddle, when Lucas was a fox,  
he courted daybreak's shotgun cracks,  
for what's a countryside but ears  
and appetites in bleak arrears?

Fiddle, when Lucas passed through death  
a nonchalance composed his breath.  
for fur and viscera composed  
no whole-of-mind where Being housed,

but took him through death's little fuss  
to come upon the Universe.  
Time spinnaker'd away from him,  
All-being was his synonym.

*Fiddle, hit and squeal death's wallop,  
but still my parts lope at full gallop!  
And I'm dispersed through every shard,  
yet how to live this? That is hard.*

*Alan Gould*

# What If?

It was an ordinary day. A group of them were swimming one kilometre from Teabag Bay north to the Mooloolaba Surf Club. As they always did, several times a week.

She freestyled head down, enjoying the vast pattern of terraced sand below, like a miniature desert. They swam under a blue and yellow sky. Her flippers powered her along past familiar landmarks they all knew, the triangular building, the white measuring poles, the long border of horse casuarinas, a carpark, fanning out now, each alone. She was comfortable, non-thinking, looking for schools of bream, a stingray, a sudden bright tropical fish—always a bonus.

Ahead the fastest swimmers approached the Surf Club. One by one the women emerged and trailed up to the club pulling off their caps and goggles, scraggle-haired.

She turned towards the familiar beach, now so close she yanked off her flippers and held them in one hand. She stretched her feet to touch bottom. It wasn't there. She expected shallow water! Hanging on to her flippers awkwardly, she kicked harder towards shore. The bottom still wasn't there. In fact she seemed to be drifting further out.

The moment can change in seconds. Doubt, disbelief, fear. She was no longer in control. She struggled again towards the sand, clinging to the heavy flippers in the hope they could propel her in. But submerging her head to pull them on her feet, she lost her breath. Weak and gasping, she tried again. A set of waves slammed in, one hard on another. Exhausted, she ducked under each one.

Fighting now to stay on top of the water, she finally dropped the flippers. Trying to relax and think of a strategy was beyond her. She had not thought clearly. She had done all the wrong things from the beginning. She did the only thing left: against her pride she raised her arm, kept it there as long as she could.

Within what must have been seconds a brown muscular body sliced towards her on a board. She could not measure her relief and the fact that she

could now give to someone else the effort and responsibility for herself. She let everything go.

The man dragged her in front of him on the board. Like a sack, she fell back into the water but he hauled her on again. And a second time. He paddled what now seemed a ludicrously short distance to the shore—that frightening gap that had seemed to her minutes before like the River Styx.

Never had firm sand felt so good. Never had she been so grateful; or respected the sea as she did now; or appreciated lifesavers for what they do. If ever there was a knight in armour, it was this man on a board.

Weak and shocked, filled with the magnitude of what had just happened, she joined her group of swimming friends anxiously waiting. Crowding round her, they offered support but her mind was elsewhere, not with them.

It was home she wanted, her husband, and time to settle and go over her disturbing thoughts. Why did pride of all things stop her from raising her arm earlier? How many misjudge, underestimate the sea and themselves! There is so little margin when one considers that life and breath, unlike other emergencies, are together in such an unforgiving time frame. How quickly and without warning can life be taken, changing families forever—while the sun shines and people, unaware, play nearby. She imagined Icarus, his wings aflame, falling into the sea unnoticed while everyone else gets on with their lives.

But tormenting her for weeks afterwards and even now fifteen years later, was the question: *Could she have saved herself?*

And what about all the other people who in confronting the great variety of risks that inhabit living, crossing the railway line just before the train, discovering cancer early only by accident, missing a flight that crashed—what about these lucky ones who are left with facing the question: What if?

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*Nana Ollerenshaw lives in Queensland.*

# A Journey of Death

BY JOHN SHENG, TRANSLATED BY OUYANG YU

**W**hen he was released ahead of schedule from his prison sentence of nearly twenty years, Jiao Zhimin was in his early forties. On his way to his father's house, his heart was tangled with emotion. Someone else his age would have had his own home to go back to. But the home he was going back to was the one he had left when he was young, just past twenty, because he had killed someone in a brawl and was sentenced to life imprisonment. In prison, he had never lived a day without wishing for a reduced sentence.

