Bitter Harvest is a comprehensive appraisal of Bruce Pascoe’s book Dark Emu. Pascoe postulates that, rather than being a nomadic hunter-gatherer society, Australian Aborigines were actually sedentary agriculturalists with ‘skills superior to those of the white colonisers who took their land and despoiled it’. Dark Emu has enjoyed extraordinary public and critical acclaim, winning Premier’s literary awards in New South Wales and Victoria. Professor Marcia Langton called it ‘the most important book on Australia’. Its ideas have already been taken up in school texts. But nothing in Dark Emu justifies its success.

Bitter Harvest is a forensic but highly readable examination which reveals that Bruce Pascoe omits, distorts or mischaracterises important information to such an extent that, as purported history, Dark Emu is worthless. Even worse, it promotes a divisive, victim-based agenda that pits one Australian against another.

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LETTERS 2  John Bunyan, John R. Rossiter
GUEST COLUMN 4  Eichmann in Ballarat  Christopher Heathcote
ASPERITIES 6  John O'Sullivan
ASTRINGENCIES 8  Anthony Daniels
THE PHILISTINE 10  Salvatore Babones
CHINA 12  China and the Tyranny of Proximity  Daryl McCann
18  The Centralising Power of China’s Techno-Totalitarianism  Salvatore Babones
23  Glimpses of Chinese Life  I. Ross Terrill  II. Frank Mount
LONDON LETTER 26  Locked Down in London  Jonathan Foreman
AUSTRALIA 30  The Night the Leaves Fell from the Bullshit Trees  Joanna Hackett
POLITICS 35  George Orwell, a Man for Our Time  I. Thomas Banks
II. Christopher Akehurst  III. Gerald J. Russello
42  Pictures Cannot Run Away  Matthew Omolesky
47  James Burnham in Australia  Edwin Dyga
HISTORY 52  The Shoddy Research Behind the Massacre Maps  Michael Connor
56  Life and Death in Pre-Contact Aboriginal Australia  William D. Rubinstein
UNIVERSITIES 60  The True Crisis of the Humanities  Mervyn Bendle
ECONOMICS 65  That Which is Seen, and That Which is Not Seen  Peter Smith
70  The National Perils of Free-Market Ideology  Jack Allen
HEALTH 74  Labor, Conversion Therapy and Draco  John Whiteball
ENVIRONMENT 80  Climate Change is Not the End of the World  Michael Green
BOOKS 85  Twilight of Democracy by Anne Applebaum  Jorge González-Gallarza Hernández
87  Van Gogh’s Ear by Bernadette Murphy  Elizabeth Beare
FILM 91  Somewhere in Time: A Supernatural Fairy-Tale  Joe Dolce
LITERATURE 96  The Sea  Barry Gillard
SCULPTURE 101  Mad Dogs and Iconoclasts  Philip Drew
STORY 104  Metacontextualisation  Frank Murphy
SWEETNESS & LIGHT 111  Tim Blair
POETRY 17: Reading up on Linnaeus  Geoff Page; 15: Counting  Katherine Spadaro;
22: elizabeth’s day  Norm Neill; 28: Anzac biscuits  Mocco Wollert;
29: ABC  Louis Groarke; 34: Booval Tea Ladies  Joe Dolce; 41: Jet-lag
Katherine Spadaro; 46: Two poems  Knute Skinner; 49: Pain’s Worth
Christopher DeGroot; 50: Poem to My Father for Christmas  Bryan Coleborne;
51: That Kiss  Philipp Ammon; 55: A Dry Leaf  Mocco Wollert;
59: Three poems  James Curran; 69: Two poems  Stephen Gilfedder;
78: Poemfan  David Dalton; Caressing you  Mocco Wollert;
79: work  →  home  lou verga; 84: Great Aunts  David Dalton; 90: In Passing  Sophia Nugent-Siegal;
95: Prome-theoi  Eli Narev; 100: Stellan  Dana Rice; 110: Thinking about Robert Harris the Poet  Ivan Head
LettErs

Churches Alive

SIR: Christopher Akehurst quickly modifies the title of his article, “The Continual Decline of the Suburban Church” (July-August 2020) noting “it is obviously not true” of the large number of Pentecostal churches nor of the Roman Catholic Church, though contending that even here “the prospects are far from rosy”. I can only speak of my local St John’s Catholic Church, at Campbelltown, where, pre-Covid, the five Sunday masses were crowded, recent Pacific and Asian arrivals contributing to the number. And the pupils of its primary school regularly attend and take part in a weekday Mass.

What he goes on to say of the large number of Australians with no church connection of course is true, but surely not the logic of his assertion that “if the Church is meaningless, it must follow that church buildings are meaningless too”. “The Church” is not true of the Roman Catholic Church nor in most places of the Anglican Church and indeed of the Uniting or Presbyterian, and English evidence especially indicates that church buildings have meaning for many non-churchgoers. Has research been done regarding Australian views of churches? Akehurst’s article raises many interesting and important questions.

The rest of the article is concerned with church buildings. Certainly the Uniting Church has closed many churches, first inevitably in places where the Methodist and Presbyterian (and any Congregational) congregations were combined. A few of the closed churches have been re-opened by the remnant Presbyterian Church or by independent evangelical groups. Second, others have been closed because of Uniting Church decline.

However, there has been a closing of churches for a century or more, for example, in parts of central Sydney as residents moved away—sometimes closed too soon, as Akehurst notes. Further out, from Hornsby to the Hawkesbury, new Anglican churches have been closed in the still small hamlets of Mount Colah, Mount Kuringai, Cowan and Brooklyn but new ones have been built in the now larger centres of Hornsby Heights, Asquith and Berowra.

But Akehurst strays out to rural districts. In many of them population has declined, and cars have made attendance at town churches much easier. Nonetheless, the Anglican Church far more than the Roman Catholic keeps many small country churches open, sometimes indeed in the open country and still providing a centre for what are still often seen as important occasions, especially christenings and weddings.

Tasmania has perhaps the largest number of often small but beautiful Anglican churches in hamlets with small populations (St Michael’s, Bothwell, is a large exception, with few residents nearby). The present bishop’s attempt to close a large number met with great opposition not only from frequent churchgoers but all, Anglicans and others, who saw these churches as their own. Often communities have raised the large sums demanded for diocesan funds in order for these people to keep their churches and to keep them open. I could mention many that have survived, some with the support of families who originally gave land and buildings—I think of Christ Church in the paddocks at Illawarra, there thanks to the Dumaresk family, where Tom Roberts’s remains are buried, or St Mary’s, Hagley (there thanks in part to Sir Richard Dry) with its neighbours at Westbury and Carrick.
ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORY ARE APPRECIATED BY MANY REGULAR CHURCH-GOERS, ESPECIALLY AMONG THE LAITY, BUT ALSO BY MANY OTHERS. A MAJOR EXCEPTION IS REPRESENTED BY THE NEO-PURITAN MAJORITY OF OUR SYDNEY DIOCESAN CLERGY, THOSE WHO OPPOSE CHURCH BUILDINGS OF ANY KIND, OR WHO RE-ARRANGE CHURCH INTERIORS WITH A CONTEMPT AND IGNORANCE OF WHICH I SOMETIMES DESPAIR, THOUGH I PLACE SOME HOPE IN CLERGY WHO ARE TRULY ANGLICAN EVANGELICAL.

I WISH WE HAD A NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST SUCH AS ENGLAND POSSESSES AS WELL AS OBLIGEANCE TO CHURCH LAW IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH. WE CAN ONLY DO OUR BEST TO ENCOURAGE APPRECIATION OF THE VARIED ASPECTS OF ONE’S CHURCH TRADITION, INCLUDING OF COURSE ITS GOSPEL FAITH BUT ALSO ITS ART, MUSIC AND ARCHITECTURE.

IN THE LATTER CASE, AT EIGHTY-FOUR, BEFORE I DEPART THIS LIFE I SHOULD LOVE TO FIND AN ACCESSIBLE HOME FOR A COLLECTION OF TWO OR THREE HUNDRED MAINLY CHURCH BUT ALSO CIVIC ARCHITECTURAL BOOKS IN MY LIBRARY, MOST AS NEW, ALL JUST IN RETURN FOR A GIFT TO SOME MAJOR MEDICAL OR HUMANITARIAN CHARITY. THE CONTACT DETAILS:

THE REV.DR JOHN BUNYAN
CENSO CORNER
PO BOX N109
CAMPBELLTOWN NORTH NSW 2560
(bunyanj@tpg.com.au)

NAPLAN, IQ AND CREATIVITY

SIR: I WAS PLEASED TO SEE PROFESSOR GANNICOTT’S ARTICLE (JUNE 2020) FURTHER SUPPORTING AUSTRALIA’S SYSTEM OF NAPLAN TESTING. HIS ARTICLE FOLLOWED MY ARTICLE, “DROP PISA, KEEP NAPLAN” (MAY 2020), AND WAS PROBABLY WRITTEN BEFORE SEEING MINE. I WOULD THEREFORE LIKE TO ADD SEVERAL POINTS OF CLARIFICATION AND EXTENSION TO HIS ARTICLE. THESE POINTS REFER MAINLY TO THE PUBLIC CRITICISMS OF NAPLAN THAT PROFESSOR GANNICOTT MENTIONED IN HIS SECOND PARAGRAPH, PLUS A CONCLUDING COMMENT ON THE FAILURE OF SCHOOLS, AND NAPLAN, TO TEST FOR HIGH CREATIVE ABILITY.

THE FIRST IMPORTANT POINT CONCERNS THE CRITICISM THAT NAPLAN OVER-EMPHASISES “COGNITIVE RATHER THAN NON-COGNITIVE SKILLS”. WELL, IT SHOULD. IQ, OR GENERAL MENTAL ABILITY AS IT IS MORE OFTEN CALLED NOWADAYS, IS BY FAR THE BEST PREDICTOR OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND OCCUPATIONAL SUCCESS AT ALL LEVELS OF JOBS, FROM THE LEAST TO THE MOST HIGHLY SKILLED, AND IS ALSO THE BEST PREDICTOR OF LIFETIME HEALTH. CLOSE INSPECTION OF THE NAPLAN TESTS REVEALS THAT IT IS, ABOVE ALL, AN IQ TEST. THE NAPLAN MATHS TESTS AND THE NAPLAN READING AND WRITING TESTS ARE VERY SIMILAR IN CONTENT TO THE US-DEVISED SAT Math AND SAT Verbal (NOW CALLED CRITICAL READING AND WRITING) TESTS, WHICH ARE CLEARLY MEASURES OF QUANTITATIVE IQ AND VERBAL IQ, RESPECTIVELY, AND WHICH ARE NOW USED FOR ADMISSION TO MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY. A CHILD CAN BE GOOD AT ONE BUT NOT THE OTHER, A FINDING BORNE OUT BY THE APPROXIMATE 0.7 CORRELATION, OR 49 PER CENT (RATHER THAN 100 PER CENT) RELATIONSHIP, BETWEEN SCORES ON THE MATHS AND VERBAL FORMS OF SAT, AND I AM SURE THAT THIS APPROXIMATE 50 PER CENT RELATIONSHIP WOULD HOLD BETWEEN NUMERACY AND LITERACY AS MEASURED BY NAPLAN. AND YEARS IN SCHOOL DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BUT IN AN UNFAIR MANNER KNOWN AS “THE MATTHEW EFFECT”—AN ALLUSION TO THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW—WHEREBY NATURALLY MORE INTELLIGENT STUDENTS BENEFIT MORE FROM SCHOOLING THAN THEIR LESS INTELLIGENT PEERS.

ATTEMPTING TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD’S NAPLAN RESULTS BY PAYING FOR PRIVATE COACHING, ANOTHER COMPLAINT MENTIONED IN PROFESSOR GANNICOTT’S ARTICLE, HARDLY SEEMS TO BE WORTH THE EXPENSE. US COLLEGE BOARD RESEARCH INTO COACHING FOR THE SAT REVEALS THAT COACHING, ON AVERAGE, WILL INCREASE SAT MATH SCORES BY ONLY 3.3 PER CENT AND SAT VERBAL SCORES BY ONLY 1.7 PER CENT. AND IT IS THE ALREADY BRIGHTER STUDENTS WHO BENEFIT THE MOST.

THERE IS, HOWEVER, AN “ELEPHANT IN THE SCHOOLROOM”, NAMELY THE CONTINUED FAILURE TO TEST CHILDREN FOR THEIR CREATIVE ABILITY. INTELLIGENCE OR CONVERGENT THINKING ABILITY (WHERE THERE IS ONLY ONE CORRECT ANSWER) HAS ONLY ABOUT 10 PER CENT CORRELATION WITH CREATIVE OR DIVERGENT THINKING ABILITY (WHERE ALTERNATIVE POSSIBLE ANSWERS APPLY). AUSTRALIA HAS SLIPPED BADLY IN INNOVATION—AS MEASURED, FOR EXAMPLE, BY PATENTS LODGED PER CAPITA EACH YEAR—and there has never been a greater need to identify students by Year 9, the last year in which they undergo NAPLAN testing, who have high creative ability but not necessarily high IQs. THESE STUDENTS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE SCHOOL IF THEY WANT TO AND ENCOURAGED TO PURSUE A CAREER IN INNOVATION (JUST AS THOSE LOW IN BOTH ACADEMIC AND CREATIVE ABILITY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE SCHOOL AND PURSUE A SUITABLE TRADE). THERE ARE MANY PRIVATE SECTOR AND EVEN GOVERNMENT SECTOR JOBS TO BE OPENED UP—in new product development, new service development, and the marketing and advertising of the same, and not to forget the arts—for which creativity will be at a premium.

AS A RESEARCHER, I AM DEVELOPING A NEW AND EFFICIENT TEST OF CREATIVE ABILITY THAT COULD EASILY BE ADDED TO THE NAPLAN TESTS WHEN THEY RESUME NEXT YEAR.

John R. Rossiter
Wollongong, NSW

LETTERS

Letters are subject to editing unless writers stipulate otherwise.
In early September alarming events have taken place in Victoria that have captured international attention. In Ballarat, a large rural city famed as the site of the historic Eureka Rebellion, three police officers went to the home of a modest working-class family and arrested Zoe Lee Buhler, a visibly pregnant young woman. They charged her with sedition. The whole matter was quite distressing and confusing for her, because Zoe Buhler, who evidently is not highly educated, didn’t seem even to know what sedition is. Neither did her agitated and uncomprehending husband, who livestreamed the arrest as it occurred in the family’s kitchen.

Zoe Buhler’s supposed crime was posting on social media her support for an upcoming protest rally critical of the state government’s heavy lockdown regulations. That was all. She didn’t even attend. But the police were charging her with sedition, a crime one step short of treason, and thereby treating her as a political dissident intent on destabilising our system of government. This is ridiculous. It beggars belief.

These police were carrying out orders issued not by the state’s Attorney-General, but by administrators in the Health Department. Due to the unprecedented powers granted them under Victoria’s “State of Emergency”, health bureaucrats now carry serious weight—and don’t we know it, as the police follow their bidding during the COVID-19 crisis. Lacking all sense of proportion, health managers treat members of the public who are being cheeky nuisances, like Zoe Buhler, as dangerous threats to homeland security. So instead of giving her a polite yet firm warning, the administrators utilise laws intended for the likes of a Julian Assange.

Dare one add that the state’s Health Minister, Jenny Mikakos, has a law degree from Melbourne University and was herself formerly a solicitor in private practice, so she ought to know better. But she has escaped all criticism of her underlings’ cavalier excesses.

Many have noted something distinctly Orwellian in the way things now run across Victoria, and not just how the state’s Chief Health Officer has great power with next to no transparency, accountability or oversight. (A frustrated Scott Morrison told the media on September 7 that the Victorian government regards its modelling for the lockdown of the state as too secret even to reveal to the Prime Minister’s Department.)

Much as Orwell envisaged a Ministry of Peace responsible for waging war, and a Ministry of Truth which spread lies, in present-day Victoria our Department of Health uses police to harass a pregnant woman with little concern for her physical health and mental well-being, even preventing this expectant mum from getting to a medical appointment to check on her unborn baby. Department of Health? Health Minister? Chief Health Officer? Worse still, instructions were given for police to seize both Zoe Buhler’s and her husband’s mobile phones. Common sense stresses you don’t take away a pregnant woman’s phone, as it has those contact numbers she needs in the event of an obstetric emergency. Not in Victoria any more.

What fascinates me is the subsequent uproar. If ever we needed evidence that younger generations are ignorant of history, and how it urgently needs to be studied not only in universities but in secondary and primary schools, the evidence is in the shallow tone of what has been said about the arrest of Zoe Buhler. The vast majority of people have been appalled at this disgraceful act by the Victorian government, and by other excesses occurring under a seemingly unending, and undemocratic, “State of Emergency”. For them it clarifies how wrong things are. But there is little depth, and no historical awareness, to the collective outcry. People lack moral co-ordinates to use in argument, while some Victorians have defended those country cops, insisting they were just obeying orders.

This is the famed “Nuremberg Defence” used by Nazi war criminals when put on trial. They claimed they bore no personal responsibility for
the bad things they did. They were just carrying out orders, the defence line went, and so were morally obliged to follow instructions through. Obedience was a duty. The entire Nuremberg episode brought an end to that style of legal defence, and never again would the justice system in democratic countries accept that members of the police or military are innocent if they do bad things on orders from above.

Clearly, the people of Victoria have forgotten that golden principle. Unacquainted with how the Nuremberg Defence was so discredited, it therefore seems on the way back. Accused Nazi war criminals might well have a fighting chance if sent to trial in Victoria today.

It doesn’t stop there. Another opinion about the Ballarat incident went into instant circulation; this was most clearly expressed by a letter published in the Weekend Australian of September 5-6, titled “Pendulum Swings Too Far”. The correspondent made the point that irrespective of whether police officers were in the wrong or the right, the reason people were fussing was only because a pregnant woman had been arrested.

But that is the point. It is a moral norm in our society to show special consideration for pregnant women, yet Zoe Buhler was treated unsympathetically by the police, as is evident from the video record. Again we must invoke Nuremberg, because a hallmark for immoral behaviour by authority is how it targets the vulnerable and weak. That came out time and again in those Nazi war trials and firmly established a moral code for what is acceptable. To argue or even think it is okay for police officers to follow questionable orders to harass a pregnant woman is to take a step towards an Adolf Eichmann.

It is from this prominent Nazi that we get another key term, “Little Eichmanns”. These are seemingly harmless ordinary people, officials who willingly do unethical things in their community, and whose actions collectively therefore make immoral systems possible. As was stressed at Eichmann’s 1961 trial in Jerusalem, if you get enough of these people going along with bad orders you’re on the path to a holocaust. History has repeatedly shown this. Eichmann himself insisted until the very end that he was just following orders, although what his trial made abundantly clear is the “banality of evil”—how evil is largely conducted by normal-seeming officials on an immediate very small scale: they try to pass off their personal actions as inconsequential against the grander scheme of things, but those actions set and affirm the moral tone.

Much as the Nuremberg excuse has surfaced again, no one has pointed out how the police at Ballarat were Little Eichmanns. They didn’t shout, they didn’t threaten, they just unemotionally processed a very pregnant, upset and bewildered woman, showing neither hostility nor empathy towards her throughout.

Witnesses at the Eichmann trial described his behaviour during the war, and how it took this same pattern; the official dispassionately got on with his daily work as if there were nothing ethically questionable about what he was doing. Eichmann treated people as livestock and calmly proceeded with his job, which is just how we see those Ballarat cops behaving in the video. Zoe Buhler explains to them repeatedly that she is about to go to a medical appointment to check on her unborn baby, and offers to take down her social media post. The three cops could have allowed this, given her a verbal warning and left it at that. They are empowered to do so in such circumstances. But instead of showing human decency, they dispassionately continued with the needless arrest of this agitated expectant mother, handcuffing her and hauling her off to the police station when she should have been getting an ultrasound.

For people of my generation this is all crystal clear. A proper sense of morality tells you to avoid following immoral orders; and you protect the vulnerable, not pounce on them as easy victims. These were principles for our lives, what formative figures like Gandhi, Bertrand Russell and Martin Luther King preached when I was young. But that’s history, a discipline nowadays ridiculed as irrelevant to how we conduct our lives.

At the time of writing Dr Christopher Heathcote has spent 178 days in virtual solitary confinement under Victoria’s State of Emergency. As a single person, he is forbidden by the emergency laws to meet with any other individual.
On August 18 there appeared on the website of the Critic, a new and lively conservative magazine in London, an article that alone would qualify it as the rag to watch. Titled “The BLM Takeover of Whitehall”, it was a twenty-four-carat, old-fashioned, publish-and-be-damned scoop. Its author is Justin Elderman, who is either a recluse on the scale of Greta Garbo or, as I strongly suspect, the bearer of a pseudonym, since I can find neither photographs of him nor other writings by him. And if he’s a civil servant, as is likely, he’s well-advised to keep his identity “Top Secret”.

Undercover agent Elderman fires with both barrels in the third paragraph:

“On 3 June, Jonathan Slater, Permanent Secretary of the Department for Education, responded to the DEFRA Permanent Secretary Tamara Finkelstein’s call to ‘fight racism’ by tweeting the Black Lives Matter hashtag and declaring his quest to ‘tackle the whiteness of Senior Whitehall’ (both these Whitehall heads are white, incidentally). On 5 June, Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, sent an email … declaring that ‘Systemic racial inequality ... has deep roots within UK society, including Defence’ and, like the DfE head, signed off with #BlackLivesMatter.”

This report was not the first sign that something untoward was happening. But the Elderman piece was the most thorough and well-documented account. It revealed not only that the most senior civil servants had unconcernedly tweeted out calls for their junior colleagues to give unqualified support to BLM but also that formal civil service structures existed to pressure government departments to implement internal policies shaped by BLM ideology. It summed up the situation: “Our supposedly impartial civil service is institutionalizing far-left identity politics.”

It’s important to unpack what’s wrong about all this. In the first place, civil servants are not supposed to have policies of their own. Their job is to implement the policies of the government. Second, for that reason they’re not supposed to take controversial political stands against the government of the day. Third, the senior mandarins quoted were either unaware that Black Lives Matter represents a controversial political ideology hostile to the current Tory government (and almost certainly unpopular with most people) or were deliberately obfuscating the fact. In either case they’re promoting policies contrary to those of the elected government.

Black Lives Matter is not simply a humane slogan calling for racial justice, inclusiveness and diversity—which almost any government might adopt—but two very different and sinister things. First, it is an organisation, self-styled as “Marxist”, with a political program that calls for “dismantling imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy and the state structures that disproportionately harm black people in Britain”. And, second, it is the application to racial questions of a body of political ideas, known as “critical theory”, that argues inter alia that white people are all racists; that whites are oppressors and all other races are victims; that “colour-blind” policies are racism in disguise; that conventional ideas such as the value of hard work are the imposition of white culture on minorities; and much more nonsense in like vein.

I’ve been following the development of “critical theory” ever since I picked up a book by Frantz Fanon, the North African psychiatrist who thought that anti-colonial violence was indispensable to the genuine liberation of the oppressed, in Collet’s left-wing London bookshop in the late 1960s. I was one of the shop’s best customers. Its shop assistants called me “Comrade”. I’ve slogged through vast jungles of impenetrable jargon in Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, the French structuralists (and post-structuralists), Michel Foucault, and their tepid American imitators such as Robin diAngelo of white fragility fame. And despite some brilliant insights into the power of culture over politics in Antonio Gramsci and a lot of perverse ones in Foucault, the overall doctrine that was born of the marriage of critical theory and identity politics struck me as the greatest nonsense at every stage of its gestation.

It’s a dogmatic theory that calls itself “anti-racism” but is in fact a kind of rigged anti-white racism: whatever response whites make to a question about an allegedly “racist” episode, the theory invariably shows them to be racist. It’s constructed, like Marxism before it, so as to be unfalsifiable, thus
proving that its claim to scientific status is false. It supposedly rests on self-evident axioms from which all its conclusions derive. But those axioms are a great deal more fragile than “whiteness” and crumble upon critical scrutiny. Thus: It is not true that racism is whatever anyone perceives as racism, since the accuser may be mistaken or lying. It is not reasonable that women or other victims must always be believed even if other evidence contradicts their testimony. It is not good public policy that statistics should not be collected if they are likely to contradict leftist preconceptions—such as that children prosper equally in all kinds of family structures—since it will damage the life prospects of the children for whom you claim concern. It is not possible to believe that all cultures are equal if you also believe all human beings are equal, since some cultures deny human equality.

And, yes, the critical race theory of BLM and the New York Times is indeed a doctrine marked by “complexity” but that’s because if your panacea is constructed from a load of old falsehoods, you can hold it together only by the most complex Heath Robinson string-glue-and-sealing-wax logic. (See explanations of “intersectionality” passim.) Or as the great literary critic John Gross once quipped: “Complexity is the first refuge of the scoundrel.”

Alas, that doesn’t mean it is easy to grapple with such a collection of dense mental obscurities. A critical theory that denies the possibility of criticism from outside the theory is as slippery as a greased pig. My advice, therefore, is not to follow my example but to read the works of those who have done the hard slog of analysis and come back into the light with accurate, careful and (inevitably here) damaging criticisms. I refer to Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay—Helen leaning left, James rightwards, I believe, but both straight-shooters—who have written the indispensable guide to “woke” ideology: Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—And Why This Harms Everybody. It shows that woke policies that ostensibly favour the poor and minorities do not do so and may even do the opposite.

Boris Johnson would be rationally justified in sending copies of it to all the permanent secretaries in Whitehall, as Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph used to send copies of Hayek’s works to the mandarins of their day. It’s essential reading if you hope to understand the nature of the cultural-cum-political clash that divides Britain, the United States and Australia—one that pits professional elites who control the cultural, legal, business and media institutions against most people and their elected allies in politics. The cultural elites seemingly have the advantage over the politicians because they have recruited social and racial justice to their side in the form of BLM. Pluckrose and Lindsay undermine that claim, but neither elites nor politicians know it.

As a result you have the Sherlock Holmes mystery of the scoop that didn’t bark in the night. The Critic’s story has not been challenged. Apart from the distinguished example of Charles Moore, however, it hasn’t been followed up—not in the Daily Mail nor the Times nor the Sun nor in any of the usual voices of indignant Middle England. And that is all the more remarkable because Downing Street is waging a quiet guerrilla war to dispatch some of the “woker” mandarins into the private sector: the permanent secretaries of the Justice and Education ministries have been defenestrated and more will probably follow. But no one says it’s because their giddy endorsements of BLM were issued at the very moment when mobs were pulling down statues and attacking the Cenotaph which, as Douglas Murray has rightly observed, is a site commemorating our dead that can truly be called “holy” even today. Downing Street defends the constitution by stealth.

It’s not hard to understand this silence. It means not consent but fear and moral nervousness. Everyone looks at the forces assembled on both sides and calculates the side likely to win. How do the media, universities and charitable institutions divide? Eighty-twenty for social justice, Minister. We can’t ignore the feelings of our younger graduates who have learned a different history from us. And corporations? Every company that advertises in Vogue is for Black Lives Matter, editor. (Pity about the looting.) How can Whitehall resist this creeping critical theory? I’m sure we shouldn’t over-react, PM. Maybe a few sounding-out sessions over coffee with high-flyers?

So a self-congratulatory moral iconoclasm now tears apart Britain’s cultural institutions from the National Trust to the BBC to the British Museum as their woke officials seek to “decolonise” the minds of the British people by attributing every national achievement to slavery and minimising the British role in suppressing it worldwide.

The Tories can’t let this drift on. Vital though Pluckrose and Lindsay’s arguments demystifying critical race theory are, they need determined presentation if they are to win the day. Donald Trump may be a primitive, but he has a record of taking long-ignored conservative arguments out of cold storage, applying them forcefully, and making them stick. He did so last week when he issued an executive order prohibiting the use of critical race theory in federal diversity-training courses. It’s a challenge to the critical race theorists they’ve never faced before.
Tomorrow, or the day after, I return from France to England, where I shall be in quarantine for two weeks. I shan’t mind this in the least because I have been in quarantine, or estivation, for about three months and have missed what is usually called normal life hardly at all.

In France, where my house is very isolated (at least by European standards), we don’t have television or radio, the internet connection is intermittent at best, and the nearest town is too far away to buy the papers daily. When finally I catch up with the news, I discover that they are just the same as if I had followed them with assiduity; and since they rarely bring me much pleasure, I think I am rather better off without them. “Since sorrow never comes too late,” as Gray put it,

And happiness too swiftly flies
... where ignorance is bliss,
’Tis folly to be wise.

Doctor Johnson, whose life of Gray was not as complimentary as it might have been, once said that public affairs vex no man, by which he meant that we are all mainly or exclusively interested in our own little sphere, and therefore that our vexation over public affairs is largely ersatz, simulated or bogus.

That might have been so in the eighteenth century, but it can hardly be so nowadays. The American government, for example, is incomparably more tyrannical towards its citizens than was George III towards his subjects, and intrudes far more into their day-to-day affairs. The means to do so has increased, is increasing and ought to be reduced: but, as the American senator once said, you can’t get a hog to slaughter itself.

If you don’t go to public affairs, they will come to you, if in no other form than increased taxation. My isolation, therefore, is an illusion, but since, as Calderón put it, la vida es sueño, life is a dream, anyway, I might as well indulge in it for as long as possible.

One of the many things I don’t miss about the news is the bad temper with which they are reported, or on which they report. No doubt every age seems bad-tempered to itself, and there is probably no way to measure bad temper scientifically (though I can imagine psychologists somewhere developing a bad-temper scale, supposedly reliable and validated, asking people questions such as “When they announce that your train is delayed do you a) receive it with calm and take out your knitting—score 1—or e) shout and swear at the public address system, which you would like to destroy if you could—score 5). But even if such a scale existed, we wouldn’t know whether people nowadays score higher or lower than they would have done in 1950. I have my suspicions, however.

Does bad-temperedness matter, apart from reducing the quality of daily life? I think it may end up destroying democracy and, what is far worse (and not at all the same thing) freedom with it. If Matthew Arnold thought that ignorant armies were about to clash by night when he wrote “Dover Beach”, goodness knows what he’d make of the situation now. At least in those days the foot soldiers of the ignorant armies had the excuse of desperate poverty and real hunger: nowadays, the main nutritional threat to the poor is obesity. Not long ago, the Guardian newspaper published an article about hunger in South Africa resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic, and accompanied it by a photograph of women queuing for free food at a soup kitchen in a black township. They were all enormously fat; and while, strictly speaking, being enormously fat is not incompatible with having nothing to eat at the present moment, still—as illustration or propaganda—the picture could hardly have been more ill-chosen.

But to return to the question of bad temper. The vehemence of readers’ commentary to be found after an article in a newspaper, especially one of very marked political tendency, is chilling, to me at least. Of course one doesn’t know whether these people represent anyone other than themselves, that is to say whether they are typical of any large section of the population, or whether their next address...
will be an asylum for the criminally insane—who, almost by definition, are a very tiny minority.

In America, where the future of the West is played out, people of differing political standpoints can nowadays hardly bear to be together in the same room. Each thinks the other (there being only two possible standpoints) not merely mistaken but wicked or evil. Luckily, in my French redoubt, I have been able to avert my mind from this, the other and much more serious global warming, that of heating temper.

I have been reading a little about Shakespeare recently, preparatory to a lecture. One of the questions about Shakespeare is who he actually was. It was Delia Bacon, I think, an unusual American lady of the middle of the nineteenth century who eventually went frankly mad, who first suggested that Shakespeare (the author of the plays) was not Shakespeare (the boy from Stratford-on-Avon), but rather her near-namesake, Francis Bacon. Ever since then, the question of the authorship has agitated many minds, including those of famous people such as Henry James, Sigmund Freud and Mark Twain. One of my two copies of Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence’s *Bacon is Shakespeare* (Durning-Lawrence was a Member of Parliament and militant Baconian) once belonged to Sir Ernest Shackleton, the other to Otto Orren Fisher, who presented Miami University with a copy of all the seventeenth-century Shakespeare folios. Durning-Lawrence wasn’t the only MP of his time who was interested in the authorship question: George Greenwood wrote extensively on the same question, without firmly concluding anything except that Shakespeare wasn’t Shakespeare.

Since then, other candidates for authorship have been proposed, and there are Oxfordians, Marlovians, Rutlandians, and about sixty other sects, all of whom call those who believe that Shakespeare, the author of the plays, was Shakespeare, the boy from Stratford-on-Avon, *Stratfordians*, rarely without the connotation that they are as primitive as those who believe that the Earth is flat. Not very long ago, I saw an article in a French newspaper claiming that the half-Italian linguist and translator John Florio was the true author of the *Sonnets*, thus proving the value to Britain of the European Union.

Owen, author in five volumes of *Francis Bacon’s Cipher Story*, constructed a cipher machine that persuaded him that Shakespeare’s manuscript lay at the bottom of the River Severn at Chepstow, which he dredged at enormous cost, ruining himself financially in the process and on his deathbed warning people against the authorship question) and these people usually don’t suffer fools, which is to say people of views different from their own, gladly, but impute to them the worst of motives.

If this is the case with the authorship question, is it altogether surprising that questions like the future of humanity should not give rise to consensus? It is tolerance, willingness to listen and good cheer that need to be explained, not contempt, denigration and hatred.

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Among Anthony Daniels’s recent books is *Embargo and Other Stories* (Mirabeau Press, 2020), published under his pen-name, Theodore Dalrymple.
Would you sell your soul to the Devil in exchange for all the knowledge in the world? I asked my eight-year-old nephew the classic Faustian question, and he thought about it for a few minutes before confidently answering “Yes”. He reasoned that if he knew everything in the world, he would know how to get his soul back. Smart kid.

Smartass. Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus had a dozen chances to get his soul back, but he refused to take them. Here’s some good advice: when magic Latin words appear on your arm telling you “Man, flee!” it’s time to get the hell out of Hell. Goethe’s alchemist Faust actually was saved from damnation by Gretchen’s prayers, which he surely didn’t deserve. God moves in mysterious ways, and girls even more so.

Folklorists tell us that the Faust legend of an ill-advised deal with the Devil is a relatively recent Christian innovation, while my nephew’s version is the oldest folk tale in the Indo-European languages. It existed in the ancestors of the Romance, Germanic, Slavic and Baltic languages, as well as in ancient Greek and Sanskrit. The original tale is thought to date from 3000 BC and to reflect what must have been seen at the time as the most amazing feat of alchemy ever performed: the invention of bronze.

Bronze was humanity’s big break. Before bronze, cutting tools were made of wood, bone, shells or stone. Humans had discovered precious metals like gold and silver, but they weren’t very useful for making axe heads or saw blades. The discovery (invention?) of bronze changed all that. Mix seven parts copper to one part tin, heat until fluid, then cool to set. Goodbye, Stone Age; hello, bronze armour, spears, helmets and swords.

Copper and tin, the ingredients for bronze, are both relatively soft, but if you blend them in just the right proportion, you get a metal hard enough to chop down trees, line wagon wheels, shoe your horses, and decimate your foes. As the first transmutation of metals ever discovered, bronze was present at the birth of alchemy. The secret of its manufacture could only have come from the gods, and the intense heat of the forges from which it emerged made it easy to tell which gods those were.

So it is that in the Western world’s oldest story, “The Smith and the Devil”, it’s Old Scratch himself who teaches our ur-Faust the recipe for bronze—in exchange, of course, for his eternal soul. Considering that Heaven hadn’t been invented (discovered?) yet, that might not have been such a bad deal. In those days, the best anyone could hope for after death was a pale, blood-drained afterlife of eternal melancholy. Still, why take any chances? The smith used his newfound metallurgical skills to forge the world’s first shackles, and when the Devil came to claim his marker, the wily smith used them to clap him in irons—well, bronzes. The smith kept him locked up until the Devil annulled their contract.

Smartass. Still, when the Devil asks for your soul, it’s probably best to think twice, especially if the terms are a bit vague. But the Bronze Age is long gone, and these days the Devil tends to be more modest in his demands. Instead of your soul, it might be your data, or your privacy, or even just your IP address he wants. In exchange, he (or Google, which is much the same thing) will still give you access to all the knowledge in the world. That may not be such a bad offer. In fact, it may be quite a steal.

The Devil Google and his sexy demons Siri, Alexa and Cortana offer all of us the opportunity to know just about everything there is to know. All they want in return is marketing information of sufficient sophistication to allow them to anticipate our desires, and even to shape them. What they want, in essence, is access to our brains. If we accept, they won’t make us any wiser (omniscience certainly didn’t do much to improve Faust’s judgment), but they will make us smarter. Like my nephew, we can even ask Google how to prevent Google from skimming our information. The
answer is simple: for $10 a month, you can do all your online browsing via a virtual private network, or VPN.

When you use a VPN, you are effectively browsing the internet through a secure connection to someone else’s computer, which acts as an agent negotiating with websites on your behalf. The VPN puts a thick firewall between you and the organisations who want to know everything about you. If you’re a citizen-journalist revealing the secrets of a corrupt regime, a VPN could save your life. And if you want to watch television shows that are blocked in your country, you can log into Netflix through a VPN with a better geography. But if you use a VPN for all your online activity, you’ll find the internet a blander, duller place.

Internet privacy sounds great, until you try it. We all value our privacy, but we still expect the internet to know who and where we are. We want our browsers to properly autofill forms, our news feeds to tell us about local events, and our search results to reflect our most idiosyncratic informational desires. When I search for “Luther”, I want to see the rebellious monk pop up on my screen, not a load of links to a television series I’ve never heard of (score—Bing 1, Google 0). And I would much rather Google learn about Luther by monitoring your searches than by messing up mine. Search algorithms are subject to the free rider problem, and although I value my own privacy, I certainly don’t value yours. If I use a VPN, my internet experience is still improved by your data openness, but if everyone hides behind a VPN, all our experiences are degraded.

Australians seems eager to stick it to the Devil by passing tough new internet privacy and pricing laws, but they may regret it. To see why, look to Europe. In Germany, residents can request that pictures of their homes be scrubbed from the internet. As a result, Google Street View is unavailable in most of the country. In Spain, the government imposed a universal copyright fee of five cents per day on the use of news snippets by websites like Google, Facebook and Twitter. The devils simply removed news snippets from their sites, and now you can’t find the news in Spain. Multiple studies have confirmed what every Faustian intellect knew all along: in a truly free market, news organisations would be paying Google to feature their snippets, not the other way around. Heedless, France followed Spain into news oblivion last year.

Meanwhile all across Europe the dreaded General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) protects ordinary citizens by forcing them to click “OK” every time they visit a website. Everyone clicks “OK”. If you don’t, you can’t even access government services, never mind buy a train ticket or order a meal. Exactly what are Europeans okaying? Who knows. Who cares. If all the angels can offer is “click or be damned”, we might as well deal with the Devil. Many non-European websites actually ban themselves in Europe, because allowing access isn’t worth the cost of complying with the GDPR. If you want to see them, get a VPN.

The truth is that our data really isn’t worth very much to anyone, least of all to ourselves. If you think your data is valuable, try selling it. Google will give you total knowledge for your data, but it wouldn’t give you a penny. Knowledge is, after all a public good. In the aggregate it is expensive to produce, organise and maintain, but the marginal cost of making it available to one more person is essentially zero. So Google will give you knowledge that has no marginal value for them in exchange for data that has no marginal value for you, making a few pennies along the way. That seems reasonable, but reasonable or not, it’s the only deal on the table.

In the twenty-first century, we all have access to truly Faustian levels of knowledge, and if knowledge is power, absolute knowledge corrupts absolutely. So maybe we shouldn’t get too carried away with our Faustian desires to know who won the 1942 Academy Award for best actor (James Cagney for Yankee Doodle Dandy) or how many pints make a peck (sixteen); they may be corrupting us more than we know. Then again, maybe absolute corruption doesn’t sound so bad. Hey Google—call Mephistopheles. I’m ready to sign.
In the Year of COVID-19, the relative isolation of Adelaide, Hobart, Darwin, Canberra, Brisbane and Perth, not to mention all the small cities, towns and hamlets in Australia’s far-flung regions, rapidly became an asset. Remoteness, in other words, turn out to be an advantage in a country that, in Geoffrey Blainey’s words, suffered from “the tyranny of distance” in its formative years. For Melburnians and non-Melburnians alike, compelled to endure the nightmare of a stage-four lockdown or not, the tyranny of proximity and not the tyranny of distance drives our instincts to survive. If we are to learn anything from the Year of COVID-19, beyond a fanatical commitment to stringent hygiene protocol, it is this.

Geoffrey Blainey’s *The Tyranny of Distance*, first published in 1966, emerged at a pivotal moment in Australian history. Blainey made the case, in the chapter titled “Antipodes Adrift”, that the early British settlers of our continent developed “the kind of community one would expect to find within a few miles of Land’s End”. The problem was, however, that this community happened to dwell on the other side of the world, in the beginning an eight-month voyage under sail. The introduction of the steamship cut that down to ninety days by 1850, while the advent of the Suez Canal route reduced the time of the journey to something like forty-five days by the 1870s. Nonetheless, the next great advance was not until the start-up of regular flights and the “Kangaroo Route” in 1935. For the first century-and-a-half of British settlement, then, Australian society was affected by the anxiety of existing at a great distance from its civilisational wellspring.

Remoteness, maintained Blainey, was not only a matter of geographical separation from Britain, but also of our long-distance governance of Australia’s underpopulated and undeveloped tropical north. The resultant unease of possessing the sensibilities of an Isle of Wight but located on a mostly empty continent in the faraway South Pacific revealed itself in any number of ways, not the least being a hybrid Anglo-Australian patriotism (as implied by the national flag), military expeditions in defence of the empire (Sudan, the Boer War, First World War, Second World War), a British-centric immigration policy and an interdependent economic relationship. Blainey, unsurprisingly, nominated 1941 as the year which marked “Australia’s transition from its traditional role as echo and image of Britain and an outpost of Europe”. December 7, date of the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor, might have been a day of infamy for America but it was a moment of salvation for Australia. Thereafter, it was the US and not the “Old Country” that prevented our incorporation into Imperial Japan’s Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Australia’s transformation from an “echo and image of Britain” was in fact gradual, spasmodic and, in some ways, marginal. The signing of the ANZUS treaty in 1951 confirmed a shift that had commenced ten years earlier. Even so, the UK remained our main—though no longer sole—source of immigrants from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. Our troops were part of the Commonwealth forces that fought in the Malayan Emergency (1948 to 1960), a successful British-led counter-insurgency movement that defeated the military wing of the Malayan Communist Party. We can add that Australia’s involvement in the defence of South Korea from the invading forces of North Korea and its Communist China ally (the so-called People’s Volunteer Army) was an Anglo-Australian partnership, albeit with the US as the overriding force. The British, unlike the Australians, did not participate in the Vietnam War. Moreover, the UK’s decision to join the European Community in the 1970s signified a fundamental change in the Anglo-Australian economic relationship. As Blainey points out in updated editions of his book, by the time the technicalities of the tyranny of distance between the UK and Australia were resolved—improvements in telecommunications, relatively inexpensive international flights and so forth—fewer and
fewer Australians were regarding Britain as “the Mother Country”.

Nevertheless, from the 1950s onwards a rising generation of tertiary-educated Australians agitated against any remaining way in which Australia seemed to them “an echo and image of Britain”. Our constitutional monarchy, for one, was in their sights. Early Baby Boomers and their older brothers and sisters took to heart Donald Horne’s lament in The Lucky Country (1964) that most Australians were too second-rate in their thinking, too cosy, dull and provincial, to imagine their country as “grown up” and capable of determining its own destiny on its own terms. The professorial Horne added to the charge by mocking his compatriots for misinterpreting his use of lucky in the title of his famous book: he meant stupid-lucky in the sense that, as “an echo and image of Britain”, we had never learnt to think for ourselves. Horne’s denunciation of post-war Australian society was, in a double sense, an extension of A.A. Phillips’s “cultural cringe”, first expounded in a 1950 Meanjin essay. In the first instance, Horne was lambasting Australians for their cringing bondage to Britain which (allegedly) explained their inability to contemplate his brilliant and innovative idea of an Australian republic. Horne, paradoxically, betrayed himself as a victim of the cultural cringe he railed against. He wanted to “fix” an unbroken constitutional arrangement because he worried what it said about Australia: an inferiority complex, surely, that is almost the definition of a cultural cringe.

Malcolm Turnbull also exhibited symptoms of a cultural cringe in his role as a head of the botched 1999 pro-Republic campaign. His 1993 book The Reluctant Republic reads like his own case of chronic inferiority battling it out with his insufferable self-righteousness: “As long as we have the British Queen as our Head of State, other nations, not just in Asia, will regard us as somewhat less than independent.” Did we really need to change our constitution, one older than those of China, Germany, Russia, Japan, France, Indonesia, Malaysia and most other countries, in order to mitigate the confusion of foreigners?

None of this is to argue that Australians should be Anglophiles in the sense of being “an echo and image of Britain”. The UK and the Commonwealth of Australia are two separate nations with their own distinct interests, which sometimes coalesce and sometimes diverge. Brexit was relevant to us because it holds the promise of advantageous arrangements for Australian businesses, workers and travellers, with Westminster regaining the autonomy it surrendered to the European Union. Constitutionalist monarchists need be neither Anglophiles nor Anglophobes. Sir Anthony Mason, Chief Justice of Australia from 1987 to 1995, apparently turned republican one evening after watching the Bodyline television series, an illustrative example of an Australian “cultural cringe” masquerading as grown-up sophistication à la Horne and Turnbull.

Australia’s progressive intelligentsia did not get their republic and yet, as Nick Cater outlines in The Lucky Culture (2013), our “bunyip aristocracy” ticked off many of the items on their let’s-be-adults-about-this agenda. In particular, the tumultuous Whitlam era from 1972 to 1975 was a veritable whirlwind of “growing up”, from instituting no-fault divorce laws and slashing tariff barriers to changing the national anthem from “God Save the Queen” to “Advance Australia Fair”. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam launched Australia on a course that in most (though not in all) ways has continued to this day. According to Whitlam, Communist China was no longer to be feared or ignored but engaged in a mutually beneficial way. You could conclude, after reading sinologist Stephen Fitzgerald’s obsequious “The Coup That Laid the Fear of China: Gough Whitlam in Beijing, 1971”, published in 2012 by the Whitlam Institute, that Whitlam actually knew little about the People’s Republic of China. Such details were beside the point in his grand vision of a break with Britannia and sparkling new commitment to Asia. Some, of course, might see that as an obvious case of Australian “cultural cringe”.

Australia’s political class, whether Labor or Liberal/National, followed Whitlam’s lead for half a century, making him—as he always hoped—a genuinely transformative prime minister. His political nemesis, Malcolm Fraser, did not return Canberra–Beijing relations to the antipathy of the pre-1972 era; instead, to the chagrin of Opposition Leader Whitlam, Fraser purloined his predecessor’s unbridled enthusiasm for the PRC. On the occasion of Mao Zedong’s demise, September 9, 1976, members of both sides of the political aisle lined up to sign the condolences book for one of the most brutal dictators in the twentieth century. In striking contrast, there were no official sympathies the year

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**Why fuss when Deng’s pro-market reforms were going to create in the PRC a sizeable middle class with liberal or democratic sensibilities that would not tolerate the dictatorship of the party?**
before at the death of Chiang Kai-shek, our erstwhile ally through the Second World War and for the first two decades of the Cold War. Our political class was enamoured with a Big Idea that had three key elements: Australia would engage with the PRC and expunge forever its (supposed) reputation as “an echo and image of Britain”; we would, through our Aussie-style pragmatism, temper the darker instincts of the Chinese Communist Party; and, finally, as a long-time ally of the US and a newly converted admirer of China, we could play the role of honest broker between Beijing and Washington.

Our rapprochement with the PRC during the Whitlam–Fraser years (1972 to 1983) was so unequivocally a “good thing” that not even the crushing of the 1978–79 Democracy Wall movement registered on Australia’s political radar. Why fuss when Deng’s pro-market reforms were going to create in the PRC a sizeable middle class with liberal or democratic sensibilities that would not tolerate the dictatorship of the party? But then, on June 4, 1989, came the Tiananmen Massacre. Prime Minister Hawke shed some tears, but within two years relations between Beijing and Canberra were back to pre-massacre normalcy; maybe even better considering the inexorable rise in bilateral business. Bob Hawke’s successor, Paul Keating, demonstrated derring-do when he agreed to meet with the Dalai Lama in 1991, although such “intrepidness” would not be repeated by an Australian prime minister until 2007. Keating, nevertheless, was in his own way more committed to generating a “special relationship” with China than Whitlam because, by the 1980s and beyond, a fourth element had been added to the original Big Idea: unbounded economic opportunity.

Keating, along with other seers of his era, wanted to position Australia as the fulcrum of an Asia-Pacific economic community, with Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, China, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea on one flank, and Canada, the US, Mexico, Peru and Chile on the other. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, especially the annual meeting of leaders, was a manifestation of that grand vision. The sky was the limit if only the “recalcitrant” leaders of these nations could be persuaded to discard their traditional paranoia and parochialism—just as Keating and a new generation of open-minded, imaginative and progressive Australians had done when they shook off outdated, backward thinking—in order to see the “big picture”.

Don Watson’s Recollections of a Bleeding Heart (2002), encapsulates Keating’s thinking at the time: “For Australia the stakes were massive—enmeshed in an open trading community like the world had never seen, the nation’s prosperity was guaran-
teed for a century.” Keating, in the wake of the Tiananmen Massacre, was not unsympathetic to human rights abuses in the PRC. His mention of them at a state dinner in Beijing prompted Premier Li Peng, “Butcher of Tiananmen”, to abruptly take his leave. Keating, during the same trip, insisted on a meeting with Chen Kaige, director of Farewell My Concubine, a Chinese film-maker then under house arrest. Keating, according to Watson, was moved by Kaige’s plight but optimistic about the capacity for “freshness and renewal in societies”. The Chinese Communist Party, presumably, would one day shake off its outdated, backward thinking.

Paul Keating was, in effect, wagering that mutual self-interest among the disparate Asia-Pacific nations would override all other factors including the customary geopolitics of the region. His vision was at once idealistic and cynical. Tim Harcourt, an economist at the UNSW Business School, captured the sentiment when he asserted in 2011 that Blainey’s “tyranny of distance” had given way to the “power of proximity”. Our geographical proximity to the burgeoning economies of Asia, with the post-Mao juggernaut leading the way, had made us a “lucky” country all over again, only this time we deserved our luck. Thanks to the market-oriented reforms of the Hawke–Keating years, which involved eradicating whatever remained of our post-war tariff regime and “opening up our country” to all comers, Australia was well positioned to “integrate” with the twenty-first-century economies of the Asia-Pacific region. This was not the dumb luck that Donald Horne had derided half-a-century earlier but the deserved good luck of progressive thinking.

At what point did Australians wake up to the harsh truth that Paul Keating’s wager had not come off? When did most Australians finally admit to themselves that inviting the PRC into our midst was “opening up our country” not only to surprising levels of investment, inexpensive mass-merchandise and an unprecedented demand for our wine, fruit and nuts, beef, wheat, barley, coal, gas, iron ore, educational institutions and the rest, but also to genuine peril? Possibly the growing evidence of concentration camps—sorry, Vocational Educational and Training Centres—in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region alerted some to Beijing’s totalitarianism. Maybe the penny dropped when Beijing began moves towards terminating its “one country, two systems” promise to Hong Kong’s so-called Special Administrative Region. Perhaps others finally grasped the irremediably malevolent nature of the Chinese Communist Party with the release in 2018-19 of the report of the Independent Tribunal on Forced Organ Harvesting in the PRC:
“The Tribunal’s members are certain—unanimously, and sure beyond reasonable doubt—that in China forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience has been practised for a substantial period of time involving a very substantial number of victims.” Then again, other Australians might have twigged when the Turnbull government, after a bipartisan parliamentary committee investigated the CCP at work in Australia, introduced legislation in December 2017 prohibiting foreign interference in our domestic politics.

Paul Keating, predictably, was not a man for turning. In November 2019, speaking at an event hosted by the Australian, Keating fulminated against everyone, from the media to our national security agencies, for failing to appreciate the legacy that visionary statesmen like him, who understood the “bigger game”, had bequeathed Australia. The bigger game, in short, was the rise and rise of the PRC and the concomitant shift of focus in the world to the Asia-Pacific region, a reality that had not been communicated properly to the people of Australia: “The Australian media has been recrante in its duty to the public in failing to present a balanced picture of the rise, legitimacy and importance of China.”

Implicit in Keating’s denunciation is the same elitist assumption that informed Donald Horne’s The Lucky Country almost six decades ago: ordinary Australians are derivative, parochial and second-rate in their worldview; an original conceptual thinker—with a little help from a speech-writer or two—is required to light the way ahead. Keating noted, almost in passing, that CCP “reformers” had been superseded by “traditionalists” in the wake of the Tiananmen Massacre (or “Tiananmen demonstrations” as Keating prefers it) but the hope of “a multi-party, Western-style democratic structure” emerging in post-Mao China was always a delusion on the part of “people ignorant of China’s long history or the recent history of the Communist Party”. Keating, borrowing from Henry Kissinger, then makes the familiar “civilisational” apologia for the imperialist-Leninist tyrants who hold sway in the PRC: “China’s political culture has deep roots and is suffused with its own distinctive philosophical concepts of life, of hierarchy and authority—a Confucian China with modern characteristics.”