He was worried that he might not do well when he was set free at his age, as a few of his jail mates had been in and out of jail quite a few times already, simply because they took to the old road of crime again when the bottom fell out of their lives. Jiao Zhimin vowed that once he was out of the prison he would never do anything against the law again. He lived in fear of being imprisoned again, as he would become an old man there, and even if he regained his freedom he would lead a miserable life, with no one to bury him if he died of illness or hunger. He regretted, too, that he had not treasured the time of his youth when he flaunted his superiority as if he could bid wind and rain to come if he was bold and wild enough. When everyone else let him have his own way, he felt as if he had achieved something. But that was a thing of the past now. If he had not been sentenced to life imprisonment, he might have become successful, but now he did not even have a home to return to.

When he finally reached his father's house, he was sad to find that his father had become an old man. His father put a few things on the table: a bowl of congee, a few pieces of steamed bread and some pickled vegetables. It was certainly not Jiao Zhimin's wish to have a sumptuous meal prepared for him. But it didn't feel good to be sitting and eating alone at the table.

His father had few words to say. He didn't look healthy, either. Jiao Zhimin wanted to say something. But what was there to talk about? He knew nothing about the outside world and he didn't want to talk about what life was like in prison. When his father asked how he was, he said, "Just so-so," and there was nothing more to be said. Then he wondered about his older brother when his father told him that he was "not busy with anything". His father lit a cigarette.

He thought of his childhood when his mother was still alive and his family was dirt poor. Sometimes he would fight with his older brother but his mother would always criticise his older brother behind his back.

Just as he put down his bowl and chopsticks, his older brother came home. Jiao Zhimin was surprised to find that he too had turned into an old man, bald, and, like their father, he looked unhealthy. He did not want to talk much, either.

Jiao Zhimin felt very tired but, gathering himself together, went out for a look

around. Too embarrassed to ask if there was a place for him to sleep, he told them he was going out to look for friends and see if anyone had anything he could do. His older brother said, in a scolding manner, "Don't ever go back to your dubious friends. It's no fun if you get in there again." He took a look at his older brother and thought: Even if I get back in again, it's better than you because you, in your old age, just eat and do nothing at home. But he didn't say anything as another thought came to him: If only Mother were alive! His instinct told him that he was not welcome at home unless he had money.

He went back to his friends of the old days. One of them, Jin Changyun, who worked in the transport business, treated him to a meal in a small restaurant. They had been childhood playmates. When he saw that Jin had been successful, he couldn't help admiring him. "Let me tell you honestly that this is the first time in twenty years that I have a good meal like this," he said, sighing. "When I have money, I'll invite you to dinner. Is there anything that I can do for you in your company at all so long as I can make a living?"

"As you just came out, you can't work as a driver. But you can work with a driver as a porter. I'll pay you fifteen hundred yuan a month," Jin Changyun said.

Jiao Zhimin was overjoyed. He didn't care what job it was. As long as he got a job and was able to feed himself, he could always make more money down the track.

Jiao Zhimin was out with a driver daily, working till late at night. When he returned home, on tiptoes and very tired, he had to knock on the door for his older brother to get up and open it for him. He would have liked his own key, but his older brother didn't give him one. Each time his brother opened the door he was full of resentment, blaming Jiao Zhimin for getting back so late and making it impossible for others to have a normal rest.

He sensed the coldness towards him at home. After all, he was someone released from prison. It seemed that people outside the home were kinder. Perhaps his brother was concerned that he might want a share of their property. If he had been in prison and his father had died, all of the property would have gone to his brother. Tears came to his eyes when he thought of that. He shouldn't have come home in the first place. What was the point of coming home? Would they ever give him any financial support? If he didn't come home, there at least was a home in his heart, a home that used to be there. If there was not much warmth, it was at least something to go back to in one's heart. He wanted to leave this place as soon as possible, never to return, not even when he died. He would not be bothered with them, either, alive or dead. When they died, he would not go to their funerals.

He left home, and did not return. Sometimes he stayed in someone else's home for the night. At other times he slept in his truck. Because of the irregular lifestyle and the long hours of physical work, his health deteriorated. Much of his wages went on cigarettes, with little left for meals. Meanwhile, he could see that Jin led a comfortable life and, although a married man, had beautiful young women for company. Jiao Zhimin thought he would have done a lot better if he had not always tried to flaunt his superiority when he was young, and that he would not have had to live under someone else's roof.