Tim Harcourt, in the Year of COVID-19, was sounding a little less enthusiastic about the power of proximity in a recent article in the Australian. He admonished “the pro-China business community”, who believed that Australia “should do whatever the Chinese want as they are our biggest customers”, although he also criticised the “national security lobby” who advocated “for our national sovereignty whatever the price but don’t really know the price or want to calculate it”. Harcourt can rest assured that the likes of Andrew Forrest and the mining lobby, China experts such as Kevin Rudd and Steven Fitzgerald, tertiary education bureaucrats like the University of Queensland’s Peter Høj, representatives of the real-estate industry, BRI signatories such as Victoria’s Dan Andrews and so on ad infinitum will remind us of the price at every opportunity. The great problem for the pro-Beijing appeasers is that ordinary Australians, of whatever political persuasion, are no longer listening to them. The “bigger game”, contra Keating, is not the power of proximity but the tyranny of proximity.

If Keating attempted a similar message of appeasement today, less than a year after his November 2019 speech, he might be laughed off the stage. The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a national sentiment obsessed with “the tyranny of proximity”. This expresses itself most literally in Melbourne’s stage-four lockdown, unprecedented cross-border prohibitions, a preoccupation with social distancing and a growing desire to de-couple from the PRC. We might claim, in this context, that the paranoid belligerence displayed by the Party Politburo with regards to the coronavirus is akin to the Soviet government at the time of the 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. There is the same fear that the outside world is endangered by the perilous behaviour of a totalitarian entity that cannot do the right thing in the first place, and then reflexively engages in a cover-up and scapegoating to cover its tracks. The CCP’s first official report on the genesis of the disease, “Fighting COVID-19: China in Action”, on June 7, says it all. Nowhere in it is to be found a sense of guilt, remorse or self-criticism, only self-righteousness and triumphalism followed by an unctuous call for global harmony: “The sun will shine after a storm. As long as the world’s peoples can cherish hopes and dreams, can embrace the idea of a global community of a shared future, and can unite in pursuit of a common goal, we will be able to overcome all our current difficulties and challenges, and build a better world for all.”

It seems likely that COVID-19 has crystallised a
long-standing unease amongst ordinary Australians about binding ourselves to the trajectory of the Chinese Communist Party. China’s responsibility for and handling of the pandemic are a literal reminder of the danger that the imperialist-Leninism of the Party Politburo poses to us all. That does not mean we are parochial and narrow-minded, as Paul Keating would see us, but simply keen to avoid the fate of the citizens of the PRC. Though Keating fails to mention that the CCP was responsible for the Great Famine and three decades of economic inertia, he is not wrong to assert that a later version of the very same totalitarian organisation has lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of dire poverty. The Chinese people have been offered an “affluent life”, though not the “free life” and, given the belief of the party and its intrusion into every corner of PRC society, they understood it was not an offer to be refused. What a growing number of ordinary Australians began to fear, even before COVID-19, is that the CCP might be replicating a parallel modus operandi in Australia.

Clive Hamilton’s Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia (2018) warned us that agents of the party are bribing our politicians, co-opting our entrepreneurs, subverting our universities and insinuating themselves into everything from charity organisations to our neighbouring nations in the South Pacific. The persecution (and later expulsion) of undergraduate Drew Pavlou by the University of Queensland, in response to his 2019 campus protest against the oppressive practices of the Communist Politburo, should have been a wake-up call for young and old. One of our G8 universities was now offering its charges the choice between the “prosperous life” and the “free life”. The Morrison government, as recently as August this year, announced a billion-dollar Cyber Security Strategy to put (metaphorical) distance between the people of Australia and Beijing’s 100,000-strong Cyber Corps. In mid-August the Defence Department warned of “highly active” spies who posed an “extreme threat” to the RAN’s $900 billion shipbuilding project in the Adelaide suburb of Findon. A report from the ABC disclosed that back in 2016 Beijing opened a new consulate-general office, with ten staff—in the Adelaide suburb of Findon. It is the same site as the Overseas Chinese Association, an instrument of the CCP’s State Council, which has the purpose, according to Clive Hamilton, of “mobilising the Chinese diaspora to serve Beijing’s goals”.

Nevertheless, how many ordinary Australians, without the onset of COVID-19, might have continued to agree with Keating that criticism of Beijing constitutes little more than the “pious belching” of journalists? Certainly the scales would have fallen from the eyes of some after reading the Sydney Morning Herald report in March 2020 about the Greenland Group, a Beijing-backed property giant, which bought and stockpiled three million surgical masks, 500,000 pairs of gloves, bulk supplies of sanitisers, antibacterial wipes, thermometers, hazmat suits and other anti-coronavirus items, before shipping them off to the Socialist Motherland. It did not help that the Global Times, mouthpiece of the Party Politburo, responded with outrage and scorn to Canberra’s call in June 2020 for an independent and international inquiry into the genesis of SARS-CoV-2. The imposition of tariffs on our barley, threats to boycott Australian beef and wine, recommendations that Chinese nationals (students and tourists alike) shun “racist” Australia and so on have only confirmed the view of many that President Xi Jinping’s boast, in his 2014 address to the Australian parliament, that a “vast ocean of goodwill” existed between the PRC and Australia was a lie.

A half-century of appeasement has resulted in Communist China generating a Communist Politburo with the dream—and potential where-withal—of spawning a new rendition of Pax Sinica. Mao’s regime stood on the shoulders of the Soviet Union in order to secure its frontiers, access financial and technical assistance and, not least, attain nuclear weapons capability. Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping repeated the feat, only this time by standing on the shoulders of a very different giant. Australia, along with the West in general, has allowed itself to be robbed blind, through job relocation, technology transfer and outright theft of intellectual property, so that we might be disarmed by the mouthpiece of the Party Politburo as gum on their totalitarian boot.

Keating, as it turned out, did not even get it right when he warned Australia against seeking “Chinese strategic containment”. We can say, with the benefit of hindsight, that our goal is not merely containment but something far more sweeping. Ordinary Australians wish to be separated from the CCP by all means possible, a process which in a sense began with the barring of Huawei from our shores but, doubtless, will ultimately involve proscribing TikTok, WeChat and every other digital Trojan horse used by agents of the regime to enter and control our sovereign space. Australians, deep in the Year of COVID-19, want Xi Jinping and his CCP to be quarantined from our lives. The tyranny of their proximity has proven too much to bear.

Daryl McCann, a regular contributor, has a blog at http://darylmccann.blogspot.com.au, and tweets at @dosakamccann. He contributed “Emperor Xi Has No Clothes” to the May issue.
Reading up on Carl Linnaeus

Life is mere taxonomy,
I’m half-inclined to think,
reading up on Carl Linnaeus,
master of the plants.
We need to know where things belong;
a book mis-filed is lost forever.

By twenty-five our frames are set,
those matrices of time and space.
First-night loves are in there somewhere;
first-time trains from first-time airports;
the dawn when your first child was born ...
and deaths as well, of course.

It’s true steel drawers will bend a little;
Linnaeus got a few things wrong.
And, plainly, our additions still
outnumber our deletes—or will
until an age of vagueness
slips in, uninvited.

For some, the turning points of history
may wobble by a year;
their sequence though remains in place:
Bach before Beethoven
and then the skip to Brahms.
We mainly know where things are found:
cities, rivers, slow sierras.
Cataloguing is, we’re told,
taxonomy’s first cousin,
those wonderful anomalies
you find when wandering the stacks,
reminding us perhaps of God
who knows where every sparrow falls
but rarely seems to care.
These days, more at ease with doubt,
we dial up Wikipedia
which knows not so much less.
How well its algorithms keep
our lives and worlds together via
those cyberish taxonomies
we would not be without!

Geoff Page

Counting

One-two-three! he said quickly, his voice rising with me, the wrinkles in his corduroy sleeves straightening as his strength hoisted and swung me. There is laughter at the top of the world. And down. Skip at his side a little, let a few decent seconds pass before asking, Do it again please Dad, do it again, and can you turn me upside down this time?

We have manoeuvred a thin, slippery sheet under the person in the bed. We twist its corners around our hands, as they showed us in the hospice. My sister gently says: We’re going to move you a little in the bed now, when you’re ready. You count to three and then we’ll do it, OK, Dad?

The slightest nod, and a voice whispers from behind closed eyes.

One...

Katherine Spadaro
Modern China has always been a police state, first under Kuomintang (KMT) rule and later under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). If the KMT was unable to enforce its will in a republican China beleaguered by civil and international war, it showed its true colours in the White Terror it unleashed after retreating to Taiwan. The island spent thirty-eight years under martial law before slowly evolving into the vibrant liberal democracy it is today. Taiwan’s transition to democracy now seems natural and irreversible, but under the oppressive rule of “generalissimo” Chiang Kai-shek it was not always obvious that “free” China would ever hold a fair election.

In the early 1980s, it was even possible to believe that the CCP-ruled mainland would get there first. Mao Zedong was dead, and Maoism along with him. There was a widespread realisation that thirty years of central planning had been a disaster, and experiments in liberalisation were breaking out all over the country. As the fortieth anniversary of the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) approached, students erected a ten-metre-tall Goddess of Democracy in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. It was China’s butterfly moment.

But on June 4, 1989, the police state reasserted itself. After a brief moment of seeming indecision, the CCP elite came down firmly on the side of repression and control. The Tiananmen Square Massacre didn’t just change Beijing. It changed the whole country. It marked the transition of China from a revolutionary communist police state into, if not exactly a fascist country, then something resembling a kind of authoritarian falangism with Chinese characteristics.

Just as Francisco Franco’s Spanish falange practised a form of Christianity shorn of any Christ-like compassion, the post-Tiananmen CCP practised a form of communism that lacked any of Karl Marx’s humane sympathy for the plight of the poor. But in the last decade, communism itself has been superseded by a new state religion in China, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Its fourteen-point catechism opens with “ensuring Party leadership over all work” and closes with “exercising full and rigorous governance over the Party”. These two principles bookend an unprecedented program of techno-totalitarianism that makes Maoism look mild by comparison.

Mao Zedong aspired to a level of totalitarian rule that was beyond the bureaucratic capacity of the party he led. Xi Jinping doesn’t have to aspire. His party and state bureaucracies, acting in conjunction with state enterprises and quasi-private corporations, actively monitor all communications in China. They actually censor personal messages in real time. As a result, the private sphere has contracted to the point of singularity, and the party-state is not content to leave it there. It is developing artificial intelligence tools to penetrate even the minds of its citizens—or, at least, its netizens.

All of that is frightening, but not entirely new. What really distinguishes contemporary China’s techno-totalitarianism from all previous totalitarianisms is its overwhelming centralising tendency. Twentieth-century totalitarianisms required the mobilisation of millions of minions, and that was only made possible by vast networks of political control. China’s twenty-first-century techno-totalitarianism cuts out the middle men. It lets the central authorities set the parameters for all of society, invisibly, and with little need for informants or enforcers. The long-standing geographical and institutional structures of the CCP party-state are receding into irrelevance as Beijing works with and through big technology firms to monitor and control individuals directly from the centre. It’s a genuine innovation in the mechanics of evil, and it may give a new lease of life to the ageing CCP regime.

Labels like “fascist” and “authoritarian” are now used as generic political insults, but they once had specific meanings that arose out of particular historical contexts. Authoritarianism came first. It
was originally used by spiritualists in the second half of the nineteenth century to differentiate their own mode of spiritual self-discovery from the “authoritarianism” of organised religions based on the authority of priests and the Book. Its first political use was to criticise local governments that restricted alcohol, gambling and prostitution — what we now call the “nanny state”. It evolved to mean government by appeals to authority: of the church, of the security services, even of the expert class.

Falangism and fascism arose in Spain and Italy (respectively) as authoritarian political movements, with falangism taking its name from the Spanish word for “phalanx” and fascism from the ancient Roman fasces, the bundle of rods that symbolised strength through unity. Spanish falangism looked to the Catholic Church as a symbol of authority, while Italian fascism looked more to the security services. Although both regimes were anathema to liberal Anglo-American traditions, it is worth remembering that both were widely admired in their day. Falangism spread from Spain to much of Latin America. Fascism had a strong influence in Europe, until it was overtaken by Nazism and crushed in the Second World War.

Nazism can only be a proper noun because it was the house ideology of a particular political party that espoused a specifically German national and racial superiority. And unlike fascism and falangism, it is not properly speaking a form of authoritarianism. Authoritarian movements like fascism, falangism, Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, India’s Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and (before its late-twentieth-century reforms) the KMT seek to tie the house ideology of a particular political party to liberal Anglo-American traditions, it is worth remembering that both were widely admired in their day. Falangism spread from Spain to much of Latin America. Fascism had a strong influence in Europe, until it was overtaken by Nazism and crushed in the Second World War.

Totalitarian government, like all tyrannies, certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life, that is, without destroying, by isolating men, their political capacities. But totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man.

Strange, Arendt seems to have had a soft spot for Mao Zedong. In her second edition of Totalitarianism, she praised his 1957 speech “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People” as “the first piece of serious writing which has come out of the communist orbit since Lenin’s death”. She specifically credited him with choosing a path of “national communism” free from “totalitarian terror”. She thought him wise for recognising the tension “between the people and the government ... even under a Communist dictatorship”. But she thought that the “strong populist note in the speech” was of “even greater importance”. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was still a decade in the future.

Arendt seems never to have returned to the question of Chinese totalitarianism, but the truth is that Mao’s China was not a totalitarian state, at least not on Arendt’s terms. Arendt saw the potential for totalitarianism in China (and India), “where there is almost inexhaustible material to feed the power-accumulating and man-destroying machinery of total domination”, but she correctly ascertained that in neither country was there sufficient mass participation in politics to make totalitarianism viable. Mao did his best to foster that kind of participation in the Cultural Revolution, but it was always a youth movement and personality cult, never a universal phenomenon. In China, the family, the army, and even the CCP itself proved resistant to mass mobilisation.

Until today, Mao’s China was a revolutionary state, totalitarian perhaps in ambition but not in reality. Under Mao’s successor Deng Xiaoping, the CCP hardened into a kind of falangist authoritarian regime with communism as its secular religion, observed more in the form than in the spirit, but nonetheless above criticism and beyond questioning. Deng’s own successor, Jiang Zemin, continued in the authoritarian tradition, making room for private industry while maintaining the power of the party-state — and the sacraments of communist ritual.

But in the early 2000s, China’s new paramount leader Hu Jintao began to lay the seeds of a creeping totalitarianism, squeezing out alternative bases.
of power in business and the military. He prioritised state-owned firms and solidified state control over “national champions” in strategic industries. He also began a major program of military modernisation that transformed the People’s Liberation Army from a bloated party militia into a professional fighting force. Born in 1942, he was China’s first truly post-revolutionary leader, starting life as a working engineer before becoming a party apparatchik at the age of thirty. Hu, who like Jiang is still living in retirement, probably never intended to bring about a totalitarian transformation in China. But his professionalisation of the party-state made it possible for his successor to do just that.

Xi Jinping became China’s paramount leader at the end of 2012. He quickly consolidated the three main offices of General Secretary of the CCP, President of the PRC and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Born in 1953, his only work experience outside the Party was a teenage stint digging ditches during the Cultural Revolution. He is a CCP apparatchik par excellence. His father was a revolutionary guerrilla fighter, self-taught intellectual and economic reformer. Xi is a “prince-ling”, albeit one with a grudge from five years hard labour. He seems to have little concept of life outside the Party. He seems to be as ambitious for China’s power as he is for his own. And he has set China on the path to totalitarianism.

Totalitarianism is a loaded term, all the more so since the two archetypical totalitarians—Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin—were both mass-murderers on the scale of Genghis Khan. But Genghis Khan did not lead a totalitarian regime, and the fact that totalitarian rulers can murder with impunity does not turn all totalitarians into mass-murderers. Anyone who wants to understand China’s twenty-first-century totalitarianism has to put aside the mass-murder league tables of popular political theory. Totalitarians are not merely more murderous authoritarians. In fact, totalitarians are very unlikely to be authoritarians, since any source of authority outside the state is ultimately an impediment to the totalitarian atomisation of society. And totalitarians may not be murderers at all.

In 1971, Roland Huntsford, then the Scandinavian correspondent for the Observer, published The New Totalitarians, a book about social democracy (and specifically the Social Democratic Party) in post-war Sweden. He portrayed Sweden as a country in which the party managed all aspects of life, with its cradle-to-grave welfare system operating to obliterate any sense of individual responsibility. Those few who dared to think for themselves faced ostracism or exile. Huntsford later described The New Totalitarians as “a youthful indiscretion written with far too much emotion”, but he was in his mid-forties when the book was published, and although the book certainly is indiscreet, it is politically mature. The more recent and scholarly PC Worlds: Political Correctness and Rising Elites at the End of Hegemony by the anthropologist Jonathan Friedman corroborates many of Huntsford’s journalistic observations.

To label Swedish social democracy as “totalitarian”, one must pull back from Arendt’s condemnation of totalitarianism as an “absolute evil”, but that still leaves room for her evocative description of life under a totalitarian regime as a form of “organised loneliness”. And as in Stalin’s Russia or Hitler’s Germany, there were few autonomous bases of civil society in post-war Sweden. Even the Lutheran Church of Sweden was effectively secularised under the sway of the Social Democratic Party. The party dominated or ran all forms of educational institution, from nurseries to vocational education centres, often under government contracts. It controlled the schools, the universities and their unions. Remarkably, it has governed the country almost continuously since the Second World War, although it has rarely won as much as 50 per cent of the vote, despite controlling all of the country’s major institutions.

Similarly, the CCP under Xi Jinping is decidedly a minority party. Boasting 90 million members, it may be the world’s largest political party, but in a country where party membership is merely the first rung on the ladder of political influence, the numbers don’t mean much. No one can know for sure, but it seems unlikely that the CCP could win an open election in China, if it ever had the courage to run one. Notionally, there are eight independent parties that are part of China’s “United Front” (against what?), but they are not even window dressing. China’s very constitution proudly proclaims its status as a one-party state.

But China’s party-state is no friendly neutral like post-war Sweden. Nor is it an isolated, inward-turned, self-destructive pariah like Stalin’s Russia. It is an aggressively expanding military power that
herds disfavoured minorities into concentration camps, claims a special role protecting diaspora communities, and seeks to redraw its neighbourhood map. Today’s China is like nothing so much as late-1930s Germany. And we all know where that led.

The “reductio ad Hitlerum” is history’s most seductive rhetorical device. Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party he led are talismans for ultimate evil, allowing anything that can be linked to them to be automatically cast beyond the pale. Its casual use can cheapen an argument, and it is all too often employed simply to close down debate. As many terrible tales as history tells, there have been few true parallels with Nazi evil. Yet Nazi Germany itself was once a respected (if not entirely respectable) member of the family of nations. Upstanding politicians like Neville Chamberlain met with and dealt with Adolf Hitler—and Chamberlain wasn’t the only one, but only the most upstanding.

In the 1930s, Nazi Germany was already evil incarnate, but not yet evil in motion. All sensible people could see that Hitler’s Germany did not respect the basic norms of the European state system. Industrially, Germany’s support for “national champions” in strategic industries challenged the economic and technological status quo. The country sought to reorient European trade around a German core. It was also rapidly arming and aggressively irredentist. But as a dynamic country at the heart of Europe, representing more than a quarter of the European economy and bordering twelve European countries, Germany could not be ignored—at least, not by Europeans. Nor could it easily be isolated.

The arguments for accommodating 1930s Germany were not so different from the arguments for accommodating China today. Established hegemons should make room for “rising powers”. Germany should be allowed to take its “rightful place” in the hierarchy of nations. Germany offered a new model of “state capitalism” that was more effective than the liberal free-market approach. The Nazi party had “lifted millions” of Germans out of poverty through centrally managed economic development. The past “humiliation” of Germany left it with “legitimate grievances” that should be addressed. Germany’s growing concentration camps were a “purely domestic” issue and the rest of the world had no right to interfere in Germany’s internal affairs.

Yes, we really have heard it all before. But the parallels between 1930s Germany and today’s China don’t end there. In international affairs, China’s blustery rhetoric about reunification with Taiwan echoes Germany’s demands for Anschluss with Austria. China’s creeping occupation of the South China Sea recalls Germany’s unilateral remilitarisation of the Rhineland. China’s claims to speak for (and pretence of defending) all people of Chinese ancestry everywhere in the world resemble 1930s pan-Germanism. Hong Kong is eerily reminiscent of Danzig.

In short, China’s totalitarian expansionism is nothing new. But the technology that underpins it is. Xi Jinping has tools at his disposal that Adolf Hitler could only have dreamed of. In the 1930s, George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four was still a decade in the future, and even Orwell didn’t envision the real-time monitoring and censorship of all private communications. Orwell’s Ministry of Truth repeatedly rewrote history; Xi’s algorithms erase it entirely.

Or prevent it from happening in the first place. Today’s China is a continuously-edited present where proscribed words disappear from the virtual page even as they are typed and proscribed thoughts are difficult to imagine because they can never be expressed. Contemporary China’s techno-totalitarianism is increasingly integrated and all-encompassing—and increasingly centralised. Orwell’s twentieth-century Big Brother could only operate through the party, and as a personification of it. Today’s information technology allows China’s leadership to circumvent the party, governing individuals directly through their mobile phones.

As in other totalitarian states, China’s one party is embedded in all aspects of civil (and, in China’s case, military) society. All trade unions are CCP trade unions; all schools and universities have CCP oversight committees; even private companies are beholden to the CCP. Party-society integration isn’t just at the top level: within each organisation, party committees exist within every department. The CCP is everywhere.

Except it isn’t. Most party committees rarely meet, or meet only for tea and cakes. Visit any Chinese university and they will show you the locked door behind which lies the dusty party room. The vaunted embeddedness of the party in all institutions is a thing of the past. The party has moved online.

Techno-totalitarianism gives the leaders of China’s party-state inside access to and ultimate control over everyone’s bank accounts, mobile payments and social media accounts. In a country where nearly all transactions are made on mobile phones (everything from booking a ride to buying vegetables from a street vendor), the government’s ability to control your phone is equivalent to the power of house arrest. China has also invested heavily in facial recognition technology, allowing mass public
surveillance of the kind used for policing in London to be tied to individual identities.

When Wuhan Central Hospital’s Dr Li Wenliang was arrested for warning colleagues about the novel coronavirus, he wasn’t turned in by a colleague-turned-informant. He was betrayed by his WeChat account—and the accounts of others who spread screenshots of his messages. In his case, the party-state’s monitoring was relatively unsophisticated: his name was on the images being posted to social media. But others routinely report their messages being edited in real-time as they type them. There is no human agency behind that kind of repression; it’s an entirely electronic process. But there is a human principal. His name is Xi Jinping.

Compared to earlier party-state totalitarianisms, China’s techno-totalitarianism is extraordinarily centralised. There is no role for local party secretaries in designing the algorithms that WeChat uses to suppress political speech. All of the relevant strings can be pulled directly from Beijing. The Chinese government has named at least fifteen private companies as artificial intelligence “national champions” that report directly to the national government, wherever their home offices may be. These companies include well-known brands like Huawei, Alibaba, Baidu and Tencent (owner of WeChat), as well as more specialised operators like Hikvision (surveillance systems), Megvii (facial recognition), Yitu (image processing) and Unigroup (chip design). Assigned the joint mission of completing the surveillance state, they certainly don’t have to worry about local party committees interfering with their research.

The Chinese word for China, Zhongguo, poetically translated as “Middle Kingdom”, more literally translates as “Central State”. It reflects China’s self-conception of lying at the centre of the world. Throughout most of history, the Central State has been one of the world’s most decentralised. China has often been more a unified cultural zone than a unified political entity, and warlordism has been a recurring feature of the dynastic cycle. Authors have always highlighted the challenge of governing the “vast” and “varied” country that is China. Its mountains are proverbially high, and its emperor is proverbially far away.

Not any more. The internet brought the emperor into people’s offices, and the mobile phone has brought him into their pockets. These days, the emperor isn’t even a click away. People don’t have to raise a petition to attract the ear of the emperor, because the emperor is already listening. And watching. And following. And always ensuring that no one ever gets the chance to point out that the emperor is wearing no clothes. Anyone who still believes that China might once again break down and fracture into several warring states, think again. Change will come to China, eventually, but when it does, it will radiate out from the centre. It may even lead to the demise of the naked emperor, Xi Jinping. But it certainly won’t take him by surprise.

Salvatore Babones is The Philistine.
ROSS TERRILL

A Young Chinese Businessman

A Chinese friend in his thirties, Chen Lijun, with chiselled features and a ready smile, told me a life story that illuminates China’s twilight socioeconomic condition.

He recently left a government post in Beijing for a small private data-processing start-up called Horizon. His previous job at Standard Press, a large publisher deeply entangled with the communist state, paid 6000 yuan (about A$100) a month. Now, as general manager of Horizon, he gets 20,000 yuan a month. He manages twenty-three staff, all younger than himself, works long hours, loves the simple dynamics, appreciates the pay, and a degree of freedom to speak out to me.

When we talked over coffee at Jianguo Hotel east of Tiananmen Square, I could see Chen’s major reason for switching was political and philosophical. At Standard Press, he sensed “clouds ahead” in the publishing industry. Xi Jinping’s control was growing tighter. The newly arrived president of the press was “not open to new ideas” and “not a man of books”.

The “bogey of thirty-five” is familiar to all Chinese. Turning thirty-five is a special moment. “Choice narrows. People often get fixed, thereafter, on one road forever. If you want better, change by thirty-five.” Chen paused. “Otherwise, at thirty-five if you haven’t climbed, you’re stuck.” Had he stayed at Standard Press, his life in ten or fifteen years would be dull and unfree. “Not-living-not-dying”, he called it.

Chen’s boss in the acquisitions section at Standard Press said, “You’re good and I need you. But if you must leave, don’t go to a small experimental outfit. Choose a big state-owned company. Xi Jinping will give more resources to this type.” Chen laughed. “That was one thing she got right—and Xi got wrong!”

“It’s different from us,” he says of the “kids” under him at Horizon (all in their early twenties). “They seek happiness more than success. If they don’t make enough money, they move. If they get a pile of savings, that’s not a culmination. Self-fulfilment is the culmination. They crave a car, they want to see Tibet, to go to Australia.”

His little firm Horizon may succeed in China’s hybrid system of Leninism above (government) and social-Confucianism below (citizens’ private and chosen economic life). Xi and other top leftists think private firms are useful to China only for a while, then the government will absorb them for the glory of the state and success for the China Dream. Reformers like Premier Li Keqiang argue that small units like Horizon are good for hybrid China now and tomorrow.

Chen’s father is a farmer and carpenter in Shandong Province. For him, under Mao, going beyond high school to university was impossible. “But my dad is smart. While still at primary school he helped teachers beautify their houses. Jesus was a carpenter, too, you know.” Chen never discusses politics or large issues with his father. But father sent son to school and college. “Little guidance but much encouragement,” Chen summed up. He entered a small college at Yantai, in China’s apple country in Shandong.

Chen brought two Western friends home to meet his family and other villagers. “Canadian classmates. Everyone stared at my foreign friends as if they were two monkeys from the zoo. I was admired for bringing the first-ever foreigners to our village. My father was so proud.” The parents still work hard on the farm, he says, “while I have a life as a modern man”. The parents still work hard on the farm, he says, “while I have a life as a modern man”. They never mention the Cultural Revolution, which held them back, to their son. Nor the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, when Chen was in second grade.

Graduating in 2008 from a second school, Minorities University in Beijing, he was hired by Standard Press, which was then expanding. Publishing suited him because of his high marks in
exams for literature. “I learned English like crazy, reading English stuff every day by the lake at the university.”

After six months working in acquisitions and marketing, Chen rose to promoting Standard Press on visits to various provinces. His boss could see Chen had the outgoing personality, eager and always smiling, for such PR work.

But as Xi Jinping tightened the CCP’s grip on culture, Chen outgrew Standard Press. A new chief, Tan Bingzhang, on arrival wrote an announcement on Weibo (China’s Twitter), that he’d been appointed president of Standard Press. “In Chinese culture, you don’t do that,” Chen said with a grimace. “Not nice. Best keep things modest. Leave others to publicise it.”

Recently, Chen visited Tan to get a signature on his earlier quit form from Standard that listed his new job at Horizon as “general manager”. Said Tan, “Huh, just like me, general manager, equal with me.”

Chen demurred respectfully. “But my company is very little and your company is very big.” Chen, under cover of anonymity, added to me: “I did not say what was in my heart—that Tan was not a true leader of a publisher, just a political man. Trying to put on a good face for some future promotion elsewhere, maybe in the Ministry of Education.”

“Horizon might grow large,” I said to Chen, “just like Standard Press.”

He replied: “Companies like ours are a threat to the CCP’s China. Essential for China, but dangerous to the CCP. We are OK for now, but the next two years will make or break us.”

Chen says it’s risky for a small private company to grow big. “Our party-state will tax and regulate it back to small. Argument with the government over tax is hopeless. You just have to hand the money over—55 per cent of revenue, 3 per cent for this, 6 per cent for that. More and more. Didn’t Jesus say, Those who have, should give?” Chen smiled at his paraphrase.

“You cannot fake figures, but our financial people try to do things, you know, that are best for our little business.” I think Chen knows Horizon’s insecurity, but has the appetite to struggle for its future, and for China’s and his little son’s.

If Chen had to guess, how many years until China has a woman president, or a businessman president, or religious believer president? “We had a female Empress in the Tang Dynasty”—618 to 907 AD—“that’s why I admire the Tang very much.”

Long pause. “But I would say 100 years. Only if the Party broke down. With other parties arising, or political fighting. Still, the CCP has helped women in some ways.”

“A businessman president?”

“Like Trump in America? Comparing US and China, I see flexibility in the West’s systems that can bring a Trump, but in China, seldom such flexibility.”

“But you have Jack Ma” (the wizard of Alibaba). “Ma would never dare to stand up and declare an ambition to lead China. And young people would not join him—unless they had a lot of money. Remember, Chinese schools today teach a lot of political propaganda, even to primary pupils.”

I said some Chinese parents tell me they no longer trust the government to produce safe baby food and medicine for their kids. Better to buy from New Zealand or Australia. That issue could escalate from private to political. Chen frowned: “Yes. That’s why the CCP desperately tries to control social media, to prevent people escalating it up to a political issue.”

“Do you feel nostalgia or desire for the countryside?”

“Yes, when I’m worried I feel like I should go back to the Shandong countryside. Probably, I’ll go back when I retire.”

What would Chen like his son, now five, to grow up to do? “Choose something he loves. But I would be pleased if it’s related to the arts, which are a great tool for communication. Music, for instance, speaks internationally, regardless of language. In painting or music, my son could make use of a realm of freedom. Maybe, travel from country to country, Australia, Brazil, see the whole world.” Sounds like the mentality of Chen’s “kids” at Horizon.


Frank Mount

The Secret Society

Here are a few points and observations readers might like to consider during discussions about China. They arose out of a conversation I had in Hong Kong thirty years ago with the Hungarian Laszlo Ladany SJ, then generally regarded as the doyen of all China-watchers. A fascinating man and a powerful intellect, he had produced for over
thirty years a weekly newsletter called China News Analysis based mainly on his constant listening to radio broadcasts across the closed Communist China—nothing but impeccable China sources. China-watchers throughout the world read him religiously and quoted him, almost always without attribution, not that that ever worried him. More importantly, he was one of the few, if not the only, observer to predict the Cultural Revolution.

I asked him over a memorable lunch in one of the obscure and exquisite little restaurants he often took me to, “Who runs China today?” I meant what individual or faction at that time. However, he took it more broadly and said in effect the following. It’s the Communist Party of course, but it is a different sort of Communist Party from those in the West—Italy, France or Australia. The Chinese Communist Party, while Marxist, is really another Chinese secret society like the Shanghai Green Gang that ran China under Chiang Kai-shek, and many others in China and Japan. It operates like these underworld gangs through extortion, bribery, murder and smuggling. And as with these gangs, it is next to impossible to know what is happening inside the Communist Party. For some periods it has been impossible even to know who the Party leaders were. Ladany reminded me that when Mao Zedong died in September 1976 and was succeeded by Hua Guofeng, Henry Kissinger had said that the Americans knew nothing about Hua, not even where he lived.

Another observation Ladany made was that during the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966, all education at all levels in all institutions, including schools, universities, museums and libraries, closed for ten years. Millions of books were destroyed. Teachers were run out of town, as was anyone wearing spectacles to read. This period, he said, had produced a generation or two of illiterates, and he wondered what impact that might have in the future.

Well, we might now know. The current President for life, Xi Jinping, was fourteen years old in 1966 and twenty-four years old in 1976. In these formative years, the only education he would have received would have been in Marxist-Leninist theory and praxis and Mao Zedong Thought during Communist Party meetings and seminars. Many of those who surround him today would have had similar experiences.

Ten years ago, I wrote about Ladany’s comments in the book Wrestling with Asia: A Memoir (Connor Court). But fifty years ago, I was among a number of senior associates in Australia, the US and the Asia-Pacific region, including Indonesia, Singapore and Japan who came together in the Pacific Institute and warned of the imminent rise of an aggressive and expansionist Communist China and the need for Australia and its allies to take action to protect the strategic sea lanes running though Indonesia and the South China Sea. Fortunately, action in this regard has been under way for some years now, thanks mainly to the US, Australia, Japan, India and others. Of particular interest and value has been the recent strategic agreement between Indonesia and India to build a major naval base near their joint maritime border at the western end of the Malacca Strait and India’s even more recent agreement to form a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Australia. Along with that, we can assume, surely, that the Five Power Defence Arrangements of the UK, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and New Zealand have not been idle in this matter—and that French nuclear naval power will now remain in the Pacific.

It will be interesting to observe how Xi Jinping’s totalitarian clampdown on China’s society, demanding that everyone adhere to and practise Maoism, fares as it conflicts with the aspirations of the new educated, prosperous and innovative middle classes, who are the beneficiaries of modern globalisation and trade liberalisation. We await to see what effect this might have, not only on the national economy, but on Xi’s future and his stated ultimate ambition of world domination within a few decades.

Frank Mount was Secretary of the Pacific Institute from 1967 to 1978, and later worked as an intelligence analyst for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He edited Asia Pacific Report from 1997 to 2007.
Leaving the re-opened London Library (masks compulsory throughout, all borrowed books subject to sterilisation) in the late afternoon I walk through a West End so desolate it could be the set for an apocalyptic film. All but a handful of its scores of cafes, restaurants and drinking places have closed, many of them permanently. Not only are there no tourists or theatregoers, but most of the businesspeople have not come back, despite the end of lockdown. The staff in the Jermyn Street gentlemen’s shirtmakers, bootmakers and hairdressers try not to look like men and women contemplating unemployment and poverty.

Other, more residential quarters of the capital have returned to busyness. But even on the busiest high streets there are bleak stretches of boarded-up shops and restaurants. Things were not good on the high street even before COVID-19. High rates—the business-destroying property taxes on which the English exchequer excessively relies—high rents, internet shopping, and the drift away from communal entertainment had all taken their toll. The lockdown turned the possible demise of thousands of enterprises into certainties. For most people, or at least most people over thirty-five, it is sad to see the end of so many pubs, butchers’ shops, newsagents, cinemas, grocery stores and the abundant cheerful cafes that enlivened British life and improved British coffee-drinking taste after the 1980s. For others, especially the sort of person who sees all technological or internet-related change as an unqualified good, or who prefers to communicate or be entertained while physically alone, none of this seems like a great loss.

Among the British political and journalistic class there seems to be remarkably little concern about the economic impact of the lockdown, the millions of jobs that have already been lost, or the likely political and psychological impact of mass unemployment and impoverishment.

It was all too typical when, at the end of August, the Guardian columnist Marina Hyde attacked the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, for, in her version of events, “giving us a new mantra: Leave home. Forget the NHS. Save Prêt”. She was referring to the Prêt à Manger sandwich chain, which a few days before had announced the closure of dozens of stores and the cutting of 3000 jobs. This had prompted a Daily Telegraph story saying that the Prime Minister was worried about the reluctance of Britons to go back to their workplaces in the wake of the lockdown. (More than 50 per cent of British office workers are still “working from home” compared to fewer than 20 per cent of German office workers.)

The Prime Minister, it is fair to say, has chosen to respond to the Covid crisis with slogans. “Stay at home; protect the NHS; save lives” was the first; the most recent is “Hands/Face/Space”. However, he has expressed little concern in public about what seems to be a looming economic and financial catastrophe.

This is perhaps not surprising. Like many members of the legion of Guardian columnists and BBC broadcasters who fiercely condemn anyone who expresses worry about the economy as “putting profits before human lives”, he belongs to that small but influential part of the population for whom money has never been a real worry, or whose limited experience of life renders them unable to sympathise with the concerns of people who work for or own private businesses.

That so much of the London political and media elite feels something akin to aristocratic disdain for the fortunes of shopkeepers and their ilk is perhaps understandable. After all, you would be hard pressed to find institutions in the UK in which nepotism and hereditary opportunity are more common than in the BBC, the political parties, and even (or especially) the theatre with its actors’ dynasties.

A surprising proportion of Britain’s middle-class opinion-formers and policy-makers seem to be privileged in another way, one that has only become apparent thanks to the crisis. They seem to have led lives remarkably untouched by serious illness or even the threat of it. In any case they demonstrate minimal awareness of the annual destruction wrought
in this country by various cancers, by influenza and other illnesses, let alone the enormous death toll inflicted by malaria and other epidemic diseases in the developing world. Such blessed ignorance would help explain the decision that the British state should essentially treat COVID-19 as the only serious biological threat to human life and health.

For during the lockdown, the National Health Service essentially stopped testing for any and all other illnesses besides COVID-19—even as it struggled to set up an adequate testing regime for the new virus. Scores of thousands of people were not given and have not been given the mammograms, colonoscopies and cervical smears they were due, despite the fact that entire hospitals lay empty for months, waiting for an avalanche of Covid patients that never arrived. Many of these untested people will lose their lives to cancers that would have been treatable if caught in time. You could make a strong argument that they were effectively sentenced to death by politicians, administrators and opinion-formers in a state of collective panic intensified by social media.

This is not to say that COVID-19 is not a frightening, devastating disease, but to question the sometimes bizarre ways in which the British state has responded to it. As its critics have pointed out, the government has dramatically changed its tack on lockdowns, testing regimes and quarantines several times. This would be understandable and indeed desirable if it were primarily in response to changed circumstances or new understandings of the virus and the best ways to prevent and treat it. More often, the government’s U-turns seem to have been prompted by waves of outrage on Twitter. Cabinet members like Health Minister Matthew “Panicking Matt” Hancock and their advisers are not just obsessed with Twitter but, like so many journalists today, confuse its surges of anger and approval with actual public opinion. As one long-time observer of Westminster pointed out, this is rather like a Prime Minister sending his ministers to Hyde Park’s Speakers’ Corner as a way of gauging the public’s response to his policies.

No one has yet explained one of the great mysteries of the British response to COVID-19: why during March, April and May the UK was the only country in the world to maintain a normal international airport regime, as if the crisis were not happening. Not only were there no restrictions on flights from China, Iran, Austria and other early hotspots, but no monitoring of any kind. Britons returning on flights from northern Italy in March and April, some of whom had actually had COVID-19, told the newspapers how astonished they were that there were no officials taking down names and contact details to aid in tracing people who might be importing the illness. This was while countries like Singapore and Taiwan with experience of SARS were testing and staying in touch with all new arrivals.

According to one Westminster theory, there was a political reason for the UK’s failure to put in place even the most basic record-keeping measures at a time when they might have made an enormous difference to the medical authorities—and to Britain’s lamentable early efforts to control the epidemic. If passengers arriving on flights from Italy and other hotspots were to be registered or interviewed, it would have required co-operation between the Ministry of Health, the Home Office (whose Border Force runs passport control and customs) and the Ministry of Transport. But Matthew Hancock, Priti Patel and Grant Shapps, the heads of their departments, and the civil servants beneath them, were incapable or unwilling to work together. Boris Johnson lacked the leadership or inclination to force them to do so. So the kinds of monitoring regime found in every other developed country—and many developing countries—was never even attempted. Instead, in July, months after it would have made sense to do so, the Johnson government suddenly began imposing strict quarantine restrictions on international passengers, regardless of whether they had been recently tested or were flying in from countries with low infection rates.

During lockdown most people obeyed the rules, even the silly ones that made a crime out of public sun-bathing and prompted officious police to decide that certain food products like Easter eggs did not count as essential items. When people did kick against the traces it was often in strange, small rebellions, like speeding in their cars through empty streets, or riding their bicycles on paths intended for pedestrians only.

Despite all the political conflicts over Brexit and other issues in recent years, there was a kind of pulling together here that was apparently not possible in the United States. There weren’t many opportunities to see or talk to other people, but when you did, say in the supermarket or at the pharmacy, there was often friendliness, an openness and sense of shared experience that was moving and gratifying.
It was clear that most people, of all backgrounds, trusted the government to do its best. They put their faith in the National Health Service—an object of worship in much of British society—and in official agencies such as Public Health England, which in theory is the equivalent of America’s Centers for Disease Control and Germany’s Robert Koch Institute. Unfortunately, for most its existence, the main function of the PHE has been to put out warnings against excessive drinking and other low-intensity public health threats. Its staff were not up to the challenge of dealing with a major epidemic, as events soon showed.

For instance, when it became obvious that Britain needed to establish a large-scale Covid testing regime as quickly as possible, PHE’s leaders insisted that only they be allowed to carry out such tests, even though PHE’s own testing centre was still under construction, and various universities and private laboratories already had the facilities to do it. This was not just a matter of an agency trying to defend its turf against all comers, there was also a political-ideological element. Like many health officials in the UK, PHE’s executives were apparently obsessed with the idea that the Tory government could use the Covid crisis as a means of increasing the privatisation of healthcare. It often seemed as if preventing such a horror was a higher priority for PHE’s bosses than fighting the pandemic, and the UK testing regime was and continues to be shambolic and inadequate.

To be fair, the entire British civil service, not just PHE, is not what it used to be. Among other handicaps, the British state in general is now highly resistant to any kind of public policy that might require public employees to have direct, non-virtual contact with the public or to spend time outdoors on foot. This is most obvious in British policing, but even the census is now carried out using small samples and computer models rather than having officials go from house to house. So it is no surprise that British governments did not consider Covid strategies that would require large numbers of workers to go knocking on doors and asking people about their movements or their symptoms.

As autumn approaches, we seem to be on the verge of another lockdown, although it is unlikely to be nearly as severe as those imposed in countries like Spain and parts of Australia. It is not clear that the public will be as amenable to restriction as it was during the spring and early summer. It does not help that, like governments elsewhere early in the crisis, that of the UK resorted to what seemed to be necessary or beneficial untruths for the public good. For instance, in order to ensure that hospitals had sufficient protective equipment, the public was repeatedly told that it should not seek to obtain masks, because masks were ineffective at preventing the spread of the disease. A few months later, masks were made compulsory on public transport, in airports and other public places. Most of us will wear our masks when we ride public transport or go out to the shops—assuming that the stores are still open—in the hope that the masks will protect others and ourselves. But it may take a while before those officials, scientists and doctors who lied (for what they considered to be the best of reasons) regain our trust, and that could be dangerous for everyone.

Jonathan Foreman is a journalist based in London. His previous London Letter appeared in the April issue.

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Anzac biscuits

I ate the last biscuit
and the plastic container
looked at me sadly
while I made the disclaimer:
they would have gone stale
because he is gone.
I only bought them for him
so no more from now on.

No more music, dances,
his hand on my breast,
tearlessly I watched him leave,
exchange prison for rest.

No more Anzac biscuits,
and I finished the wine,
but I kept his old blanket
that smells faintly of pine.

Mocco Wollert
A B C
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
—e. e. cummings

Apple
Blossoms
Cascade
Down
Effortlessly: tumbling downwards
(when we shake
the branches
in the spring)

Falling
Gently (into my girlfriend's
open arms)

Heaps (of them falling)
Into (her open)
Joyful (arms)
Killing (seriousness,
and any hope of
political
discussion;

Laughing
Merrily (we wander over to

N-O-where in
Particular;

Quietly
Repeating
(Soft nothings:
all these white petals)
slipping,
Tumbling (floating, oh!
so sweetly, some of them
Upside
) down! )

Verily (, my love, I
Would (spell out my love for you in all the letters
of the alphabet)
I would
X-ray (straight into
Your (heart to find, I hope)
Zero (resistance:
you, yielding to my embrace
I, now buried in your arms … )

Louis Groarke
It was a clear and balmy night when the first stirrings of revolt began. It was the sort of night when dreams come true and the leaves fall like dandruff from the bullshit trees. This is what happened.

All the people in Australia who thought Chris Lilley’s shows were hilarious went outside, waved Australian flags in the air and flashed torches into the night sky. They didn’t know how else to protest at the poor treatment of this great Aussie comedian. Then all the people who loved *Gone with the Wind* and believed it to be a fine example of a particular movie genre also went outside to wave and flash. This was after they’d bought copies of the book for all their children, grandchildren, friends and neighbours, and downloaded the movie before it was removed from public viewing. Australians are a little perverse that way and don’t like being pissed on by the irrational Left. They were soon joined by thousands of *Fawlty Towers* fans laughing and yelling, “Don’t mention the war”, while goose-stepping about doing Nazi salutes and making Hitler moustaches. The humourless Cancel Culture had already had a bash at their Basil and they weren’t going to allow that to happen again.

Next, all those who thought that pulling down statues and changing place names is actually pretty silly, doesn’t change history, and has a creepy 1984 feel about it, joined the throng. A very large group (who had mistakenly believed that taking a knee was a new and deeply spiritual Tai Chi move) suddenly realised that it was an imported American pose indicating subservience and herd mentality. They leaped up in embarrassment (hoping that no one had noticed them making such wankers of themselves) and scurried outside with their torches. This group included almost all sports teams in the country, and many indoctrinated school children. Oldies whose wonky knees didn’t bend as well as they used to do were glad to see the end of this particularly ridiculous and craven behaviour.

Those cranky BLM marchers learnt to read and do sums, and discovered that the number of Aborigines dying in custody is decreasing, that most black deaths are caused by other blacks and that black people go to jail because they (wait for it!) break the law. They also learnt that we have never had slaves in Australia. How good was that! So they went out to wave flags and flash torches because they were just so happy to have expanded their brains.

Another mob, those who thought Australian universities should exist primarily to educate Australians, streamed out of their homes to wave in solidarity with hundreds of Drew Pavlou and Peter Ridd supporters. A huge crowd of people who had sworn never to buy anything made in China ever again arrived, along with another smaller crowd who were trying really hard to buy only goods made in Australia. Ever so many people who thought it was perfectly fine and normal for boys to be boys and girls to be girls came rushing out in gay abandon. They were fed up with trying to remember what gender fluidity, diversity, cis-gender and binary meant, which damn toilet they should use and what all those irritating capital letters stood for.

There was a mighty roar of approval as hundreds of senior folk, mostly women, toddled out of nursing homes with Australian flags fluttering proudly from their Zimmer frames, proclaiming in impeccable and grammatically correct English, “We are the teachers who know how to teach. We know about phonics and times tables and we will not be silent for another minute! This country has produced illiterate, innumerate children for years. Shame on you all! Tonight we reclaim the classroom, so give us your devices, children, take your grubby little hands out of your pockets, stand up straight and get used to not being special!”

A relatively new group, the Enemies of the ABC (previously Friends of the ABC) grabbed their flags and torches and climbed to the top of high buildings and hills to protest about the bias and insulting nonsense being produced by our national broadcaster. This had resulted in the most frequently
Forces of Darkness are circling. You've been stitched up, that the Constitution is under threat. You know in “treaties”, “recognition”, and “sovereignty”, you know Parliament”, “race-based constitutional distinctions”, hear words like “constitutionally enshrined voice to which is what’s going on at present. As soon as you kindly to barrow-pushers trying to muck it up, the document. It has served us well. We don’t take put on little red nappies. Gosh they in the night sky. Some of them even trying to find the emu that wasn’t white beards, and cavorted about tatious red headbands and untidy donned long white wigs with osten-tatious red headbands and untidy white beards, and cavorted about trying to find the emu that wasn’t in the night sky. Some of them even put on little red nappies. Gosh they were having fun! It was such a hoot.

Our Constitution is a serious document. It has served us well. We don’t take kindly to barrow-pushers trying to muck it up, which is what’s going on at present. As soon as you hear words like “constitutionally enshrined voice to Parliament”, “race-based constitutional distinctions”, “treaties”, “recognition”, and “sovereignty”, you know that our Constitution is under threat. You know in your heart that we’re getting stitched up, that the Forces of Darkness are circling.

The problem with our Constitution is that it’s not sexy. It’s serviceable and boring and just lies about quietly doing the job it’s meant to do. As long as certain High Court judges don’t get ideas above their station, our Constitution works a treat. It’s like an old pair of comfy shoes that you can trust not to pinch your bunions. But nobody hands out money to protect it. No lobby groups have Constitution Week (at public expense) and dance about in face paint praising Griffith, Kingston and Clark. You’ve never heard of them? I rest my case. Nobody wanders the country garnering votes for it as occurs with that (again publicly funded) mob of a particular (but not always obvious) shade who want to change it so that they get special treatment over and above everyone else’s treatment. I would say that was a teensy bit racist, wouldn’t you?

Many Australians who just wanted our Constitution bloody well left alone charged out of their homes waving flags and flashing torches with huge delight because at long last they had an opportunity to be noticed! They definitely didn’t want a dodgy, free-choice postal vote on the subject of changing the Constitution, as had occurred with the same-sex-marriage “debate” (the plebiscite that wasn’t). Our Constitution is far too important for that.

Finally a truly miraculous event occurred. It was absolutely unprecedented. Australian Aborigines of every hue and nationality suddenly realised how fortunate they were to be getting twice as much money per head as ordinary white people. They also decided that they were jolly lucky because good old Captain Cook put up the British flag before any of those other more ratbaggy countries claimed us. I will not mention their names here in case I am seen to be gloating or overly nationalistic. However, I will point out in passing, just for interest, that the French, Spanish and Dutch did have slaves. You might care to remember that.

Best of all, the ever-increasing number of people who claimed Aboriginality decided that 250 years of intergenerational trauma (does anyone actually know what that is?) and victim-playing was rather excessive and maybe it was time to get a life and move on. They even admitted that the puffing-smoke-welcome thingy began as a bit of a joke but the white folk liked it so much nobody was game enough to tell them it was a furphy.

They even admitted that the puffing-smoke-welcome thingy began as a bit of a joke but the white folk liked it so much nobody was game enough to tell them it was a furphy.
trappings that had been so cruelly foisted upon them. These trappings include electricity, schools, shops, welfare, doctors, clothes, houses, wheels, saucepans, Netflix … It’s a long list so I won’t bore you. Suffice to say that these dissenters were never seen again. (I did hear that some sneaked back when they ran out of petrol, their Nikes fell apart and their phones went flat, but we shall ignore that as racist gossip.)

In Canberra, the seat of government, the politicians became alarmed at the sight of so many of their constituents gathering all at once, but knew immediately what had to be done. (It wasn’t exactly brain surgery, even for the Greens polities.) They undertook some bold and long-awaited steps. They reclaimed Darwin Port, plus all those dairy farms that were producing baby formula for Chinese babies, several electricity companies that should never have left Australian hands, and a few other bits and bobs like farmland and water rights. They just did it in a brilliant and decisive display of strength. There were no ifs or buts! They even ripped up Dingbat Dan’s Belt and Road agreement. Rip, rip! Just like that! Some lawyers and a couple of chappies called Kev and Bob complained a bit but their whining couldn’t be heard above the joyous, approving cheers of the torch-flashers. Dingbat Dan was already serving a long stretch in the naughty corner.

Those who thought multiculturalism was a failed and divisive ideology (who had met secretly for fear of being cancelled or disappeared), were overjoyed to become part of the gathering. Multiculturalism had been the brainchild of Al and nurtured by Gough, and now a whole industry sucks on its bounteous teat. Dutiful Australian citizens had initially tried hard to believe in multiculturalism, even though nobody had asked them if they wanted it in the first place. Nowadays though, behind closed doors and out of the hearing of the Race Police, they whispered rude things about it. They believe immigrants should assimilate, speak English and share our Western values. Not much to ask really.

Next, the Jacinta Price Fan Club came out in force to cheer for their brave and fabulous heroine, followed by the Populate and Perish Group who wanted a reasoned population policy from the government. Last but not least, all those who were proud of being Australians put extra-powerful new batteries in their torches and were soon flashing with the best of them. This huge group included all who had found a home here when their own homes had been destroyed by war or famine or other horrors and who believed that this is a fine, peaceful and democratic country in which to live. The farmers, the labourers, the thinkers and creators, those who made things and those who fixed things, the supporters of Anzac Day and Australia Day, the nurses and carers, the police, ambos and fireys, and the military who put their lives on the line for our country were there, too—all who were givers not takers, lovers not haters.