Suffering pain, he went to see a doctor. An examination revealed that he was suffering from a serious kidney infection. The doctor advised a good rest. But he dared not rest. His life was worth nothing. If he died, he'd die a death that would cause no one else any trouble. With a good brain and nimble hands, he had quickly learnt to drive a truck. But because Jin did not want him driving without a licence, he had to work alongside a driver. Soon, he was unable to do any more work because of

his back pain, for which he could not afford any treatment, until the helpless thought suggested itself to him: I have to die. He felt it was ignominious to live like that, having to get fed by watching people's faces, and all the while the pain worsening.

Once again he went home, knowing that this was his last time. He found the way they lived deplorable. He learnt that they were both suffering from the same kidney condition, relying on dialysis to keep alive, his own condition being hereditary. As he had brought them something to eat, the three sat down and ate. Then he said goodbye. He had borrowed three thousand yuan. Before he left, he put down one thousand at his father's bedside and carried what was left, thus beginning his journey of death.

He had a feeling that a burden had been lifted off him. He no longer had to worry about having to make a living. He no longer had to worry about his illness. Once he had the courage to give up on his own life, he had no more worries. If one truly had a soul after one died, it would fly freely. His own body, it seemed, was always in a cage. Even when he left the prison, neither his body nor his heart was ever free. But now he was finally carefree, even though he wasn't completely resigned, having never fulfilled his desire to live a decent life.

Wandering, he came to a deserted place, where he sat thinking under a big tree, trying to put his life in order. He wondered what his life was all about. It was like a continual process of satisfying one's own desire, without an end. Might he have kept on making money or borrowed a large sum of money in order to buy a house? Maybe not. He might have led a freer and more relaxed life. The problem is that one lives too long and hopes to live longer, which is why there is no end to desire. He had spent so many years in jail, his only hope being freedom, as if he'd get anything once he was set free. But freedom had brought him nothing, except more physical and spiritual fatigue. Well, no more thinking. No use thinking. He had to get something to eat and then go to a hair salon to find a woman before he ended his life.

There was enough money in his pocket to last a few good days. He went to a restaurant in the centre of town and ordered what he liked best: prawns and roast duck, along with some liquor. He had a beautiful meal. It was the first time he had ever ordered food without looking at the price. He was happy and sad at the same time. After all, this was like what was served to the condemned prisoners in jail.

He left the restaurant and went in search of a hair salon. On one street there were quite a few salons, each with two or three women, some of them no longer young. Then he found one with many young and beautiful women. As soon as he entered it he set his sights on one and chose her. He followed the girl upstairs and they entered a room where the girl took off her clothes without a word and lay in a bed waiting for him. He took off his clothes, went up to her and held her tight in his arms. He looked her up and down and thought to himself: Such a beautiful girl! He wished that he could take her away and die together with her.

Later he found a hotel, booked a room and went in. He locked the door, sat down on the bed and took out the sharp knife he had been carrying. He looked at the knife, dazed, and felt the pain again, so he lay down, his right hand holding the handle, and slashed his left wrist hard. Blood spurted. He let go of his hand and closed his eyes.

When he was found, he was lying in a coma. He was quickly taken to hospital, just in time to save his life. But he was left in debt, owing more than ten thousand yuan in hospital expenses. He did not know if he should feel thankful to those who had saved him or damn them. There was no freedom when he was alive and there was no

freedom when he died. But could they really stop him from wanting to die? Now that he had survived his suicide attempt, he wondered what to do.

He got in touch with some of his former inmates. When they got together, they sighed a lot, wondering why there seemed no way ahead and why the best they could do was work as cheap labourers, determined to risk everything if ever there was an opportunity. In the end, after much discussion, they took up Jiao Zhimin's idea to kidnap Jin Changyun.

Jiao had no difficulty in getting Jin out, and the three of them kidnapped him. Because they knew that the crime of kidnapping would incur heavy penalties, worse for people who had already been convicted, they killed him as soon as they got his money and abandoned his body.

When the body was found, the police went to work, sampling and investigating till they zeroed in on the suspects. Soon the three were back in prison again. Jiao Zhimin knew that he would be soon executed and, whether free or not, he would always have come to this end.

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*John Sheng, who now lives in Sydney, is originally from China. He has published four collections of short stories in Chinese. Ouyang Yu has published seventy-six books in English and Chinese of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and literary criticism, including thirty-nine books in translation.*

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## From the Tree

### Patrick

The day my son died  
his mother I held  
in the crook of my arm;  
his little body cold  
on pebbles between us.