But then, oh dear me, many of the Chris Lilley supporters said that they were also Enemies of the ABC and as well, some belonged to the Leave our Statues Standing Group and thought Drew Pavlou and James Cook were top blokes. They wondered if it were okay to wave five bright torches. And everyone searched their hearts for the good old Aussie common sense that had become a little lost in the tsunami of leftie bullshit that had covered Australia of late, like an evil slime of ignorance and stupidity. They decided that five (or even more) torches were perfectly fine because let’s face it, when the chips are down and the enemy is at the gate, the more torches lighting up the darkness the better.

Not long after that problem was sorted another arose. The torch and flag wavers were getting hungry, especially the little kids. This problem was easily solved though. Members of the Country Women’s Association came out of hiding all across the country. They’d been working underground since being declared illegal when they’d dared to suggest that there was only one female sex and refused to change their name to Country Alphabet People’s Association. They put on their pinnies and, with alacrity and love, produced trays and trays of lamingtons and fairy bread. The littlies flashing torches had never seen these delicacies, as they had been banned as homophobic and racist. Lamingtons, being chocolate coated and then covered in coconut, are only too obviously representative of white supremacy. Fairy bread is apparently an insult to all fairies, wingless or otherwise.

The sheer, unmitigated boldness of the CWA ladies inspired the manager of the Colonial Brewery over in the west to roll out barrels of beer for the thirsty, and in South Australia, Coopers Brewery followed suit much to the delight of its many supporters. The thirsty folk of the Northern Territory didn’t need an excuse to have a beer and were already handing out stubbies in freshly printed stubby holders that said “F*** BLM”, “I ♥ Pauline and Barra Fishing”, and “All Lives Matter Mate But Mine Matters Most”. Territorians are such a droll lot!

Fish-and-chip-shop owners across the country fried up huge batches of Chiko Rolls, a much-loved Australian delicacy now only sold secretly under the counter since the name might possibly offend somebody somewhere in some other country. Next, some really pro-active types raided the government warehouses in every town, where the
confiscated illicit food was stored. They handed out boxes of Wagon Wheel biscuits (which had disturbing colonial connotations) and Scotch Fingers (which were just plain mean to the Scots) and Golden Gaytime ice-creams (which offended the wingless fairy people). They distributed Coco Pops and Eskimo Pies, Chicos and Red Skins. They found bags and bags of black and brown jelly babies that the Food Police had (with much effort) removed from general circulation. Down low on the back shelves were boxes of Golliwog biscuits that had been confiscated in the first wave of Food Cleansing. The little kiddies munching happily into these choccy bickies had no idea that they were all disgusting racist pigs. Nobody had told them. They just thought they were little kids eating slightly stale choccy bickies. Next the people from the last cheese factories not owned by foreigners made thousands of toasties dripping with delicious Coon cheese. From Cape York to Tasmania’s South East Cape, from Byron Bay to Steep Point in Western Australia, the barbies were fired up and sizzling Aussie steaks and sausages were handed out together with lashings of Australian-made tomato sauce. It was the biggest party ever! The flag waving and torch flashing continued with fresh vigour.

Soon, so many were waving that the movement and light could be seen from space. Australia was alive and sparkling with wonderfulness! The astronauts in the space shuttle sent photos of this amazing phenomenon back to earth. And then, oh joy, oh bliss, the wokey mob saw that they were as insignificant as a tiny piece of earth. And then, oh joy, oh bliss, the wokey mob sent photos of this amazing phenomenon back to The astronauts in the space shuttle and sparking with wonderfulness!

Way, way up in Heaven, the Archangel Gabriel saw this beautiful shining light in the shape of Australia, and thought he’d better wake up God. But God was resting from his labours (trying to make sense of Israel and Palestine, Syria, Donald Trump and everything else) and was really annoyed to be disturbed.

“It’s the Australians,” said Gabriel quickly, before God hurled a lightning bolt at him. “They’re up to something.”

God peered down. He had a soft spot in his heart for the Australians. It wasn’t just that Australia had been one of his better shapes, he mused, although it was certainly more eye-catching than say, Madagascar, which was sort of boringly blob-like, or Iceland to which he’d given far too many wiggly bits that had made life hell for geography students. (That was, back when students still studied geography, before the Great Dumbing Down.) Australia had such a charming near-symmetry that still pleased him all these millennia later. He particularly liked the amusing little heart-shaped bit he’d plonked off the bottom, just because he could. More important than its delightful shape, though, he liked the way in which Australians stuck up for their mates, their belief in a fair go for all and their creative sense of humour. Not even he could have thought up a sacred site that was invisible! When he first heard about that he laughed so much that a mountain in Mexico fell down and a river in Africa ran backwards for two whole days!

However, God had been worried about his Australians of late. They had been following false prophets and no one knew more than he how dangerous that could be. False prophets were his speciality, after all. It had started with the Great Dumbing Down, when they chose to stop using the incredible brains he’d spent thousands of years fine-tuning. They’d gone off willy-nilly to ponder about “Snails Are People Too” (five-year course, Sydney Uni), “The Comparative Regality of Kim and Meghan’s Bottoms” (three years, UQ) and “The Importance of Safe Spaces for your Budgie” (four years, Melbourne Uni).

Then there’d been that strange business with them spurning all the lovely coal he’d made especially for them, because a few ignoramuses thought using it made the world hot! That was just plain offensive because he was the only one in charge of the climate. They seemed to have forgotten that. Sometimes he was tempted to blast them with another Little Ice Age, just to shut them up. And what was their problem with nuclear? He’d gone to a lot of trouble to make the world hot! That was just plain offensive because he was the only one in charge of the climate. They seemed to have forgotten that. Sometimes he was tempted to blast them with another Little Ice Age, just to shut them up. And what was their problem with nuclear? He’d gone to a lot of trouble to give them more uranium than anyone else and they wouldn’t use it! God feared that his Australians had lost the plot. They were still building those ugly wind farms all over the beautiful countryside he’d created for them and cluttering up their roofs with those silly panels that were going to be a devil to dispose of when they wore out. He couldn’t understand their odd compulsion to squish more and more people into his lovely wide empty spaces—what was that
all about? It didn't make sense. And now millions of them were up in the middle of the night flashing torches in his eyes when he was trying to sleep.

"Who are you lot and what the hell are you doing lighting up my heavens?" he roared at them.

"We're the silent majority," said the people. "The stable core, the centre who hold this place together."

God thought that was actually his job, but didn't like to curb their enthusiasm. After all, it wasn't often that he saw them so happy and full of purpose. "But what are you doing?"

"Uniting and taking a stand for our country, I guess," said a small girl in a red nightie, who was staggering under a huge spotlight and a melting Gaytime.

"Did you say, 'taking a knee?'" asked God. He'd been around a while and was getting a little deaf.

"Don't be so silly," said the red-nightie girl, rolling her eyes. "Can't you see? We're Australians, not gormless drongo Americans who are too gullible to work out that BLM is a Marxist mob trying to overthrow everything we believe in. And look how many of us there are! I'd say that nobody better mess with us ever again because WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH!"

"Is your name Greta?" God asked. After all, she was a bit scary.

"Oh per-lease! Don't insult me," said the red-nightie girl. "Greta is so yesterday, and if she were here she'd be part of that wacky wokey bunch over there in the corner, down near the sewage farm who just crawled up into that elephant's backside trying to find some reason for their existence."

"We are the good guys and we are sticking up for our country," added her little brother, who was wearing his Dad's Uggies, and delightful Harry Potter pyjamas.

"And why would you be doing that?" asked God, who was a huge J.K. Rowling fan.

"Because we love it."

"Humph, about bloody time," muttered God, as he went back to bed well pleased. He hummed a few lines from his favourite song, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", and was soon fast asleep.

And that, my friends, is what happened on the magical night when at last the leaves fell from the bullshit trees.

Joanna Hackett wrote on Young Dark Emu in the July-August issue.

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**Booval Tea Ladies**

During World War I, 35,000 returned soldiers, many wounded and ill, passed through Ipswich. The Booval Comfort Club provided aid to Australian fighting men—motto: *Keep the fit man fit.*

Rationing restricted women’s clothing. Flour bags, old sheets, saved towels, made dresses, undergarments, crocheted with butcher’s twine.

At Swanbank Rail Station, with its green window-frames and red tin roof, scones and biscuits were baked, handed to troops passing through by rail. *Piping hot cups of warm wishes.* The Billy Can Scheme brought Christmas cakes, cigarettes and gifts, in tins. Soldiers called them *barrels of sunshine.*

Joe Dolce
George Orwell, an atheist for nearly all his life. If the account of his school years which he supplied in his long essay “Such, Such Were the Joys” is to be relied on, he had ceased to believe in God by the time he was fourteen years old, and had conceived a strong distaste both for the doctrines of Christianity and for its Founder:

I hated Jesus and the Hebrew patriarchs. If I had sympathetic feelings towards any character in the Old Testament, it was towards such people as Cain, Jezebel, Haman, Agag, Sisera: in the New Testament my friends, if any, were Ananias, Caiaphas, Judas and Pontius Pilate. But the whole business of religion seemed to be strewn with psychological impossibilities.

As the boy grew into the man, his views on Christ and the characters of sacred history do not appear to have changed very much, though his early esteem for such oddly chosen heroes as Haman and Judas appears to have left him. But to the religion of the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer in which he had been raised Orwell never returned. His guiding allegiances were to the revolutionary working classes, to the socialist movement, and the liberal tradition of free speech. All of these loyalties, as he understood them, were bound to turn him into an enemy of organised Christianity in general and of the Catholic Church in particular. For Catholic intellectuals he rarely had a good word, even if he might on occasion recognise the literary talents of a Chesterton or a Hopkins, or the plainspoken honesty of a Frank Sheed. As for the Catholic culture of his time, to him it principally meant General Franco, mental stagnation, authoritarian politics and repression generally. Contempt for the sacred he carried about like a loaded weapon, and was willing to use it against even fairly innocuous targets. In a letter to a female friend in 1932, he describes an experience at an Anglican parish in a poor neighbourhood where he was temporarily lodging:

My sole friend is the curate—High Anglican but not a creeping Jesus and a very good fellow. Of course it means that I have to go to church, which is an arduous job here, as the service is so popish that I don’t know my way about it ... I have promised to paint one of the church idols (a quite skittish looking [Blessed Virgin], half life-size, and I shall try to make her look as much like one of the illustrations in La Vie Parisienne as possible) ...

_La Vie Parisienne_, for those not familiar with the name, was an erotic men’s magazine in the early twentieth century. To quote this much is to demonstrate that Orwell was not, like certain other sceptics, a man burdened with any lingering fondness for the religion he had cast off as an adolescent.

The lessons of war gave his odium more fuel on which to feed. Orwell served as an infantryman with a Loyalist unit in the Spanish Civil War, in which the cause of the Church was closely bound up with that of Orwell’s Nationalist enemies. The cause of literature nearly suffered an irreplaceable loss on May 20, 1937, when the future author of _Animal Farm_ and _Nineteen Eighty-Four_ was shot through the neck by an enemy sniper. Orwell recovered and returned to England with no kinder feelings towards the political Right than those he had carried with him to Catalonia. His encounter with the Catholic Church in the flesh had, if anything, left him even more hard-bitten in his anticlericalism. He wrote approvingly at this time of the burning of Spanish churches in communist-controlled areas,
mentioning with regret that Barcelona’s Sagrada Familia was spared during the violence. He treated with scepticism accounts of murdered nuns (stories now known to be horribly true), and, being left hors de combat, continued his war with the Nationalists and their sympathisers with his pen.

One notes in his journalism from the end of the 1930s and the early 1940s with what vigilance he kept accounts of allies and enemies. He was not by nature a bitter man, but he made a point always to know which side of politics a fellow writer was on, and party affiliations certainly factored in his judgments of books and their authors. His professed belief in literary objectivity was not a hypocritical sham, but its application in his own practice had its limits. He was saved from turning into a narrow and tiresome ideologue by his generous instincts and quintessentially English sense of fair play, yet he never let sleep his awareness of who is For us and who is Against.

The political was not everything to him. The doctrinaire Marxist and every other crank who lives to overthrow the established customs of mankind were, equally with the Jesuit and the reactionary, objects of his personal disgust. The civilised decencies of private life he never ceased to value, as the reader discovers in Orwell’s homely reflections on the English pub, the English rose garden and the domestic fireplace. These and other of this life’s unbought graces had in him a devout appreciator. Still, a writer less interested in the world above this world would be far to seek.

For this reason it is of interest that Orwell considered the declining belief in the supernatural to be a matter worthy of his concern. He refers to the growing disbelief in the life to come in several passages of his collected works, and never lets himself slip into the facile secularist attitude that this is unambiguously a good thing, the result of growing freedom of mind, public education and all the rest of it. Rather, the collapse of the former Christian confidence in the resurrection and the final judgment was, as Orwell concluded, one of the reasons why his generation had seen the rise of the dictators of Left and Right, secret police and concentration camps. The following passage may be taken to summarise his unease:

Western civilization, unlike some oriental civilizations, was founded partly on the belief in individual immortality ... The western conception of good and evil is very difficult to separate from it. There is little doubt that the modern cult of power worship is bound up with the modern man’s feeling that life here and now is the only life there is. If death ends everything, it becomes much harder to believe that you can be in the right even if you are defeated. Statesmen, nations, theories, causes are judged almost inevitably by the test of material success. Supposing that one can separate the two phenomena, I would say that the decay of the belief in personal immortality has been as important as the rise of machine civilization.

Elsewhere he puts the matter even more bluntly: “The major problem of our time is the decay of belief in personal immortality.”

Orwell thought the study of theology a ludicrous preoccupation, but in these passages he seizes upon the root of much modern perplexity. Absent the assurance that there awaits every one of us a resurrection, whether for good or evil, all the great questions of personal conduct become immensely more obscure. When three of the Four Last Things have been analysed out of existence, exactly what moral weight attaches to the one that remains? The grave, if it is the final abode of St Peter and Nero equally, would seem to be a strong argument that the earthly life of the first is not a significantly better model to live by than that of the second. The unconscious dust of the two may even now be mixed together, neither punished nor rewarded. If the dogma of the life to come is indeed a cheat, anyone who discards it in favour of the gospel of Epicurus acts wisely; moreover, with the blessing of St Paul: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

Orwell was not given to making lazy intellectual compromises. He hated the easy Epicureanism that the modern Western world sold in his day and still sells on its every billboard and pop-up ad in ours. Seldom as he found himself in agreement with Chesterton, who had seen America, he would undoubtedly have concurred with the opinion that the great Catholic man of letters offered after a visit to Times Square: “How beautiful it would be for someone who could not read.” The modern world, so much of which is a skilfully organised means of causing us to forget that we have souls, as well

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He never fooled himself into thinking that the conquest of happiness is no more than a question of establishing equality in education, employment, and access to material goods.

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as minds and bodies, presented few attractions that Orwell, any more than his putative enemy Chesterton, found remotely worthy of applause. He never fooled himself into thinking that the conquest of happiness is no more than a question of establishing widespread equality in education, employment, and access to material goods. He knew that men have other needs:

Most Socialists are content to point out that once Socialism has been established we shall be happier in a material sense, and to assume that all problems lapse when one’s belly is full. But the truth is the opposite: when one’s belly is empty, one’s only problem is an empty belly. It is when we have got away from drudgery and exploitation that we shall really start wondering about man’s destiny and the reason for his existence.

Orwell has been dead for seventy years now. The problem of empty bellies is still with us, even if it is not so common in our time as it was in his. For this we do well to be thankful. But it would take an invincible optimism to examine the lives that we live now and conclude that the soul of the West is at all better nourished than was the case when Orwell, a lifetime since, found it famished.

Thomas Banks is a teacher of Latin and literature and a poet who lives in North Carolina. His writing has appeared in First Things, Crisis Magazine and the New English Review. He and his wife offer instruction in ancient and modern literature at The House of Humane Letters (houseofhumaneletters.com).

CHRISTOPHER AKEHURST

Big Sibling is Watching You

Who would you suppose at first sight this verbal snapshot represents?

A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture … seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one’s will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic.

They really get themselves into a state, don’t they, the social media mob, crouched over their keyboards, some in unsavoury shared houses, others in the more desirable residences enjoyed by Green Guardian-subscribing Friends of the ABC and suchlike, clacking out in transports of rancour the digital screeching that passes for reasoned comment in the obscenity-laden echo chamber of online “debate”. But of course the words above are not of our time, as readers may already have recognised. They are from George Orwell’s description of the daily “Two Minutes Hate” in his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Orwell did not foresee the internet but he did foresee the rages that engulf the worldwide mob in our own era. He foresaw the attack on free speech. He also foresaw the kind of lies we have invented to accommodate, for instance, fantasists in the field of sexual identity. What is the difference between insisting that “I am a woman” when biology says you’re a man, and believing “two plus two equals five”, as Orwell’s robotic Party members do when instructed by the omnipotent Big Brother?

When, many years ago, I first read Nineteen Eighty-Four (the title year is set thirty-five years after the date of writing) it struck me as a fanciful foretelling it flashed like a warning light on red. Much of what it describes is already happening around us.

Stalin and Hitler—and let us never forget that Hitler was not, as portrayed by the modern Left, an extreme right-winger but a socialist—showed us (and Orwell) the barbaric excesses that tyrannies are capable of. But surely, or so I concluded on first reading the book, the kind of vicious intolerance of dissent that kept their—and later Mao Zedong’s— despotic regimes in power could never take hold in our liberal democratic Western society. That was why we had fought the Second World War—to protect democracy—and later the Cold War, to keep the “evil empire” at bay. Our shared Judeo-Christian-Westminster set of values united us, as did our determination to defend our freedom.

Who could have predicted that the gravest threat to our freedom would come not from without but from within? Orwell did. The England he describes—though it could be anywhere in the West—is the product of internal revolution. We got that too.

It wasn’t 1984 but 1968 that fractured our outward unity and released the torrents of hatred of those shared values. The most visible haters were not the supposedly downtrodden working class but students from the prosperous middle class, beneficiaries all of those same values, orchestrated into action by the anti-capitalist effusions of, chiefly, weaselly old Marxist Herbert Marcuse, a refugee from Hitler
nestling in tenured privilege in the world’s most capitalistic country. Marcuse persuaded a pampered generation that our values were all wrong and that our society was oppressive, greedy and rotten. And so we were plunged back a century into an age of perennial riots and cries for revolution with which we still live.

Feminists were the first of the new revolutionaries to try and force us down Orwell’s path. They were the first to impose on us, in the form of “inclusive language”, a version of Orwell’s truncated concept-eliminating Newspeak. Any words with “man” in them had to go, so that we finished up with absurdities like person Friday, which had only made sense in Defoe’s formulation, or in having meetings presided over by something you sit on. I haven’t checked but I imagine “Big Brother” is now banned as well. Has he become Big Sibling?

Newspeak is a direct parallel with the contemporary Left’s politically correct language. The essence both in the book and now is to prevent free speech by suppressing words that convey what today’s linguistic censors call “inappropriate” ideas. Language, instead of being a glorious means of expressing our thoughts and imagination, of communicating to everyone, as Matthew Arnold put it, “the best of what has been thought and said”, is to the contemporary leftist an instrument of manipulation. Eliminate the words for concepts you don’t approve of, and you limit what people can say and think, or as one of Orwell’s characters remarks, “It’s a beautiful thing, the destruction of words.”

How many words have been forcibly removed from our vocabulary simply because some politicised offence-garnering identity group has decided it objects to them? In the same way that in Nineteen Eighty-Four the liquidation of inconvenient citizens (“traitors”) is arbitrary and sudden, so it is with today’s linguistic liquidations. Aboriginal, I read the other day, is all at once taboo; colonial, applied to beer, was last June’s hate-word. Long gone are lady, considered by feminists a term of patriarchal oppression, and Christian name, allegedly out of place in a multicultural society. Black gets objected to for imaginary “racist” associations in usages such as “it was a black day” because fanatics don’t understand that the metaphor derives not from the skin colour, which is never true black anyway, but from primitive fear of absence of light. By the same token, if Greens had a little more imagination they might want to do away with “green with envy” (which of course is usually entirely apposite) while the majority of us could affect to be offended by “whited sepulchre”.

If words, then books. In Nineteen Eighty-Four all books from earlier eras when people were free to think have been hunted out and destroyed and such classics as are allowed to remain have been rewritten into unrecognisability. Our contemporary bibliophobes with their schemes for “decolonising” libraries are right on board with that, even if book-burnings are still rare—probably because many young people of today’s protesting sort have trouble reading, as educational surveys repeatedly show, and prefer to destroy visible objects even they can understand, such as statues.

Mobs do not reason, or else, in their anger at, say, slavery, they would protest against present-day slavers—Muslims in North Africa, Asian sweatshop owners—not real or imagined past ones. They don’t reason because they exemplify Orwell’s Newspeak verb bellyfeel in irrationally accepting—bellyfeeling—an assertion, the fundamental one of our time being the leftist notion that Western history as a catalogue of oppression and exploitation has been wholly destructive of the planet, its people and environment. And of course they mindlessly chant slogans of numbing meaninglessness as though repetition were a substitute for content. As Orwell’s Julia, an outwardly keen Party member, advised, “Always yell with the crowd.”

Winston Smith, the principal character in Nineteen Eighty-Four, discovers to his cost that opposition to the imposed orthodoxy leads to a terrible end. Similarly if not yet quite as brutally, anyone in public life who dares to question today’s orthodoxies faces loss of job, income and reputation, irrespective of what the prevailing orthodoxy is, since as in the novel they change from time to time. In Nineteen Eighty-Four the change is one of military alliances, with the two other powers in the world alternating from enemy of Airstrip One, as England has been banally renamed, to friend and back again (the Nazi-Soviet pact was the inspiration for this), each variation requiring instant unquestioning loyalty or hatred from Party members. In our time the changes depend on which identity group is in the current ascendant. We’ve had gays and lesbians demanding marriage and feminists reviling marriage as domestic slavery.
We’ve had Aborigines demanding “constitutional recognition” and Aborigines who don’t want to be part of the nation at all. The “trans” lobby seems set now for a good long run, as do the anti-whitists with their desperate hand-me-down emulation of another country’s locally specific racial politics—which now includes the importation from America, by people who in everything else are viscerally anti-American, of alien terminology to describe our Aborigines—“people of colour” and “first nations”.

There are other parallels today with Ninety-Eighty-Four. In the novel there are various hate figures put through the motions of spurious public trials and exposed to vilification and revulsion. We had Cardinal Pell. There is a constant war to keep people afraid. We have a pandemic, and apparently had Cardinal Pell. There is a constant war to keep people afraid. We have a pandemic, and apparently the prospect of more, with all the opportunities for regulating people’s lives that they offer to the dictatorially inclined. We live under constant surveillance, which Orwell foresaw too, with the telescreen in every home and public place. The telescreen ensured, too, a ubiquitous stultifying uniformity of thought. We can experience that by stepping onto a university campus, or turning on the ABC, or reading the pronouncements of our awful Human Rights Commission.

Above all, no humour. There is not a wisp in the book. How could there be when the Left, portrayed in Nineteen Eighty-Four in the fullness of its triumph over all that is decent and worthwhile, and in our own day obsessed by its dreary paranoia over sex and race, has no sense of humour at all? This is especially manifest at state-sponsored, hence leftism-infused, “comedy” festivals.

In twenty-first-century Australia Nineteen Eighty-Four is still—just—in the realm of dystopian fantasy. But the spirit of Big Sibling presides over every civic, cultural, educational and even sporting institution we have. If we can’t liquidate him, we’re finished.

Christopher Akehurst, a regular contributor, lives in Melbourne. His article “The Continued Decline of the Suburban Church” appeared in the July-August issue.

Gerald J. Russello

Orwell Knew

There is a parlour game conservatives in America sometimes like to play among themselves. The game tries to predict whose dystopia the country (sometimes expanded to include the Anglosphere, or the whole “West”) is most likely to experience. Until the end of the Cold War, the answer was obvious: that of George Orwell. His visions in Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four terrified conservatives (and not just them, of course), who saw the rise of communism as the most serious threat to Western civilisation. The barnyard Lenin and Stalin, Big Brother, Newspeak and the rest became Orwell’s metaphors for a totalitarian world government opposed to democracy and the free market. Terms such as doublethink and memory hole entered the lexicon in part because they reflected very real fears at the time.

After the Cold War ended, however, Orwell was somewhat eclipsed by the different dystopia of Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World. Instead of a dour communist state, Huxley wrote of a rich, decadent technopolis, whose denizens are deformed through eugenics and whose populace is rendered almost insensate and anaemic by drugs and other pleasures. That vision seemed more suited to the world dominated by a global capitalism rising towards the end of history that promised to convert us into consumers rather than citizens, for our own good. The global elite, sometimes referred to as the “Davosites” in reference to their gatherings in Davos, Switzerland, would run the world for us. That vision of course had its own casualties, not least the millions of those lost in the great shuffle of global markets, who have turned instead to narcotics, pornography, gambling, video games and other distractions helpfully provided by corporations or government, who are then left to their dissolution.

The brave new world of Huxley’s imagination seems strikingly sophisticated and intellectual when compared to that portrayed in the third possible alternative future sometimes raised along with the other two, the 2006 film Idiocracy. In that movie, which has become something of a cult classic, the population has grown stupid and lazy, with people barely able to function independently while they are ruled by incompetent corporate masters who cannot even understand the system they have inherited but cannot maintain.

Of course, the distinction between the Orwellian and Huxleyan dystopias was always a bit overstated. Huxley’s world is in its way as totalitarian as Orwell’s Oceania, and the proles are also drugged with screens and narcotics. As Ryan Barilleaux has written, a dystopia is not simply a bad political situation, or a civilisation in decline, though these may be present. Rather:
of utopian speculation). It reflects someone’s program of social and political perfection.

And dystopias have common characteristics, such as abuse of technology, social regimentation and inevitable totalitarianism to implement technology and that social regimentation for dystopian ends. Thus Margaret Atwood’s A Handmaid’s Tale is closer to portraying a real dystopia than Trump is in bringing one about; Trump just doesn’t have a vision of perfection to actualise, however much his opponents would wish such a vision upon him.

In particular, the time seems right for an Orwell revival. He was a man of the Left, and despite (perhaps because of) the current populist wave in parts of the West, the Left has responded with enormous cultural, political and financial power to assert their views in ways that would have won the admiration of Big Brother. Indeed, like the fights in the 1930s among various factions of the Left (which as Richard Bradford recounts, cost Orwell access to some support by those who thought he was not hewing to the party line), today’s progressives seem as intent on destroying the older liberalism of the post-war generation as they are with their putative opponents on the Right, in an echo of totalitarian politics from Russia to Cambodia. Social media platforms routinely manipulate search results to exclude opinions with which they disagree, sometimes in ways that are not obvious. Corporations fall over themselves to announce their allegiance to current orthodoxies, and the past becomes reduced to a binary history of Us versus Them. Moreover, the “Us” and “Them” change as power politics dictates, so everyone is in a constant state of unease about saying or doing the wrong thing, or even referring to someone else who has done or said something contrary to current orthodoxy. As Orwell himself puts it in Nineteen Eighty-Four, the dominance of totalitarian ideology creates an “eternal present” where the Party is always right.

Richard Bradford’s Orwell: A Man of Our Time (published this year by Bloomsbury) is largely a straightforward, solid account of Orwell’s life and work. Bradford, author of biographies of Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin, among others, presents the outlines of Orwell’s professional, personal and intellectual life. But the point of the biography is not to rehash that ground. Instead, it is to bring Orwell into our time. In particular Bradford thinks Orwell is a “man of our time” because many of the things Orwell saw in the 1930s and 1940s have come or are coming to pass:

antisemitism—especially on the extreme left; the tolerance by the free world of authoritarian regimes, now because we need them economically; dim-witted materialism; populist politics; brainless nationalism; doublethink as a motor for political discourse—that is, outright lying; the resurgence of seemingly endemic xenophobia; and, of course, Brexit.

Orwell still speaks with authority. We read Orwell because it is evident from even a brief familiarity with his biography that he was largely a man of principle; his experience in Burma, his life of poverty until Animal Farm, his volunteering to fight in the Spanish Civil War despite poor health, and then volunteering for service on the eve of the Second World War even though he was too old, his tramping about in London, Paris and the English coal mines to experience the lives of the poor and “down and out”. These lend an unmistakable authenticity to his writing, so even when we disagree with Orwell, we know he is writing from a place of deep belief opposed to oppression and injustice.

Bradford is clear, most of the time, about the fact that the “present-day distortion and manipulation of fact” are occurring on all parts of the political spectrum. However, he seems to indicate that the Tories are perhaps a little worse. Indeed, he does more than indicate: his comparison of Nigel Farage with the Nazi Oswald Mosley is explicit. And his easy conflation of nationalism and xenophobia ultimately fails to convince because they need not go together. Indeed, Bradford condemns the call centres and other low-wage jobs that have robbed the working classes of much of their opportunities for advancement, and tries to blame both on Brexit voters. But one message from Brexit, as it was with the presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016, is that voters were in part rejecting the free-market globalism that Bradford also seems to oppose.

Moreover, much of the populism currently regnant in the United Kingdom and America does not have a dystopian program of the kind Orwell would recognise. Trump is not (as Bradford recognises) Big Brother, and the Tories are not the...
Party. The ideological threat in our current age comes more directly from the Left and not the Right. In America, recent efforts to tear down statues and other monuments, making no distinction between those, for example, who supported slavery and those who opposed it, are just one example of the “eternal present” being imposed across society. Other examples include changing dictionary definitions, removing objectionable movies from streaming services, and other actions meant to depict the past (or what some perceive as the past) to be “bad” and the present, “good”. The electronic surveillance anticipated by Orwell’s telescreens is here, and it is run by techno-futurists from Silicon Valley who have little sympathy for reactionary or conservative causes. Though there is no Big Brother on the Left, they have a more clearly developed program and they even have a disembodied version of Oceania’s fictitious enemy, Emmanuel Goldstein; in this case it is “patriarchal oppression” or similar words that serve the same purpose: demonising enemies and rendering civilised disagreement very difficult.

Bradford does recognise that the Orwellian temptation also exists on the Left. He defends the late Sir Roger Scruton from the false attacks on him that led to his removal from an architectural advisory post, and recounts the efforts to whitewash communism in the 1930s and 1940s. But more important, he grasps Orwell’s insight about the role of non-ideologues in a world under siege from totalitarian impulses. In the West, liberals are happy to see progressives charge against those whom they also oppose, never thinking that the revolution will turn on them as well. They think they can have their own private space in which to indulge their freedom while the mob parades outside and attacks their common enemies. But that is a false hope; the ideology Orwell describes is all-consuming, and the liberal fallacy “is to believe that under a dictatorial government you can be free inside”. Bradford notes:

Orwell’s anger against the apparent alliance between complacency, indifference, and self-absorption bred out of liberal democracy; such citizens took for granted their entitlements so long as there seemed no danger that they’d be taken away.

That is, until the mob stops looking for the reactionaries and comes for you. Ask Winston Smith what happens next.

_Gerald J. Russello is the editor of the University Bookman (https://kirkcenter.org/bookman), a quarterly published since 1960 by the Russell Kirk Center in Mecosta, Michigan._

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**Jet-lag**

All day your eyes conspire to close, no matter how sublime the view.
At 1 a.m. your stomach groans for steak or cake, for chips or stew.
At 2 you think of stupid songs, and tax, and things you didn’t do.
At 3 your private fears arrange themselves into a ghoulish zoo.
At 4 you sink in darkest depths of softest sleep, an hour or two, and though at 6 their foreign sun pokes through the curtain that you drew, your body knows where you are from, and still its loyalty is true.

_Katherine Spadaro_
The Austrian expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka, having volunteered for active service with the elite Fifteenth Dragoon cavalry regiment in the early days of the First World War, found himself deployed to the Russian front, where famine, cholera and Cossacks stalked the land. On August 29, 1915, his unit was ambushed by a Cossack patrol while passing through a small wood near the Ukrainian town of Sikirycz. Kokoschka was grievously wounded during the clash, with a bullet passing through his ear canal and exiting through his neck. Crushed beneath the weight of his own and three other injured horses, the unfortunate painter was somehow able to crawl out from under the prodigious weight of the chargers, only to be stabbed in the lung by a Russian lance. With blood spurting from his head, neck and chest, he gradually faded into an out-of-body experience, as depicted in the haunting self-portrait he produced while recovering from his wounds—the eerie Knight Errant, today found in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, in which the armour-clad artist floats above an ominous landscape while his soul, represented by an uncanny, human-faced bird, perches on a denuded branch nearby.

Initially presumed dead, Kokoschka was rushed to a field hospital, where he slowly recovered, though he reported paralysis in his left hand as well as difficulty with vision and locomotion; he would suffer from vertigo for the rest of his days. This did not prevent him from being redeployed to the Isonzo front, this time in the more suitable role of an official war artist in the Austro-Hungarian Kriegspressequartier, or War Press Section. During his time in this equally brutal theatre Kokoschka was subjected to a ferocious Italian artillery bombardment, the sight and sound of which triggered an onset of crippling shellshock, effectively ending his war service. Lesions were discovered in his cerebellum via x-ray, and Kokoschka would spend the next three years in hospitals in Vienna, Uppsala and Dresden, where induced spasms and other forms of primitive neurological therapy meant to heal his damaged brain tissue only gave rise to suicidal ideation on the part of the mangled, tormented painter. Another self-portrait, the Vienna Leopold Museum’s 1918-19 Self-Portrait, One Hand Touching the Face, expressively conveys the physical and psychic toll. Looking over his shoulder at the viewer, the artist touches his fingers to his lips, as if the words simply will not come, and understandably so.

In the autumn of 1919 Kokoschka, who admirably had never stopped painting and writing plays despite his travails, managed to secure a professorship at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts, and was looking forward to a lifetime devoted to artistry, education and rehabilitation. Yet by the following spring, not long after the Treaty of Versailles had come into force, the nascent Weimar Republic was wracked with a violent bout of internecine strife, the likes of which would attend most every stage of its abbreviated existence. The Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch was in full swing, as nationalist and allied monarchists clashed with striking workers in public squares throughout the Deutscher Volksstaat, while socialists and communists sought to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in the Ruhr region. Soon the violence reached Dresden, where on March 15, 1920, a vicious clash in the Postplatz left fifty-nine dead and the renowned Zwinger Art Gallery damaged.

It was at this point that Professor Oskar Kokoschka found his footing, conjuring the words necessary to wade back into the public fray. Fiercely protective of his civilisation’s immense corpus of cultural heritage, Kokoschka always considered himself, as he put it in his 1974 autobiography Mein Leben, “responsible to the coming generations, which are left stranded in a blitzed world, unaware of the soul trembling in awe before the mystery of life”. With his adoptive city’s pre-eminent old masters gallery inadvertently damaged in the recent outbreak of street fighting, Kokoschka felt obliged to take up his pen, and in doing so produced the magnificent “Open Letter to the Inhabitants of
Dresden”, a massive that would be featured in forty
different newspapers and would spark debate across
the German-speaking world.

Kokoschka addressed his lofty appeal to “all
those who intend to argue the case for their political
theories at gunpoint … whether of the radical left,
the radical right, or the radical centre”. His request
was sensible, if quixotic given the flaring tempers
evident in the public square. He merely asked the
dizzying array of combatants:

not to hold their proposed military exercises
outside the Zwinger Art Gallery but in some
other place, such as the firing ranges on the
heath, where human civilisation is not put at
risk. On Monday March 15 a masterwork by
Rubens [Bathsheba] was damaged by a bullet. Pictures cannot run away from places where
human protection fails them.

As far as the professor was concerned, “there
can be no doubt that in due course the people of
Germany will discover more happiness in the con-
templation of the pictures, if we save them, than
from all the opinions of the politicking Germans
of the present day”. It would be far better, he archly
went on to suggest, if, “as in classical times, feuds
should in the future be settled by the leaders of
political parties in single combat, perhaps in the
circus, and enhanced by the Homeric abuse of their
followers”. (The Iraqi government requested a Bush–
Hussein duel along these lines back in 2002, albeit
to no avail, and so Kokoschka’s sensible and poten-
tially entertaining proposal remains an idea whose
time has not yet come.)

The Berlin Dadaists John Heartfield (born
Helmut Herzfeld) and George Grosz (born
Georg Groß) reacted to Kokoschka’s plea with
undisguised contempt. In their response, “Der
Kunstlump” (“The Art Swindler”), they dismissed
their Austrian counterpart as a “scab” who “wants
his business with the brush honoured as if it were
a divine mission”—never mind that Kokoschka
was advocating on behalf of a threatened Flemish
masterpiece and not his own work. Heartfield and
Grosz were prepared to go further, arguing that “the
cleaning of a gun by a Red soldier is of greater signif-
ificance than the entire metaphysical edifice of all the
painters. The concepts of art and artist are an inven-
tion of the bourgeoisie.” Heartfield’s talk of clean-
ing guns was pretty rich, given that he had feigned
insanity to avoid war service, while Kokoschka
served with distinction. Still, it was “with joy” that
the Dadaists welcomed the news that “bullets are
whistling through the galleries and the palaces, into

the masterpieces of Rubens, instead of the houses
of the poor in the working-class neighbourhoods”.

The notion that cultural heritage should be pro-
tected during an armed conflict ought not to be con-
troversial; the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907,
and the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of
Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict,
have enshrined the principle that historical monu-
ments, educational institutions, and institutions of
religious, not-for-profit, artistic or scientific sig-
nificance should be spared by combatants for the
sake of the survival of our collective patrimony.
This was understood even in late antiquity, as when
the Byzantine general Belisarius, during the 549–
50 siege of Rome, advised his adversary, Totila the
Ostrogoth:

As those to whom a city owes the construction
of beautiful buildings are reputed wise and
civilised, so those who cause their destruction
are naturally regarded by posterity as persons
devoid of intelligence, true to their own
nature. Of all cities under the sun Rome is
admitted universally to be the greatest and most
important. She attained this pre-eminence not
suddenly nor by the genius of one man, but in
the course of a long history throughout which
emperors and nobles by their vast resources and
employing skilful artists from all parts of the
world have gradually made her what you see her
today. Her monuments belong to posterity, and
an outrage committed upon them will rightly
be regarded as a great injustice to all future
generations as well as to the memory of those
who created them. Therefore consider well.
Should you be victorious in this war, Rome
destroyed will be your own loss, preserved it
will be your fairest possession. Should it be your
fortune to be defeated, the conqueror will owe
you gratitude if you spare Rome, whereas if you
destroy it, there will be no reason for clemency,
while the act itself will have brought you no
profit. And remember that your reputation in the
eyes of the world is at stake.

The historian J.B. Bury added that “Totila read
that letter again and again; it gave him a new point
of view; and the remonstrance of civilisation finally
defeated in his breast the barbarous instincts of his
race. He bade the work of vandalism cease.” Would
that all aggressors had the self-restraint and per-
spective to do likewise.

There are even those, like Stepan Trofimovich
Verkhovensky in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s The Devils,
who would go so far as to prioritise cultural heritage
over human life and all its banausic concerns. In a
rousing if hyperbolic address at a provincial fete, the scholar Verkhovensky proclaimed:

Shakespeare and Raphael are higher than the emancipation of the serfs, higher than nationality, higher than socialism, higher than the youngest generation, higher than chemistry, higher than almost all mankind, for they are already the fruit, the real fruit of mankind, and maybe the highest fruit there ever may be! A form of beauty already achieved, without the achievement of which I might not even consent to live ... And do you know, do you know that mankind can live without the Englishman, it can live without Germany, it can live only too well without the Russian man, it can live without science, without bread, and it only cannot live without beauty, for then there would be nothing at all to do in the world! The whole secret is here, the whole of history is here! Science itself would not stand for a minute without beauty—are you aware of that, you who are laughing?—it would turn into boorishness, you couldn’t even invent the nail! ... I will not yield!

There is an element of parody here, admittedly, but the orgy of anarchistic murder and arson that occurs later in the novel would suggest that Dostoevsky’s sympathies are largely with Verkhovensky. Oskar Kokoschka, who as we have seen maintained that there is more happiness to be gained through the contemplation of the pictures in the Zwinger than from “all the opinions of the politicking Germans of the present day”, and who knew of what he spoke, having paid quite the price for the politicking of others, would likely agree.

I doubt that Kokoschka’s essay was on the mind of the Philadelphia Inquirer architectural critic Inga Saffron, either consciously or subconsciously, when she was writing her June 2, 2020 piece “Buildings Matter, Too”, but her essay and the “Open Letter to the Inhabitants of Dresden”, written a century earlier, have certain elements in common. For Saffron, the recent looting of large swathes of Walnut and Chestnut streets in downtown Philadelphia, resulting in the loss of several historic structures, was something to be sorely regretted, given that “as a practical matter the destruction of downtown buildings in Philadelphia—and in Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and a dozen other American cities—is devastating for the future of cities”. Saffron further disputed the specious canard that “insurance will cover the costs of repairing the damage”, recalling all of the burnt-out buildings, victims of previous riots, that “sat empty for a decade across from City Hall during the ’90s. They, too, were waiting for a big insurance payout” that never came. More than half a century has passed, Saffron continued, “since the Columbia Avenue riots swept through North Philadelphia, and yet those former shopping streets are graveyards of abandoned buildings”. Naturally to make this sensible point required a great deal of careful steering via critical race theory—the column is generously interlarded with discussions of “systemic oppression” and fretting over the potential for the “rampage” to be a “victory for global capitalism” should “gentrification” occur in the future—but the central thesis of “Buildings Matter, Too” was clear: “the momentary satisfaction of destroying a few buildings” will only “weaken our city”.

A reasonable enough position, but “Buildings Matter, Too” proved to be the source of roiling controversy, with some forty Inquirer reporters protesting the headline by calling in “sick and tired” and submitting an open letter declaring that the use of “ignorant editorial punchlines” hindered their ability to work and “at worst, puts our lives at risk”. The Inquirer’s top editors apologised profusely for having “offensively riffed on the Black Lives Matter movement”, and changed the column’s headline to “Damaging Buildings Disproportionately Hurts the People Protesters Are Trying to Uplift”, but the remedial measures failed to do the trick, and ultimately senior vice-president and executive editor Stan Wischnowski was obliged to resign after twenty years with the paper. One imagines Saffron herself felt a certain amount of pressure as a consequence, given her subsequent tweet: “I know it was the headline on my story that sparked the outpouring of outrage and frustration [sic] about the insufficient number of journalists of color at the Inquirer, but I fully support the [sic] change that is needed to create an equitable newsroom.”

I have yet to see any substantive criticism of the content of “Buildings Matter, Too”, only outrage directed at the headline itself. Divorced from any context, it would be hard to argue that buildings do not in fact matter a great deal, for any number of symbolic or practical reasons. Indeed recent events have put me in mind of Russell Kirk’s 1982 Heritage Foundation lecture on urban planning, “The Architecture of Servitude and Boredom”, which connected the British urban riots of 1981 to the “ghastly monotony” of the “architecture of our mass-age”, the “architecture of sham” that leaves the residents of housing schemes “perpetually discontented, without quite knowing why—and spoiling for a fight”. In that seminal lecture Kirk concurred with T.S. Eliot, who warned in Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (1948) that we are
“destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the
ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the
future will encamp in their mechanized caravans”. 
According to Kirk:

ancient towns, whatever their difficulties and
their poverty, remain genuine communities,
in which the townsman still is a person, not
wholly lost in the faceless crowd; and in which,
whatever the degree of civic corruption, still
the public authority can maintain a tolerable
order. Our urban planners have lost those civic
advantages.

In the end, “the sheer size of our cities will kill
humane culture”, a phenomenon on display all
around us.

So architecture and urban planning are unde-
niably of profound importance, given that, as
Wittgenstein famously formulated it, “ethics and
aesthetics are one”. The real problem with Saffron’s
article, as we all know, was the use of the “mat-
ter” in the headline, which constituted an act of
lèse-majesté against the Black Lives
Matter slogan, just as the use of the
phrase “all lives matter” has become
strictly verboten and even a poten-
tial firing offence. The editors of the
Inquirer begged pardon for having
“suggested an equivalence between
the loss of buildings and the lives
of black Americans”, despite no
such equivalence being implied by
the adverb too. Surely it is possi-
ble to acknowledge that the unjust
taking of a life is a tragedy, while
still regretting the widespread and
ruinous destruction of property,
heritage and livelihoods. When we
look back on, say, the firebomb-
ing of Dresden, for example, we
are capable of speaking in the same breath both
of the deaths of 25,000 people and also the loss of
78,000 dwellings, eleven churches, three theatres,
and Kokoschka’s beloved Zwinger Palace. When we
consider the depredations of ISIS, we can lament the
fate of, say, the 3000 Yazidis slaughtered at Sinjar,
or the terrible violence inflicted on the Assyrian,
Chaldean and Syriac Christian communities, but
we can (and should) express horror at the oblitera-
tion of the tombs of the prophets Daniel and Jonah,
the looting of the Mosul Museum, and the demoli-
tion of Nimrud and Palmyra, and so on.

The difference here is that the property dam-
age and cultural vandalism carried out in recent
weeks—which has even been visited on monu-
ments to figures like Winston Churchill, Mahatma
Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Tadeusz Kosciuszko
and Robert Gould Shaw—has been perpetrated by
those deemed sympathetic by the media. Thus to
express even the slightest qualms about the destruct-
ion of property, livelihoods and heritage is treated
as some sort of dog-whistle denial of human or civil
rights. Meanwhile “bullets are whistling through
the galleries” once again, but this time it is not just
Dadaists on the societal fringe who are cheering it
on. I am not entirely sure how a humane culture can
persist on such terms, and I have absolutely no idea
how cultural institutions can carry out their tradi-
tional missions as repositories of our collective herit-
age in such an environment, as calls to “decolonise”
the collections, stacks and curricula of museums,
libraries and universities mount, and as even the
most anodyne monuments are systematically top-
pled or defaced.

In The Killing of History Keith Windschuttle
described the dire effects of “cultural relativ-
ism and the return of tribalism”, and the efforts of
“postmodernism to eliminate the
metanarrative from history”, which
would in turn “deprive us all, no
matter what culture we inhabit, of
genuine knowledge of our past”. Yet cultural revolutionaries have
no interest in genuine knowledge,
seeking as they do to craft their
own ersatz metanarrative. Recall
how the Great Proletarian Cultural
Revolution sought to scour away
the patina laid down by the “Four
Olds”—habits, ideas, customs and
culture—while the Communist
Party of Kampuchea declared war
on paper itself, burning everything
from currency to Khmer and Pali
manuscripts, even making the pos-
session of a photograph a capital offence. Roberto
Calasso eloquently described the situation in Khmer
Rouge Cambodia:

the temples turned upside down by his [Pol Pot’s]
sovereign rule stretched into large numbers of
mass graves … Grave diggers heaped piles of
skulls into the forms that Cambodian peasants
had used from time immemorial to stack their
annual pineapple harvest. In the face of mass
graves, history returns to being natural history.

The destruction of heritage and the killing of his-
tory will only produce a world which, as Kirk argued
in “The Architecture of Servitude and Boredom”:
buildings, like paintings, cannot run away. cultural heritage is a bequest that can be squandered, as the highest fruits of mankind are left to rot on the vine. increasingly stranded as we are in what kokoschka called a “blitzed world”—blitzed by postmodernism, blitzed by tribalism, blitzed by vandalism—it remains as vital as it was in the dark days of the kapp–lüttwitz putsch not to yield, for the sake of posterity, for the sake of generations to come, for the sake of those forms of beauty already achieved and “without the achievement of which I might not even consent to live”.

matt mumaw is a united states–based human rights lawyer. he wrote on cultural destruction in china in the november 2019 issue.

“the mouth of the heart”
(st augustine)

reading the saint’s confessions, i jotted down these five words. but now i do not recall what was on the saint’s mind when he composed them.

i do recall believing that the words apply to me.

and i do recall two times when i gave mouth to my heart, and each of those two times turned out well. but only for some years.

and i scarcely recall now those numerous times, times when i gave mouth to my heart entirely in vain.

those times do not matter now.

these days, having given mouth to my heart for a final, decisive time, not one of the other times is worth thinking about.

a question for a cow or a sheep

there is always one cow who, on the evening passage from meadow to barn, raises its head to bellow in protest to the god it posits in the heaven for cows.

there is also always one sheep that hangs back following its leader and pauses before taking a chance and leaping a wall.

for years i was such a cow.
for years i was such a sheep.
in fact i was whatever may come to mind that forever takes issue with its life.

but now i ask the question of any sheep or cow who may have the answer: just how has it come about that i no longer bellow and am no longer hanging back?

knute skinner
In The Managerial Revolution (1941) James Burnham described how the scale and complexity of developed nations have shifted the sovereign decision-making power away from elected representatives and the owners of wealth, to an unelected group charged with its public distribution and employment. The future he predicted was one in which direct control by a parliamentary elite would be incompatible with the rising managerial order. Writing half a century later, Paul Gottfried’s After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State (1990) illustrated how this process, now in its advanced stages, has inverted political nomenclature and resulted in a situation where “governing goes on in a blurred zone, between consent and nonaccountable control”.

This revolution, which has depended significantly on a gradual but radical redefinition of “liberalism” over the last century, has become increasingly evident in the Anglo antipodes. It has also made itself felt across public and private governance, potentially confusing the state’s diplomatic initiatives, redefining the relationship between the state and the citizenry, and revolutionising the nature of corporate affairs. In each case, compliance is secured through coercion, either explicit or implied, while that coercion is necessitated by social decay and the system’s increasingly obvious moral bankruptcy. Though they might seem unrelated at first glance, developments in these different areas of political, corporate and social life illustrate symptoms of this new managerial order. A select group of recent examples are described in what follows.

In late April, the federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, held a press conference with one of the country’s highest-profile business people, Andrew Forrest, on strategies employed to mitigate the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic. The event would have been unremarkable if it were not for the fact that Forrest invited the Chinese Consul-General to the podium without Hunt’s knowledge.

The gaffe, which effectively contributed to the promotion of PRC public relations in Australia, was widely reported as an embarrassment to a government whose close geostrategic co-operation with the US has been a foreign policy priority in the South-East Asian region. This was not the first time that such a media “ambush” had occurred at Forrest’s instigation—an earlier incident took place in Western Australia, where much of his mining interests are located.

Former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull responded to this gaffe by claiming that any politician who confronts Chinese interests locally “cannot expect any support or solidarity from the Australian business community”. Turnbull’s politics could be described as a neoliberal extension of the Labor Party’s geostrategic reorientation from the Anglosphere in a so-called “Asian pivot”. While this pivot is often couched in calls for a republic and the wholesale reconstruction of state symbols to reflect a utopian nominalist state favoured by ideological “progressives”, the practical consequence would necessarily involve de-emphasising Canberra’s relationship with Washington as well as London, in favour of our “near north”. The fortunes of Australian mining have indeed been connected to the Chinese market’s insatiable appetite for raw minerals, but when Forrest defends himself by stating that “anyone who wants to put America first, they are putting Australia second” it is uncertain whether it is the national interest or his business concerns that take precedence.

Burnham wrote that in managerial society “politics and economics are directly interfused [sic]; the state does not recognise its capitalist limits; the economic area is also the area of the state; consequently, there is no sharp separation between political officials and ‘captains of industry’”. It could be added that the intuitive connection between the people (in particular their cultural and historical legacies or interests) and the immediate interests of the state’s officials or “captains” is likewise broken.
While Forrest more closely resembles the class which The Managerial Revolution predicted is in the process of being dethroned, that revolution has not proceeded according to a strict application of Burnham’s terms: the managers he described can take many forms in overlapping fields of operation. The “blurred zone of governance” referred to by Gottfried is therefore found in the intersection of public bureaucracy and private administration, and includes a corporate sector which has never before been so disconnected from national boundaries and never had such intimate impact on the lives of private citizens.

The one universal characteristic is a shared ideology that is expressed whenever this managerial class exerts its influence or control. Burnham predicts a state in which “nearly every side of life, business and art and science and education and religion and recreation and morality are not merely influenced by but directly subjected to the totalitarian regime”. The corporate sector’s social-justice-oriented campaigns are the most obvious example of this tendency towards totalitarianism in the so-called “private sector”. These expressions of fealty to the corporate regime’s dominant ideologies are “voluntary” only to the extent that an employee is unambitious and unconcerned about his career prospects: the coercion he feels is soft, implied, less obvious, and therefore far more insidious in its drive to force compliance. In Burnham’s terminology, the managerial class’s increasingly conspicuous objective is the need to “curb the masses” so that they “accept” the new regime. Parallels can be found in official government rhetoric, where attempts to moralise demands through appeals to collective security echo in mainstream political discourse.