We'd let him  
paddle on the one-inch shore  
until he caught the swan  
like it was a moving toy  
or our cat at home.

We're split now,  
his mother and I  
never had more children,  
either one.

Sometimes I still climb into  
the attic, step over the circle of track,  
sit on my haunches,  
set the train off, watch it go station  
by station reaching no destination.

*Noel King*

A puzzling pile of grass and sticks  
with a suspicion of moving tail feathers  
appeared in the crook of a branch  
across the road in a tall eucalypt  
seen from our kitchen window.

Later, a currawong, wolf black with white flashes  
glides from the nearby reserve to the nest  
and bends down to feed a chick  
that stretches up in dark profile;  
long thin neck and slim fig head.

A windstorm drops the chick onto asphalt  
to crouch near the fence, pale mouthed, bedraggled.  
Still there next day, it grooms its wings.  
Days later, not fully fledged, it flies  
to an instant parent for a feed;  
an offspring, deceptively durable.

*Paul Williamson*

## GUEST COLUMN

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### RON TAFT

Today Chinese restaurants are ubiquitous, found wherever in the world the Chinese diaspora has spread—and, for all I know, even where it hasn't, if there is anywhere on the globe where that applies. A variety of provincial styles are to be found, although Cantonese seems to be the most common. They range widely from quick-service eating houses to glamorous silver-service restaurants.

When I was a young adult in the later 1930s I knew of only one Chinese restaurant in Melbourne: the Chung Wah at 11 Heffernan Lane, off Little Bourke Street in the heart of "Chinatown". During the nineteenth century there had been many eating houses in Chinatown, commonly known as "cook-shops", but by the 1930s Chung Wah was one of the few remaining.

I frequently had my evening meal at Chung Wah on a Saturday, after spending the afternoon studying in the nearby State Library. A small group of Melbourne University students would eat together there, after a few drinks at a pub in Swanston Street before we were ejected at six o'clock (closing time). The fashionable drink at the time was rum-and-raspberry.

The only names that I remember of the Chung Wah diners in our group were Ernest Clark, who later became the foundation librarian at Monash University, and Helen Palmer, a leading leftist. I think we were mostly left-wing, somewhat bohemian members of the Melbourne University Labor Club. I was younger and less politically committed than the others. Except for Helen's occasional presence we were all males as far as I remember.

The building was unusual; it was four storeys and very narrow; the kitchen occupied the ground floor and a steep flight of stairs led to the small dining-room upstairs. The orders were called out from the back of the dining room and the meals were delivered by goods lift. The waiters never seemed to know any English. This was surprising as, officially, no immigration of non-Europeans had been permitted for at least thirty-five years. The Department of the Interior sometimes issued

temporary visas for workers with catering skills to come to Australia to work in the Chinese restaurants, and if they already had family connections in Australia they were often allowed to stay.

The menu was small and basic. We prided ourselves on ordering the courses by their Chinese names; I'm not sure whether our words were Mandarin or Cantonese, more likely the latter. It was not hard for me to learn the name of my favourite dish, chicken and vegetables; I think it was *chow har yuk min*. There were three types of soup: plain chicken, short soup (won ton) and long soup (noodles). It was the first time I had encountered the Chinese custom of sharing restaurant dishes in the style of family meals at home.

Although the restaurant would not have had a liquor licence we never encountered any problems with bringing and drinking our own beer. (In those days one almost never came across anyone drinking table wine, apart from "champagne", in a restaurant, although one might do so at a private function.) I don't remember any attempt being made to hide the bottles, but it is possible that Chung Wah followed the practice of other restaurants of serving the beer in tea-cups.

My second Chinese restaurant came later when I was living in Perth. Only one or two Chinese restaurants existed there at the time and their quality and style were as basic as Chung Wah.

In 1953 the young King and Queen of Thailand were completing a state visit to Australia and were due to leave from Perth to fly home when their plane was delayed for a day owing to engine trouble. Unfortunately, their hosts, the Governor of Western Australia and his wife, had an official engagement and could not host Their Majesties at dinner. They came up with a solution to the dilemma: ask the six or so Thai students at the university to entertain their King and Queen for the evening meal. Considering that in Thailand loyal subjects were supposed to be so deferential that they normally prostrated themselves before Their Majesties, this must have been quite a

challenge for these students. Their solution was to take their guests to the nearest Chinese restaurant. Just imagine the much cosseted King and Queen being subjected to the indignity of eating in that primitive hole in the wall, and possibly being ushered into the backyard to go to the “dunny”. I never heard a first-person report on the success of the outing, but emotions must have been on edge all round.