Consider the following: in April the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, intimated that a government tracking application may be mandatory for all citizens, supposedly to help deal with the spread of the pandemic, with collected data being stored by a private transnational corporate entity, Amazon; in May, the Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, claimed that people “shouldn’t be hearing” arguments against compulsory vaccinations, adding that “not even religious beliefs are grounds for exemption”; the Prime Minister repeated earlier comments that those who refuse this benevolent interdiction into their private affairs may have family tax exemptions withheld; in August he stated explicitly that the public should expect the coronavirus vaccine—which does not yet exist—to be “as mandatory as you could as possibly make it”. It should be noted that this is the rhetoric of a government associated with the (supposedly) ideological Centre-Right, led by a party named in classical British terms “Liberal”, and traditionally connected to the cause of individual liberty, personal responsibility and free expression. Likewise, the “Liberal” state government in South Australia this year passed laws allowing authorities acting under the Emergency Management Act to remove a child from any premises, to a state guardian, with “reasonable force”. Blurring the illusory distinction between the two main party blocks, Victoria’s state Labor government passed laws which allow authorities acting under their corresponding statute to “take possession and make use of any person’s property as the Minister considers necessary or desirable for responding to the disaster”.

Governments resort to ever more invasive methods to control to keep the fracturing and bloated Leviathan afloat, while interpersonal trust among the citizenry plummets, reinforcing social decay.

The rhetoric and legislative history brings to mind the work of Thomas Szasz, who wrote, “If people believe that health values justify coercion, but that moral and political values do not, those who wish to coerce others will tend to enlarge the category of health values at the expense of the category of moral values.” Szasz was writing about the pathologisation of unapproved political opinions, such as those that challenge the aforementioned expressions of fealty to the regime’s dominant ideologies. However, his warnings apply equally to situations where the management of health issues encroach on the realm of civic rights. As Gottfried writes in After Liberalism, “Fearful subjects have given up liberty for security, but they may regret this choice if the sovereign loses their respect.” They may indeed, yet the coronavirus tracking app was downloaded six million times within two months of its release without aiding in the identification of a single close contact infection among the populace. In Victoria, military personnel have had to assist a call centre due to the volume of informants “dobbing” in their neighbours for supposed pandemic safety violations. One wonders whether these measures, and the society they are shaping, will not prove more fatal than the ailment they seek to cure.

The ease with which the public has allowed itself to fall deeper into the managerial panopticon naturally alarms those who see these developments

JAMES BURNHAM IN AUSTRALIA

Quadrant October 2020
as further encroachments on civil rights across different yet related policy areas. Despite the terrorism threat level not having risen in five years in Australia, the same “Liberal” government proposes to introduce laws that would allow the interrogation of fourteen-year-olds and further enhance civilian tracking abilities. This last move has been vocally opposed by a senator representing the Greens; thus the irony of a political party which would ordinarily embody the Cultural Marxist vanguard, but is now championing concerns typically close to the heart of libertarians and cultural traditionalists.

What do all these seemingly disparate developments have in common? The press conference hijacking incident and the growing authoritarianism of the government and private sector bureaucracies are both manifestations of the same trend; and both exhibit the same totalitarian tendency; the former because it trespasses onto the realm of electoral politics, the latter because it violates the integrity of the private realm. A classical Tory might conclude that while there is a place for everything, today nothing seems to be in its place, thus disorder proliferates. Since the withering of the nation-state hasn’t been universal, global powers such as China (whose politics are still defined by traditional loyalties, at least in the realm of official discourse) will naturally take advantage of the weaknesses of their neighbours who are motivated solely by economic concerns or abstract ideologies that reinforce mindlessly universalist ways of thinking. In response, governments resort to ever more invasive methods of control to keep the fracturing and bloated Leviathan afloat, while interpersonal trust among the citizenry plummets, reinforcing social decay. Libertarian academic Hans-Herman Hoppe writes in *A Short History of Man: Progress and Decline* (2015) that “every detail of private life, property, trade, and contract is regulated by increasingly higher mountains of paper laws” and furthermore:

> the higher the state expenditures on social, public and national security have risen, the more private property rights have been eroded, the more property has been expropriated, confiscated, destroyed, and depreciated, and the more have people been deprived of the very foundation of all protection: of personal independence, economic strength, and private wealth. The more paper laws have been produced, the more legal uncertainty and moral hazard has been created, and lawlessness has displaced law and order. And while we have become ever more dependent, helpless, impoverished, threatened and insecure, the ruling elite of politicians and plutocrats has become increasingly richer, more corrupt, dangerously armed, and arrogant.

This may be hyperbole characteristic of an eccentric anarcho-capitalist, but it illustrates a perception that is increasingly held by sections of the public. Whatever remnants of sovereignty still remain within the electoral class’s institutional framework—its parliaments, civil services and so on—political elites need to fundamentally re-evaluate the premises on which they operate. The necessity of circumstance may indeed be driving many of these tendencies, particularly in relation to the policing, intelligence and security services, but the question that social scientists and policy analysts should be asking is whether these trends are sustainable in the long term. It is difficult to imagine an affirmative answer. Sadly, it is more difficult to imagine the current political elite honestly contemplating the question—and therein lies the tragedy of the current moment.

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**Edwin Dyga is the Chief of Staff to the parliamentary leader of the Christian Democratic Party in New South Wales. He was the founder and convenor of the Sydney Traditionalist Forum.**
Poem to My Father for Christmas

When you come I want you to take my rod
And all the tackle in the canvas bag.

You pause as you settle to cast your mind
Now that your days are drawn by memory
And your words drift in a wavering voice
Which struggles against the current of thought

As you ask me to remind you of this time
Knowing that you may not remember
The words which float from the ledge of your self
Beyond the horizon where Voyager rests

As if I could ever forget those days
When you clambered ahead down the Goat Track
At the end of Narrawallee Street
And out to that shelf as old as the world

Where the fins of fossils swam through the rocks
And the gutters were bright with rainbow fish
As you cast far out ahead of us all
While a pod of dolphins was stitching the sea.

Ahead of us all you cast out again
Into the channels of dream which flow
From the tidal pools of my childhood
Guarded forever by the whale-shaped rock

Which retches its Jonah of stone into time
Then floats to the surface like a fable
From the fissures of the Permian sea
Where the surging waves bubble with steam

As glaciers slip their rivers of rocks
From the Pigeon House to the swimming stone
Which blows as it taunts the ghost of Ben Boyd
Below the lighthouse at Warden Head

Where I watched you cast into the depths
Of a day of dream I remake in my poem
When I caught a groper on my blackfish rod
In that horseshoe gutter brimming with foam.

Ahead of us all you cast out again
Beyond the bombora where fantasies
Of silver sweep as big as transoms
Drift through the kelp of the swaying seas
Past leatherjackets with spikes like lances,
Past Wreck Bay, where the drowned sea pilots sleep,
Past Point Perpendicular, where the ghost
Of Melbourne guts the belly of the deep

Until you come to Narrawallee,
Where we walked along the shoals of the beach,
And Mollymook, where our mother faces
The surf forever, dreaming beyond our reach.

We sit beneath the lemon-scented gums
Where the sky brims with the brightness of birds
Reminiscing the afternoon away
While the light dances on your drifting words

As I sort the tackle in your fishing bag
Into the stanzas of my mind: those floats
You showed me how to tie, that old green
CSR treacle tin with hand-made weights

And shavings of Hunter Valley rosewood,
The spinning reel I know I will always use,
And those star-shaped sinkers, constant pieces
Of that past which I will always fear to lose

Until I return to that rock platform,
The floor of the sea for the first dawn,
And cast far out to the blowing whale
Which guards the summer when I was born.

Bryan Coleborne

That kiss was mine

That kiss was nice
I had a dream
I felt the touch
Whose lips on mine?
Methought, benign
Your lips I felt … on mine
And I was loved by you at last
Beloved, bedeared by you at least …
And glad I was,
I thought of thee …
How sure I was it real to be!
’Twas not a crime:
That kiss was mine!

Philipp Ammon
The massacre maps are two impressive and closely imitative digital map representations: the Colonial Frontiers Massacre Map from the University of Newcastle and a slick and highly publicised offshoot The Killing Times from the Guardian (Australia). Both interactive maps of Australia are pockmarked with coloured dots, each of which represents a violent event at a specific location. Click a dot and information appears about the killing of “Victims” (black) by “Attackers” (white), click elsewhere and animated violence against Aborigines spreads across the continent from 1788.

The history both projects use comes from the same source, the Australian Research Council-funded Colonial Frontiers Massacre Project, which is based at the University of Newcastle and led by Professor Lyndall Ryan. The Killing Times is the centrepiece for the Guardian’s indigenous coverage and last year won, for both Guardian staff and University of Newcastle researchers, a Walkley Award and the Digital History Prize, part of the New South Wales Premier’s History Awards. This coronavirus year, Professor Ryan introduced the results of her team’s research at the Parliamentary Library and the National Library of Australia—often called Ryan’s Map.

The two maps presently draw attention to about 300 massacres. Fifty-four are located in Victoria and from these I selected thirty Western District events. Research which The Killing Times and the university academics are praised for is based on a single, shoddy secondary source. Twenty-six of the thirty narratives I looked at include plagiarisms and at least one massacre is a fabrication. Ryan’s academic team also claim credit for research not done.

In the following discussion “Massacre Map” refers to the University of Newcastle map. The thirty narratives I chose came from their website—the Guardian may have lightly copy-edited some of these source texts. In this list of plagiarisms the names of the massacres, sometimes followed by bracketed numbers, are the identifying names on the Massacre Map and The Killing Times.

Scars in the Landscape by Ian D. Clark has been plagiarised in Campaspe (2), Campaspe Plains, Connell’s Ford, Darlington Station, Fighting Waterholes, Lake Bolac, Maiden Hills, Mount Eccles, Mount Napier, Mount Sturgeon Station, Murderers Flat, Murdering Flat, Murdering Gully, Mustons, Reservoir (3), Tarrone (2), Victoria Valley and Wannon River. There are also comparatively minor instances of plagiarism in Crawford River, Fighting Hills, Mount Rouse, Tahara and Waterlo
Plains. *Who Killed the Koories?* by Michael Cannon has been plagiarised in Barmah Lake, Beveridge Island and Loddon Junction massacres.

Within the list of plagiarisms are four double-plagiarisms—text plagiarised from *Scars in the Landscape* which already contains plagiarisms. The Mount Eccles narrative uses text without acknowledgment from *Scars in the Landscape*, which includes text used without acknowledgment from *The Mills Brothers of Port Fairy* by Alan Broughton. The Fighting Waterholes narrative is plagiarised from Clark’s book, which includes plagiarised text from Aldo Massola’s *Journey to Aboriginal Victoria*. In Tarrone (2) and Wannon River the plagiarised text from Clark contains unacknowledged text from Michael Christie’s *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria* 1835–86. Neither *The Mills Brothers of Port Fairy* nor *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria* is listed in the Massacre Map footnotes or bibliography.

There are also suggestions not of plagiarism but laziness and lack of curiosity in that some texts, correctly acknowledged, have simply been cut and pasted from *Scars in the Landscape*. For example, Blood Hole has an eight-word introduction plagiarised from Ian Clark before a long quote from a single source—which also appears in *Scars in the Landscape*. The faux-historians, using exactly the same evidence for their Campaspe (2) and Waterloo Plains massacres, have placed the same event in two different locations.

Plagiarisms from *Scars in the Landscape* reveal even more problems from the Colonial Frontier Massacres Project team. Two examples show a tainted text being used to fabricate a massacre, and academic deceit.

A fake massacre was fabricated by plagiarising Ian Clark and not examining the source he used. The massacre which never happened was given a name, Campaspe (2)—not to be confused with the Campaspe Plains massacre. These bureaucrats of death also invented a specific location at latitude –37.621, longitude 141.582, and their website offers an image of the not-guilty landscape. The fabrication is built from the following narrative;
the italicised text is plagiarised from *Scars in the Landscape*, the misspelt name in the first line has been added by the plagiarists, and, as I say, this never happened:

*John Coppock, W.H. Yaldwin’s [sic] overseer, said in a sworn statement that on 9 June 1840, about 50 Aborigines who had stolen sheep from Dr Bowman and Mr Yaldwyn’s runs, had been tracked down by a party of eight white men. A “pitched battle” took place for three quarters of an hour, in which seven or eight Aborigines were shot dead but no white men were wounded or killed after which the sheep were recovered.*

The reason it is untrue is very simple, Ian Clark made a mistake. John Coppock gave his sworn evidence in 1838, not 1840: the fighting he described refers to an event on June 9, 1838, in Waterloo Plains. The faux-historians, using exactly the same evidence for their Campaspe (2) and Waterloo Plains massacres, have placed the same event in two different locations. The source Clark used is easily available and the matter covers several pages and also includes further sworn information from a farm labourer who took part in the violence. Clark’s error should have been noted when (or if) this source material was checked. Even so, the Ryan researchers could have noted the problem because they, and Clark, use John Coppock and his statement twice in their work. Clark, the Newcastle academics, and the *Guardian* are claiming that the same man took part in two different massacres on the same day, of the same month, in two different years. Using a single piece of evidence the Massacre Map produces two massacres at two different locations—and the death toll changes, upwards. Campaspe (2) supposedly claimed seven dead Aborigines (the *Guardian* suggests 75 dead) while the Waterloo Plains event is credited with twenty-three dead and two dead “attackers”—a murdered shepherd and a watchman. More Aborigines died at Waterloo Plains because Lyndall Ryan’s team Trove-found a newspaper account written forty-seven years later which gave the higher number of deaths—and made some erroneous statements which could have been checked.

The second case begins with plagiarisms from *Scars in the Landscape* and ends with modern deceit. Misappropriated words in the Massacre Map narrative for Murdering Flat (which never happened) include a seventy-five-word quotation credited to Aldo Massola’s *Journey to Aboriginal Victoria*—but it isn’t. Again Clark made a mistake—the cited lines actually come from *The Aborigines of Far Western Victoria: A Short Talk* by E.R. Trangmar. Some of Trangmar’s words do occur in Massola and he may have been drawing on the earlier writer or they were both taking material from an unnamed source. It is an interesting problem. The misattributed citation is the essential evidence presented for a claim that forty Aborigines were murdered. In their footnote the Massacre Map academics cite Massola as the source they have used, which is impossible: this is unquestionably academic deceit—there is no mention of Trangmar. There are other cases, like Campaspe (2), where I wondered if the sources being referenced had actually been checked, for there are some that should never have found their way into a serious study, but in this case it is absolutely clear they are claiming credit for research that was never done, and is false. Ian Clark made a simple mistake in handling his research; they didn’t.

This last error in attribution was one of the problems I listed when I wrote about *Scars in the Landscape* in my book *The Invention of Terra Nullius* (2005). I thought I was dealing with something very special, one of the worst academic history books ever printed. *Scars in the Landscape: A Register of Massacre Sites in Western Victoria, 1803–1859* was published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in 1995, and is now spreading its errors in PDF. Then I recorded, with amazement, the unjustified praise Ian Clark received from academics, who never checked. I said, not unfairly: “The work is a mess of primary sources, secondary sources and tip-shop junk. Some of the text has been plagiarised from the books he used.” I added three pages listing some of the problems I had noted. My view had not changed when I reminded *Quadrant* readers of its existence in an essay, “History on Fire”, noting, almost unbelievably, that in 2010 Clark’s book was still being used as a valid reference by approved historians, including Lyndall Ryan.

Plagiarising *Scars in the Landscape* is almost the only research of Western District violence carried out by Lyndall Ryan and her associates—apart from some not always well digested Trove searches. When *The Killing Times* and Massacres Project teams collected their award and prize money from the New South Wales Premier’s History Awards the judges’ congratulatory statement was a libel on the truth:

They [the massacres] have been painstakingly identified and corroborated from a wide range of sources including settler diaries, explorers’ journals, newspaper reports, Aboriginal testimony, Parliamentary papers, government archival sources and much more.
In the thirty massacres I chose, Ian Clark’s *Scars in the Landscape* is cited as a source twenty-seven times. In the three Clark-free narratives two are plagiarised from Michael Cannon’s *Who Killed the Koories?* (a secondary history without footnoted references but with an excellent bibliography for the period when it was published) and the third is a dim and doubtful new massacre based on unfounded suppositions by a local historian and credited by the academics to a “typescript in possession of the author”. The newspaper evidence on which this latter theorising is based has been edited on the Massacre Map to make it seem a first-person narrative, which it isn’t.

The reliance of Lyndall Ryan’s researchers on a single text draws attention to the promised work not done in the archives. The colonial government records preserved in the Victorian Public Record Series (VPRS) held in the Public Record Office of Victoria are an essential resource for researching and writing. For an historian these are fundamental and exhilarating primary source materials which hold riches still to be discovered. Here are carefully preserved government documents, court and trial records, the Native Police files, correspondence to and from settlers, and utterly essential references for writing Aboriginal history. The Massacre Map presently lists fifty-four events in Victoria, but of the thirty I looked at in the Western District only three of these referenced VPRS files—and they were all part of the original footnotes in *Scars in the Landscape*. The Massacre Map bibliography lists only three VPRS files: for context, the bibliography of *Who Killed the Koories?* lists thirty-seven files, and *Scars in the Landscape* thirteen. These latter two books are histories of the Western District while the Massacre Map covers the whole state. Though it hardly seems possible that such archival negligence has taken place, the proof is in the footnotes.

*The Killing Times* states, “Research and verification of all available evidence is done carefully and takes time.” It doesn’t if you dump research and simply copy and plagiarise a single text. They also say, “Only events for which sufficient information remains from the past and can be verified are included.” That is a lie. The truth is that the *Guardian* and Lyndall Ryan’s researchers have won undeserved awards for faked massacres, plagiarism and deceit.

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A dry leaf

All that is left is a dry brown leaf, marked by tiny teeth marks. My hand trembles as I hold it, those marks talk to me, tell me of her joy. She loved leaves, would sit for hours in front of the flywire door watching brown, dry leaves dancing in little eddies on the side of the house, beating a cantata of brittleness. I hold the leaf and I feel her, a coat softer than possum fur. She was small but feisty, her voice penetrating my mind, my peace. I still hear her in the sounds of the house when it moves in the heat, the wind; a ghostly, faint meow.

*Mocco Wollert*
When Europeans first settled in Australia in 1788, they encountered an Aboriginal society of almost incredible barbarism and violence. The reasons for the violence and barbarism of Aboriginal society derive entirely, or almost entirely, from one factor alone. The Aborigines were hunter-gatherers who had not domesticated livestock or grown crops for food. As a result, the lives of the hundreds of small tribes that constituted Aboriginal society were engaged in a never-ending struggle to find what food they could from what little existed on this continent. Directly because of this central fact, it was absolutely necessary to keep the size of each tribe small enough for its members to be kept alive by what food and other sustenance they could find. It was therefore absolutely necessary for them to avoid adding any excess mouths to feed to the limited numbers who could be kept alive by the methods of hunter-gatherers in the Dry Continent. They did this by systematically eliminating the excess mouths.

Probably the most important method of eliminating these excess mouths was infanticide, as Ludwik Krzywicki detailed in his 1934 anthropological study *Primitive Society and Its Vital Statistics.* Deliberate infanticide existed throughout Aboriginal society, and it was practised by nearly all of the Aboriginal tribes. “Horrible tales were told about it. R. Oberlander was shown a woman who had murdered ten children.” Elderly women from the Dieri (Diyari) tribe admitted to South Australian mounted policeman Samuel Gason “of having disposed in this manner of two to four of their offspring: in this way, about 30% of new-born infants perished at the hands of their mothers in the Lake Eyre district”. Among the Narrinyeri (Ngarrindjeri) of the lower Murray district, “more than one half of the children fell victim to this atrocious custom”; the Congregationalist missionary George Taplin “knew several women who had murdered two or three of their new-born children”. Mounted policeman William Henry Willshire said:

of the parts of Central Australia known to him, that at least 60% of the women committed infanticide. He tells of one woman that she had five children, three of whom she murdered immediately after birth, and she explained in her broken English: “me bin keepem one boy and one girl, no good keepem mob, him too much wantem tuckout!” Therefore the women of the bush daily murder their children and do not wish to raise more than two.

The ostensible reasons for widespread infanticide varied. Victorian government surveyor Philip Chauncy saw a young woman, shortly after her child’s birth, scratch “a hole in the sand behind her hut and having given it a ‘little’ knock on the head, laid it in the hole and kept on crying, the child crying too, till she could bear it no longer, and she went out and gave it another little knock which killed it”. Asked by Chauncy how she could do such a thing, she “replied pointing to the bag on her back that there was room only for one child, and she could not possibly carry another”. When Albert Alexander Le Souef, son of the protector of Aborigines in the Goulburn district, asked a young woman “why she had dashed her infant’s brains out against a tree” she “replied coolly: ‘Oh! too much cry that fellow’”. Frail and malformed children were murdered, among other reasons, just because they were frail. A twin was killed (and sometimes both) because the mother could not suckle it ... When a mother died while suckling a child, the infant was buried with her, and death often awaited the babe when its father, who as a hunter maintained the family, departed this life.

Moreover, “sometimes an infant was murdered and cooked for its elder brother or sister to eat, in order to make him or her strong by feeding on the muscle of the baby”. Superstitions regarding
twins often resulted in the murder of one or both. There were occasional cases of infants being killed to enable their mothers to suckle orphaned dingo pups instead.

At base, the reasons for widespread infanticide were the product of the Aborigines’ ubiquitous hunter-gatherer lifestyle. “The natives are generally much attached to their children ... and yet there is no doubt that infanticide prevailed to a fearful extent.” Krzywicki cites the reasons for this as:

connected with the difficulty of bringing up a child in the conditions of native life in Australia, and namely: the long sucking of the child at its mother’s breast, and the necessity of carrying the child on her back for several years during the wanderings inseparable from a roving way of life.

As Chauncy found, Aboriginal women “justifying themselves before the white men for the murders they had committed, pointed to the bag in which they carry their infants and said there was only room for one child in it”. In Central Australia a new-born infant was killed if its predecessor was eighteen months or less; in other places, the new infant was killed if the previously born child was unable to walk; in other places, if the elder child was not yet aged three or four.

[If] we assume that [an Aboriginal] woman gave birth on an average to five children, then about 20% of the total number of children in these tribes would perish [through infanticide] immediately after birth ... In other tribes ... it was the custom to murder every child born over and above the three living ones. Here infanticide would dispose of about 40% of the new-born infants ... But our percentages are even so very modest ones as compared with those of some observers. Some authorities even assert that 50% of the new-born children died a violent death immediately after birth.

Some mortality figures may be inferred from these realities. If the Aboriginal population of Australia was 300,000 in 1788—some demographers, rightly or wrongly, put the figure far higher—and if the Aboriginal birth rate was about 4 per cent per annum, and if only 20 per cent of all newborn infants were killed, then this suggests that about 2500 infants were killed every year before European settlement, or 250,000 per century. In the estimated 40,000 years of Aboriginal habitation of Australia before 1788, it therefore follows that 700 million Aboriginal infants were murdered.

But the reality gets even worse. It seems certainly to be the case that many Aboriginal children were deliberately killed to be eaten. The existence of this eating of children is testified by all too numerous facts. A swagman, Phil Moubray, relates that he found in the basin of the River Mitchell the Aborigines roasting and eating their own children:

When a child looks well, is “well-fed,” or “fat,” it may happen that one of the men, or even the whole community, murders it for cannibalistic purposes in the absence of its mother ... We do not think that such cannibalism was common, though there are many references to it ... It was only in periods of drought and famine that child-eating assumed large proportions ... In hard summers the new-born children seem to be all eaten in the Kaura tribe. [Explorer Alfred William] Howitt inferred this from the remarkable gaps that appeared in the ages of the children ... [I]n the Birria tribe during the years 1876-77, in the drought, not only were all the infants devoured, but even the younger grown children. However, in some tribes this practice appeared, even in a normal period, not to be so very rare. At least, if the gossip that circulated among the tribes were to be believed, cannibalism was even more extensive than we suppose. For instance, one tribe relates of another that it marks at birth those infants which are to be eaten later on; again the children of some women were always killed and eaten as soon as they got fat enough. According to [doctor and squatter Richard] Machattie, a tribe numbering 250 when the Europeans came, during the next six years ate seven children, i.e., about 3% of the whole population.

Another apparently ubiquitous feature of Aboriginal society was the striking majority of adult men compared with adult women:

According to [squatter Edward Micklethwaite] Curr, there was in every tribe when it first came into contact with the Whites “a permanent excess” of men over women, amounting to as much as two to one ... [Squatter Peter] Beveridge, noting the preponderance of men over women, declares that this exists not because more boys were born than girls—the sexes equal each other at birth—but because the mortality among the women after the age of puberty is attained is far greater than among men: this is caused by many factors, the most important of which is...
early marriage (at eleven or twelve years of age) and the treatment of the wives by the men as if they were no more than cattle.

Apart from infanticide and other factors occasioned by the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, another apparently important cause of death was tribal warfare. “Every tribe dreads a night attack from another tribe”:

Amongst the whole of the tribes of Australia the cause not of fights, but of bloodshed, was, nine times out of ten, the belief that the deaths of persons, no matter from what apparent cause other than old age, was attributable to the spells and incantations of some of their enemies, their enemies including all Blacks not their intimate friends and neighbours ... With the death of women and young children the Blacks generally did not concern themselves, but for every adult man who died from any cause save old age, a corresponding victim was anxiously desired ... [This] systematized murder throughout the continent rendered the friendship of the tribes at large impossible, and was the great factor of savagery and degradation.

That pre-literate societies were not the peaceful, idyllic Edens widely imagined today and depicted in the contemporary media, has been shown in many recent works by framer and more truthful anthropologists, such as Lawrence H. Keeley in War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage (1996). But “The Myth of the Noble Savage” is a powerful and persistent one, and the present tendency to whitewash and obfuscate the barbaric aspects of Aboriginal society—while depicting European settlement in Australia as genocidal—has only strengthened the force of this image.

A number of conclusions may be drawn from the facts presented here. First, pre-contact Aboriginal life resembled more closely than anything else Thomas Hobbes's famous description of “life in the state of nature”: “brutal, nasty, and short”. No one in their senses would voluntarily choose to live in the lifestyle of pre-contact Aborigines. Any of our radicals who argues for its merits should be compelled to live in their manner: typically stark naked, with no buildings or more than primitive shelter, permanently foraging for whatever food could be found, illiterate, and, if ill, treated by a tribal witch doctor. Second, it is apparent that the Aborigines had no concept of human rights of any kind, only collective tribal survival, and no notion of any of the aspects of justice which we take for granted, from the presumption of innocence to the sanctity of human life, especially of children and other innocents. Finally, these concepts were brought to Australia, however imperfectly, by Europeans in 1788, but today our radicals are doing their best wholly to reverse the historical facts, branding the Aborigines as innocents and the Europeans as genocidal monsters. As always, it is up to the historian to, as von Ranke famously put it, set out “what actually happened”.