In the 1960s there was a steady increase in the number of Chinese restaurants in Australia and by the 1980s these included some high-class establishments. In the 1970s my wife and I were delighted to notice a new one in Hawthorn within walking distance of our home. It was called Panda and soon we started going there quite frequently. It was a Hong Kong-style family restaurant where one could just decide to go on the spur of the moment. Most customers ate in-house, but you could take the food home if you brought your own pots.

The atmosphere was friendly and welcoming and after a while Panda became a preferred locale for our family celebrations. We frequently celebrated important birthdays and other family occasions there, including even my grandson’s bar mitzvah reception. A delightful memory that I have of one family celebration at Panda was of my grandson, then aged five. He had just arrived on an overnight flight from England. He started collecting chopsticks from nearby tables and then went to sleep under our table with handfuls of these trophies covering him.

The partner-manager, Simon Mui, originally from Hong Kong, soon became a well-known local identity. He was distinguished by his loud voice punctuated by mirthless laughter at the end of every few sentences. He knew his customers well and was ready to tell everyone that they represented a socially important segment of society. Whenever I appeared at the door he would call out from wherever he was at the time, “Good evening, Professor”, to the curiosity of all of the diners. He would then give a loud recital of the various professors, doctors and leading footballers who had graced Panda in the last couple of weeks. It was embarrassing that my friend, a Supreme Court judge whom we often accompanied there, never seemed to warrant a special mention.

Panda had style: it had fresh linen tablecloths and offered hot towels before and after the meal; the waiters were formally dressed with black ties. It sometimes won awards, such as the “Golden Wok”,

and made it into the *Age Good Food Guide*. Simon had some strong ideas and would not tolerate any contrary suggestions; for example, he would never produce a menu unless forced to, as he preferred to negotiate the choices with the diners. There was never a traditional yum cha. The noise level was continually high but Simon refused to allow any soft furnishings to reduce it. He would not employ any female waiters. As soon as a table was vacated the cloth was changed, with great care taken to ensure that the bare table-top was never exposed for a second, and the table was immediately reset.

With all his idiosyncrasies Simon became a legend in Kew and Hawthorn and diners flocked to Panda for the tasty food and the personal attention they received from him and his more placid partner, Andy. One regular bit of excitement at Panda was the visit from a dragon on Chinese New Year. The dragon paraded and danced in Glenferrie Road accompanied by the loud clashing of cymbals and drums.

Panda was very popular and obviously a financial bonanza. Then one day in the early 2000s we arrived there only to find it closed. To our astonishment there was a note on the door explaining that it was “under administration”. How could such an apparently thriving concern come to such an abrupt end? One report was that Andy had moved on to establish his own restaurant elsewhere, which seems to have been the case, but there have been other more tragic personal rumours to explain the surprising financial difficulties that I prefer not to spell out.

Since Panda closed there have been at least three short-term attempts to establish different regional-type restaurants on the site. Today it is occupied by an apparently successful Cantonese-style establishment that specialises in yum cha. But each time I visit, the ghosts of Panda and Simon and Andy still float around in my mind. They are sweet memories.

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*Ron Taft has recently published a memoir, **My World: Reflections on My Life and Times**. He thanks Dr Barbara Nichol, whose research on Chinese restaurants in Australia focuses on the period 1850 to 1960, for kindly checking some of the facts in this article.*

*Peter Ryan has been unwell, but plans to resume his contributions to **Quadrant** shortly.*

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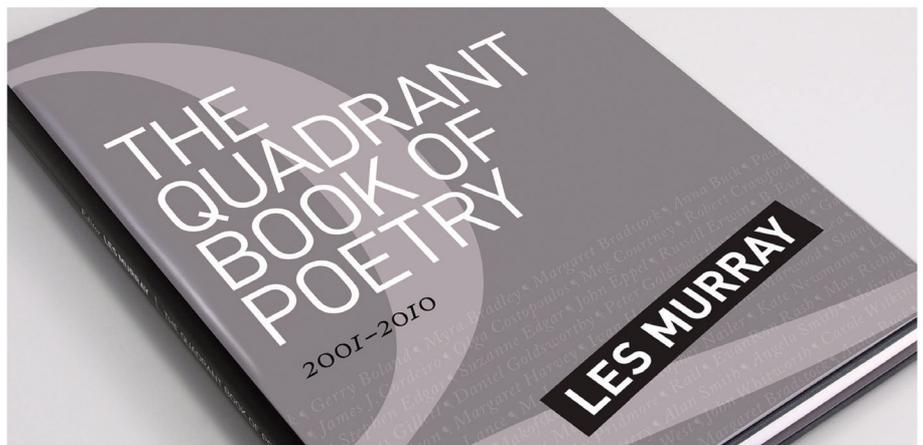


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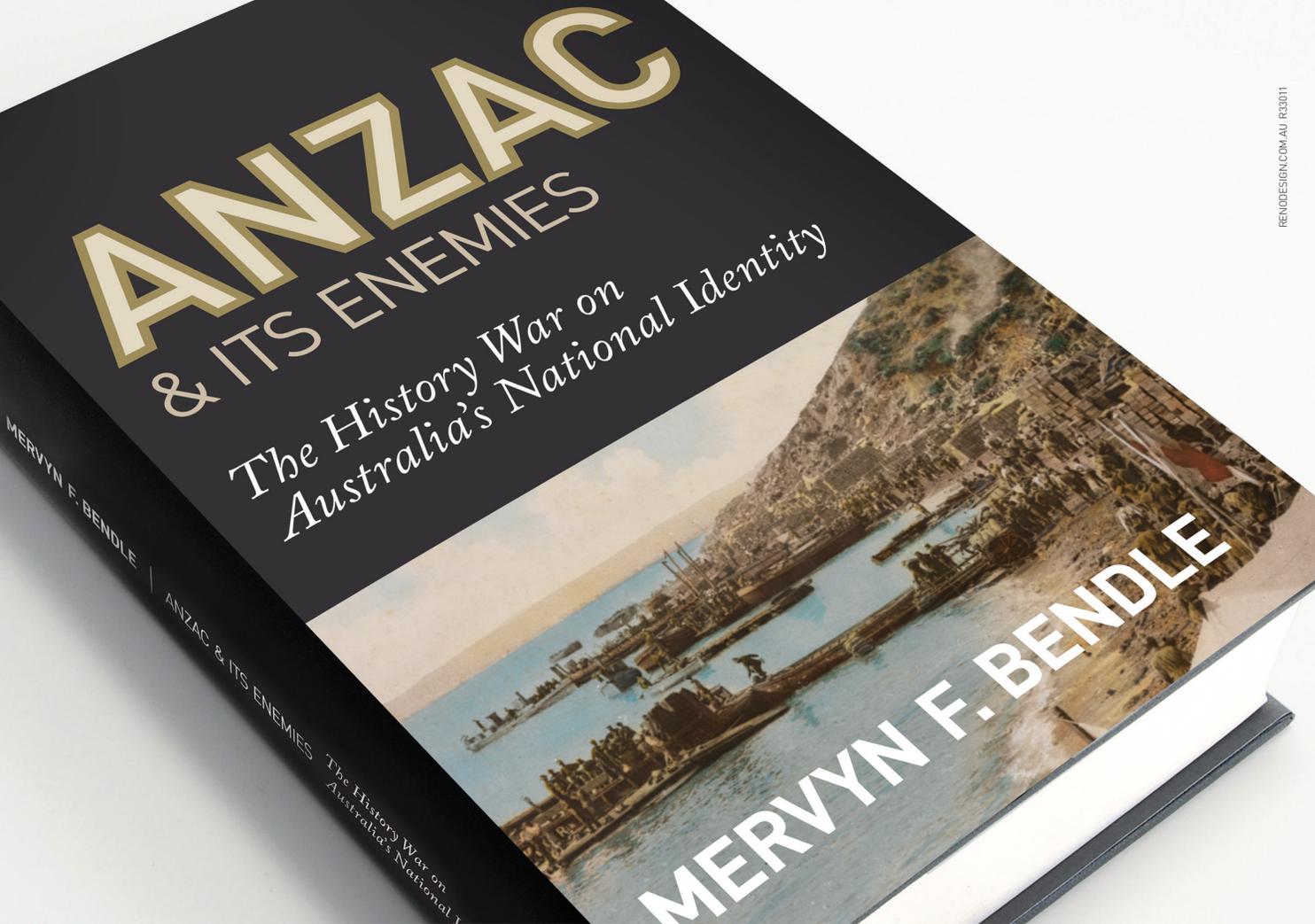
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