Note
* The references in this article are taken from a remarkable anthropological study, Primitive Society and Its Vital Statistics (Macmillan, London, 1934) by Ludwik Krzywicki (1859–1941), who was Professor of Social History at Warsaw University. It should be said that while many might assume that he was a right-wing racist, the exact opposite was the case. He was a lifelong leftist who as a student was expelled from the Medical Faculty of Warsaw University for his radical activities. During the 1905 Russian Revolution (when Poland was part of Tsarist Russia) he was arrested by the Tsarist authorities for his radical views. He edited the newspaper of the Polish Socialist Party and was one of a group which translated Karl Marx’s Das Kapital into Polish. Krzywicki died in 1941 of injuries he received when his apartment in Warsaw was bombed by the Luftwaffe when Nazi Germany invaded Poland.

Also on the topic of this article, see Geoffrey Blainey, The Story of Australia’s People: The Rise and Fall of Ancient Australia (2015) and my Genocide: A History (2004).

William D. Rubinstein taught at Deakin University and at the University of Wales, and now lives in Melbourne. He has often written for Quadrant. Detailed references in this article to Ludwik Krzywicki’s book appear at Quadrant Online.
Fraternity of Rock
(Beehive Huts, Dingle Peninsula, Ireland)

The huts sit squat, tight, huddling in a pack, looking onto a pewtered Atlantic, its silver sheen a shining offset to the dull grey stone of beehive with its lichen stickers. No thaw from the cold of millennia, their portals lion-less Mycenean gates. Stone upon careful stone, slice-packed, stacked, each a lintel for the other. The fraternity of rock, a rounded rising to celestial dome. Hearth, spirit-dwelling, bulwark and bunker against rain, wind fury, ice … the inimical. Community and congregation traverse curved wall, rise from earthen floor. Gods were sought here, young raised, life forged within cauldron of steep hill, coast and sea.

Carrowkeel
(Megalithic Cemetery, County Sligo)

At Carrowkeel nothing comes between sky, stone, heather and light, so that the underworld meets the heavens, where low clouds are a roiling, grey blanket pulled up from horizon to hill, and damp air with its cold wetness wraps passage tombs inside their own universe … trapping time, mystery, belief. The burial mounds tumble, sprawl, yet the circumference is true, the fixture eternal. They hug close the earth but still hump skyward, their black doors tunnelling into darkness.

Little Skellig

The gannets perch in sharp ascendancy, tiered tenants in a packed grandstand, a pristine throng companied on ink-black rock, matching foam and feather.

Their riotous cries drown the engine’s gargle, with the airspace above a free-wheeling flight-path of double-arcs that glide, lift, drift and drop on thermals.

They sit, shuffle, flap, flutter, waddle, wait, alive to looming migration. Below, the thick bleach of droppings oozes down sheer stone: white stripes searching for seawash.

There’s no oratory here, no beehive huts. Prayers were offered up elsewhere. But the cacophony sings its own hymn to home, staging post, pilgrimage.

James Curran
The humanities are in crisis, as readers of *Quadrant* will be only too aware. What was once the jewel in the crown of scholarship in Western civilisation has become a pedagogical sheltered workshop in our universities, totally dedicated to promulgating anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-democratic and (literally) anti-human ideologies. This situation has recently attracted the attention of the media and the federal government, which has proposed changes to course fee structures that are intended to dissuade students from enrolling in what have become useless if not in fact pernicious degrees in the humanities, arts and social sciences.

Unfortunately, the intensity of the reaction to this appalling situation has obscured the true nature of the humanities and their once illustrious history as the scholarly arm of humanism, stretching back seven centuries as a field of study, and over 2000 years as a project to lay claim “to the glory that was Greece / And the grandeur that was Rome” (to quote Edgar Allan Poe’s famous words from “To Helen”).

This heritage has been forgotten in the increasingly furious reaction to the ideological coup that has taken place over the past fifty years. The humanities have been hollowed out, leaving only a shell; the traditional disciplines have either been driven out or completely debauched intellectually, and a whole range of new ideology-infested subjects have set up home in their place. Perversely, while living comfortably in this “humanities” shell the tenured practitioners of these subjects have adopted as their mission the complete denunciation and destruction of the humanities and humanism, along with Western civilisation in general. This is the true crisis of the humanities.

Even some defenders of the humanities misunderstand the tradition and where its strengths lie. For example, in an attempted defence of the field *(Weekend Australian*, June 27), Luke Slattery tries to bolster his case by declaring, “I don’t believe humanism is an exclusive product of Western civilisation. And I think, on balance, that there is a strong case for an undergraduate program in multicultural humanism anchored in the African, Asian and Middle Eastern traditions.”

This is wrong on a number of counts, but it particularly betrays the fundamental failure of nerve that has undermined the humanities and their once impregnable position in the universities. It seems to have been conceded that humanism is a possession of many civilisations and that the humanities can’t stand on their own as a product of Western civilisation, but must be reinforced and have their existence justified by importing elements from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This claim falls apart once the intellectual traditions of these regions are actually explored. Moreover, it is condescending, as if these other cultures should be gratified by our appropriation of what they might regard as their intellectual treasures.

However, it is also a defence mechanism, prompted by the outrageous “cancel culture” attack on proposed courses in Western civilisation. “It’s all right,” our apologists are saying, “we’re terribly inclusive; it’s not just the West, there’s room in the humanist tradition and the humanities for everyone.” It’s also prompted by the Left’s relentless campaign of denigration of Western civilisation, humanism and the humanities. For example, it is claimed that humanism maintains an “ancient continuity” between Classical Greek civilisation and Nazism (see Tony Davies, *Humanism*, 2008). From a radical perspective, attacks on humanism are commonplace, typically denouncing it as an ideological construct lying at the heart of Western culture, disguising various forms of monstrous oppression. Consequently, its more reticent defenders embrace a sort of inclusive academic multiculturalism, looking for allies and hoping for safety in numbers.

This is not the right path to take. What is required is an unapologetic reassertion of the humanist tradition and its central place in Western civilisation. Let us now look at what we have lost...
in the humanities, and then at what has come to take its place, hollowing out the once great tradition and living comfortably in its shell. For reasons of conciseness, we will focus on the diametrically opposed visions of humanity, the self, and the individual that lie at the centre of both humanism and its deadly anti-humanist ideologies.

Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304–74) is generally regarded as the father of humanism, although the seeds of that revolutionary program had been sown earlier, as classical texts began to filter into Europe in the eleventh century. Petrarch began reflecting on human potentiality and the "this-worldly" meaning of life, and saw how scholars could draw upon the cultural treasures of classical civilisation to augment and develop the Christian tradition. This quest was taken up in the fifteenth century by scholars of the Italian Renaissance, and humanism’s subsequent influence is one of the main reasons the Renaissance is viewed as a distinct historical period, a time of rebirth of classical learning after the so-called “Dark Ages” lamented by Petrarch.

It is important to note, as Oscar Kristeller pointed out in 1961, that “Renaissance humanism was not ... a philosophical tendency or system, but rather a cultural and educational program which emphasised and developed” the study of the humanities. Taken together, these disciplines constituted a package that empowered scholarship and personal transformation. Its guiding concerns included the dignity of the human quest in this life, the privileged place humanity occupies in the universe, the importance of the various classical systems of thought and other forms of ancient wisdom, an interest in the natural world, and a profound new emphasis on the individual.

This revolutionary program was identified by Jacob Burckhardt in his literally epoch-defining work, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860). This book focuses particularly on “the development of the individual” and “the revival of antiquity”, their interaction, along with the rise, flourishing and destiny of humanism in the period.

The term itself was introduced (as humanismus) by nineteenth-century German scholars to reflect the Renaissance emphasis upon classical studies in education taught by the umanisti, scholars of classical literature. Umanisti is derived from the studia humanitatis, which consisted of such disciplines as grammar, poetry, rhetoric, history and moral philosophy, and was derived in turn from the Greek paideia. This etymology emphasises how the humanities pursue a scholarly and educational ideal that stretches back millennia to the very origins of Western civilisation. (This is why it is bizarre to cede “joint ownership” of the tradition to “Africa, Asia, and the Middle East”, as our apologists are prepared to do.)

This educational ideal was realised in the form of the “liberal arts” (artes liberales). These are those seven intellectual disciplines that it was considered essential for free citizens to master if they were to participate fully in civic life. These disciplines were divided into two groups. Initially, in antiquity there were three disciplines—grammar, rhetoric and logic—which constituted the Trivium. In the Middle Ages four were added—arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy—which constituted the Quadrivium.

These two groupings have important characteristics that have largely been forgotten, to our great detriment. The Trivium focuses on those disciplines that are concerned with the realm of mind, while the Quadrivium is concerned with the realm of matter and space. Moreover, these disciplines involve intransitive activity—"the action begins in the agent and ends in the agent, who is perfected by the action". This may be contrasted with utilitarian disciplines like the fine or manual arts, which involve transitive action—"the action goes out from the agent and ends in the object produced", usually producing something of cultural or commercial value. Such a distinction between inwardly and outwardly directed actions reflects the emphasis on the perfection of the individual that defined the traditional humanities, and that we are emphasising here.

Indeed, the discovery and transformation of the self was central to Renaissance Humanism. As Kristeller observes, it was driven by a fundamental "tendency to express, and to consider worth expressing, the concrete uniqueness of one's feelings, opinions, experiences, and surroundings". It hearkened back to the spiritual exercises of ancient philosophy, analysed by Pierre Hadot (Philosophy as a Way of Life, 1995):

All spiritual exercises are, fundamentally, a return to the self, in which the self is liberated from the state of alienation into which it has been plunged by worries, passions and desires. The "self" liberated in this way is no longer merely our egoistic, passionate individuality; it is our moral person, open to universality and objectivity, and participating in universal nature or thought.

In this fashion, humanism explored subjective experience, promoted individual self-knowledge, and sought to identify and communicate the foundational values and practices of a life well lived.
Letters, memoirs, confessions and biographies became popular genres (taking inspiration from the remarkable twelfth-century *Letters of Abelard & Heloise*). The pedagogy of humanism therefore aimed not just at the transmission of knowledge but above all at the development and eventual self-realisation of the individual, with the expectation that a vibrant and virtuous society would flow from this.

From this fundamental orientation, the humanist curriculum evolved and ramified over the centuries through the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, the First and Second Industrial Revolutions, and the Age of Imperialism. Other disciplines were added, including history, Greek and poetry, and it became the foundation for elite education in Europe, particularly for the governing classes, the clergy and the professions, gradually spreading to the middle classes and other social strata. The humanistic ideal of a liberal arts education persisted until the middle of the twentieth century.

What happened then? At that time, the humanities and liberal arts were widely represented in Britain, Europe and in America, including the “Great Books” courses and civilisation survey subjects. In Australia similar survey courses existed, for example at the fledgling La Trobe University before it was engulfed by student radicalism.

Meanwhile, secondary schools had comprehensive humanities curricula, culminating with demanding year-long senior subjects in English Literature, British History, Modern European History, Eighteenth-Century History, Classical Civilisation, Ancient History, Australian History, and Renaissance and Reformation History. Even in state high schools it was common for the senior masters to wear academic gowns, oversee specialist subject libraries, and seek to mentor promising students into humanistic academic studies.

Out in suburbia, fifty-four-volume editions of the *Great Books of the Western World* were being sold door-to-door, along with the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which lasted in print from 1768 to 2010, offering about 40 million words on half a million topics. These monuments to the humanist faith in the value of knowledge were so expensive that they were offered on “hire purchase” terms, and their purchase by hard-pressed working families was a testimony to the preparedness of ordinary folk to invest in that knowledge.

But it was the height of the Cold War, the West was entering the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, and innumerable new universities were opening up for the Baby Boomers. Abruptly, this entire realm of humanist pedagogy and humanities scholarship came under concerted attack. Avowed communists of various allegiances, radical New Leftists, anti-Western ideologues, exponents of identity politics, feminists, self-styled victims’ groups, radical environmentalists, multiculturalists and advocates of political correctness came to form a formidable “Progressive” coalition that depicted the traditional courses as instruments of Western imperialism, technocratic oppression, elitism, sexism, racism and ecological destruction. Academic gowns were hastily put away as a new generation of teachers took over.

Consequently, the Great Books courses largely vanished from curricula and Western civilisation courses were demonised, as we have seen in Australia with the Ramsay Centre’s Western Civilisation initiative. Traditional history and literature subjects atrophied in the universities and virtually disappeared in Australian schools as sophisticated stand-alone subjects possessing a canon of work that was systematically taught and studied.

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Literary texts [now] mattered not because they were concerned with questions of value or even because they were manifestations of individual consciousness … It was not consciousness but the ways in which consciousness was produced and structured that mattered. The notion of an autonomous world of the individual imagination was nonsense, as were the ideas that people shape their own lives and think their own thoughts.
This approach was formalised as “theory”, and its dominance was exemplified by such gargan-tuan anthologies as the Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, which runs to some 2850 pages of frequently impenetrable prose extracts. It declares explicitly that the study of literature is inherently political, must take its lead from new social movements, must provoke scepticism about society’s institutions and values, and must be prepared to engage in political “resistance”—the revolution begins in the tutorial.

This shift reflected the tremendous influence of neo-Marxist theory, social history, feminism, post-modernism and post-colonialist studies, described so presciently by Keith Windschuttle in The Killing of History (1994). And so, as another leading historian, Norman Davies, observed:

Humanist thought, Reformation theology, scientific discovery, and overseas exploration have had to give way ... the professionals now like to spotlight magic, vagrancy, disease, or the decimation of colonial populations.

The Renaissance itself quickly fell victim to this shift from the sublime to the mundane. Once, entire volumes were routinely devoted to it but soon a prominent history of the past millennium offered no specific discussion of the Renaissance in a work of over 800 pages, while another massive history of Europe gave it only a two-page subsection. In Australia, where there was once an entire Year 12 subject on Renaissance and Reformation History, a new history curriculum offered the era only as an elective at Year 8 level, competing with Medieval Europe, the Vikings, and the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment were barely mentioned. This represented the suppression of the most important periods in modern history. Is it any wonder that the humanities sank into crisis?

This was especially so as this iconoclastic intelligentsia refined its anti-humanist counter-ideology. This coalition of intellectuals, academics, teachers, ideologues, writers, artists and film-makers formed an “adversary culture”, as Lionel Trilling put it. It defined itself in terms of its opposition to what it first dismissed as “bourgeois” middle-class culture, then as imperialism, then as a “patriarchy”, then as a racist dystopia, before finally turning against Western civilisation in general. Posing always as outsiders, this intelligentsia came quickly to actually dominate the very culture they pretended to be opposing. As Daniel Bell observed in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (1974), they soon controlled “the publishing houses, museums, and galleries; the major news, picture, and cultural weeklies and monthlies, the theatre, the cinema, and the universities”. In the decades since, this stranglehold became ever tighter, culminating in the cultural auto-da-fés and bonfires of the vanities that we are presently enduring.

At the level of political critique, conventional Marxism-Leninism has had a tremendous impact, as with the multi-million-selling A People’s History of the United States (1980) by Howard Zinn. This spawned a copycat Australian version, A People’s History of Australia since 1788, deliberately published in 1988 to spoil the Bicentennial.

This lumpen-Marxism was augmented by the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School and the influential Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944), copies of which were handed around in the 1960s like contraband samizdat. Its authors, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, claimed that Reason has not realised its Enlightenment promise of liberation but had instead become a totalitarian force that links liberal democracy with Stalinism and Nazism as a form of totalitarianism. For them, this is epitomised by the heroine of the Marquis de Sade’s pornographic novel Juliette (1798), who, in David Macey’s words, “exploits the power of rational thought as an instrument of sadistic domination and pleasure. Juliette enjoys the exquisite pleasures of destroying the civilisation of the Enlightenment with the very weapons it has created.” It is a measure of the irresponsibility and superficiality of this type of radicalism that it makes “Reason” the enemy and takes evidence for its argument from pornography.

It is at the level of the human person that the intelligentsia made its anti-humanism explicit and it is here that the contrast with the historical humanist tradition is so striking. According to this version of neo-Marxism, “men” do not make history, nor find their ‘truth’ or ‘purpose’ in it; history is a process without a subject”. Similarly, the communist theoretician (and wife-murderer) Louis Althusser, argued that humanism is merely the ideology of the bourgeois revolution and capitalist society. According to him, human history has no subject but simply charts the trajectory through time of economic forces and the relations of production, carrying the masses along with them.

Behind such anti-humanism was Claude Levi-Strauss, the inventor of structuralism, which reduces human beings to place-markers in an infinite system of signs. He especially denounced the “lawless humanism” that was allegedly destroying non-Western cultures and the ecological balance of the earth. The magnitude of his anti-humanism can be measured by his assertion that “the survival of [a single] species should be as precious to us as that of
the entire corpus of a Michelangelo, a Rembrandt, a Rousseau, or a Kant”.

Meanwhile, the structuralist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan insisted that the Western self is radically split, and that the Cartesian notion of a stable and integrated subject is the core, crippling illusion of humanism. Subsequently, the post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault famously announced “the death of man”: “Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end,” he declared, “and as the structures that shape human knowledge shift”, so man will disappear, “erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”. Under the impact of such attacks, humanism became “a code word for the impotent and reactionary values of the bourgeois literary canon builders of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries”, as one radical feminist put it.

According to this anti-humanist ideology, the humanist pursuit of knowledge is illusory, because there is no fixed structure to the world and therefore there can be no final correspondence between that world and our knowledge of it. Similarly, there are no “essences”, no essential nature of anything; there is no “human nature”, and there is no “woman” or “man” (as J.K. Rowling recently discovered to her cost). Reality is constructed and knowledge is reducible to the language via which this is accomplished. Moreover, language is merely conventional and subject to the willful exercise of power. Power and knowledge are therefore conflated and interchangeable according to the formula made famous by Foucault, “Power/Knowledge”. Similarly, the world is only text and outside the text there is nothing, as Jacques Derrida insisted.

From this it follows that those who control language control reality, which is why the Left is so focused on words, signs, symbols, images and language generally. In particular, it insists there are no settled “selves” but only constructed identities, drawing on sexual fantasies and the flotsam and jetsam of contemporary popular culture. In academia, this mandates all sorts of subjects in feminist and queer theory, transgender studies and the rest. It also underpins the concept of “intersectionality”, according to which a person is the “intersection” of the sum total of a wide range of “identities” (such as gender, race, class and body image), all of which are caught up in the play of “Power/Knowledge” in an oppressive society.

So flimsy and fragile are these fashioned facades that they demand to be protected from real and imagined slights by the draconian use of state power, as with the Australian Human Rights Commission and similar state agencies. Such defensiveness is understandable, as these “snowflakes” with their constructed personas hover over an existential void, utterly vulnerable to reason, which is why reason is demonised. Awaiting them is “the abyss of annihilation” brought by the inevitable collision with reality. This is what makes those possessed by these illusions so paranoid and dangerous, as various people dragged before the AHRC star chamber have discovered.

So this is what has happened to the humanities—its true crisis. A tradition some 750 years in the making has been invaded, pirated, debauched and eventually hollowed out, leaving a shell within which a whole range of alien ideas have set up shop. Ensnosed in tenured positions in our universities, their advocates play out their intellectual fantasies, imagining that they and their acolytes are infinitely plastic beings, floating about in a sea of desire, while they seek determinedly to destroy not only the humanist tradition but the entire civilisation built around it. These people and their ideologies now represent the humanities.

What is the result? From a conservative perspective, as John Carroll wrote in *Humani*

We live amidst the ruins of the great, 500-year epoch of Humanism. Around us is that colossal wreck. Our culture is a flat expanse of rubble. It hardly offers shelter from a mild cosmic breeze, never mind one of those icy gales that regularly return to rip people out of the cozy intimacy of their daily lives and confront them with oblivion.

But what is now a wreck was for half a millennium “a huge and brilliantly lit metropolis of a culture” that hosted “the most sustained bout of philosophical, literary, artistic and musical wrestling known to man”. At stake in this Promethean struggle was “the future of the Western soul”, and the battle was lost.

But perhaps it hasn’t been finally lost; perhaps there is an opportunity for a counter-attack, as the products of the debauched teachings infecting our universities demonstrate their wilful, nihilistic ignorance in the streets and on social media. Dressing up their iconoclasm as a moral posture, they are campaigning to destroy a civilisation so they don’t have to learn about it. Probably the universities will have to be cut free and their academic ideologues left to wither on the vine. And meanwhile, in circles where the Western tradition and scholarship are still valued, the process of reclamation of humanism and the humanities can begin.

* Mervyn Bendle is contributing a series of articles on Kenneth Clark’s Civilisation on Quadrant Online.
The French political economist Frédéric Bastiat (1801–50) is not particularly well acknowledged or regarded in the annals of economics. My bible on economic theories and personalities of the past, Mark Blaug’s *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, does not mention him. A clue to his relative obscurity can be found in an entry by economist Robert F. Hébert in the 1987 edition of The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics:

Generally, judgment on Bastiat has been that he made no original contributions to economic analysis. Cairnes, Sidgwick, and Bohm-Bawerk discounted his pure economics entirely. Marshall said that he understood economics hardly better than the socialists against whom he declaimed. And Schumpeter declared that Bastiat was not a bad theorist, he was simply no theorist at all.

At the same time, Hébert also quotes Schumpeter as calling Bastiat “the most brilliant economic journalist who ever lived”. A mixed review. And he is not without fans. Austrian economists are fond of him. The American Institute for Economic Research sponsors a global network of Bastiat societies, including in Australia, to advance the causes which he espoused: free trade and economic liberty more generally. But the standing of Bastiat in economic circles is somewhat beside my point.

My purpose is not to explore or assess Bastiat’s economic theorising which, in part, goes to the esoterica of value theory. No one cares much about that. What is worth caring about is Bastiat’s exposure of economic fallacies that are brought about by ignoring effects which are not immediately obvious; or, in Bastiat’s words, not seen.

Bastiat was an unabashed free-trader and economic libertarian. Moreover, if the English translations of his works are a guide, he was a clear and punchy writer, fond of simple stories, akin to parables, to make his case, of which “The Broken Window” is the best-known. Critically, he was intent on seeing what others didn’t, or ignored. And it is this identification and dissection of unseen effects of policies and actions which, I suggest, is his abiding legacy to public life; and worth revisiting.

Economic fallacies of his day were in Bastiat’s crosshairs but his insights and arguments have wide and current application. They have not been worn down by time. As Hayek wrote in 1964 in his introduction to Bastiat’s Selected Essays in Political Economy:

If the reader should be inclined to feel superior to the rather simple fallacies that Bastiat often finds it necessary to refute, he should remember that in some other respects his compatriots of more than a hundred years ago were considerably wiser than our generation.

Nothing has changed. Hayek’s assessment remains valid today. I will go to economics first before commenting on Bastiat’s methodology and then branching out to illustrate how this methodology has application beyond economics. In going to economics, I will focus on how Bastiat shines a light on what can accurately be called the “Keynesian fallacy”—even though that particular fallacy was still to make its appearance. Regrettably, it’s ever timely to focus on Keynesianism, which is again plaguing our future by giving imprimatur to governments to engage in massive spending, borrowing and money printing. Hang onto your hats; or, more literally, your gold.

Bastiat was a contemporary of John Stuart Mill. But the two really can’t be compared. Mill’s economics is far more comprehensive, rigorous and sophisticated. On the other hand, Mill is wordy, dense and hard going. Bastiat is not. I am struck by Keynes putting down Mill in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*: “Contemporary economists, who might hesitate to agree with Mill, do not hesitate to accept Mill’s doctrine as their premise.” The pointy end of this doctrine, to

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**Peter Smith**

That Which is Seen, and That Which is Not Seen
which Keynes refers is, in his words, “that if people don’t spend money in one way, they will spend it in another”. In other words, there can be no shortage of spending overall. Keynes’s entire thesis comes to very little more than undermining the validity of this doctrine and replacing it with his own.

As we know, Keynes won his battle of ideas; and resoundingly. His alternative doctrine that economies suffer from chronic, and often acute, shortages of spending is accepted throughout the world by almost all economists and, so far as I can tell, by all central banks, government treasury departments and international economic organisations. There are a few holdouts—Austrian economists and some conservative economists—but these are impotent and barely visible in the scheme of things. Like modern-day Christian literalists.

My own view is that Mill set the standard for understanding how economies work. But he requires close reading, which doesn’t necessarily lead to a coincidence of interpretations. His relative inaccessibility, in the less verbose world of the 1930s compared with the 1850s, meant that Keynes could get away more easily with putting him down and cavalierly dismissing him. Who in the aftermath of the publication of the General Theory in 1936 defended Mill’s economics? My recall is that none did.

There were plenty of critics in the learned journals, most of whom eventually admitted defeat—or slunk away in confusion, battered by the growing consensus that Keynes had seen the flaws and rightly changed the course of economic theory. But they did not arm themselves with Mill. He was old hat at the time and, of course, is now in the dustbin of outdated economists. Being right is no guarantee of longevity. Not in the field of economics anyway.

Unlike Mill, Bastiat is hard to misinterpret. Keynes could still have taken him head on if Bastiat had been seen as important but, in that case, Keynes might have been compelled to grapple with the argument. And what is that argument? I will start with the story of “The Broken Window”. Instructive in itself, it also opens a window, figuratively speaking, into Bastiat’s general insistence on the need to consider the “unseen” as well as the “seen” effects of all policies and actions. Hayek lauds this insight as encapsulating the “central difficulty” of undertaking “rational economic policy”.

In the story, the son of a shopkeeper accidentally breaks a window. People tend to say consolingly that

**As Bastiat points out, the moral superiority of frugality over luxury is matched by its superiority in the realm of political economy.**

Moreover, society as a whole has become more prosperous because of the capital works funded by the savings of Aristus. A happy tale which, as Bastiat points out, means that the moral superiority of frugality over luxury is matched by its superiority in the realm of political economy.

You will notice that Bastiat occupies the world of money. Thus, he is immune from the charge levied by Keynes on classical economists that they thought of money as simply a veil, underneath which the real economy is chugging away regardless. Keynes, on the other hand, saw money as simply a veil, through which the savings of Aristus, and the rest. The mistake the onlookers make, Bastiat avers, is to suppose that others spend what is charitably given; and what is saved finds its way, perhaps through bankers, into spending on capital works. In the end Mondor is ruined and becomes a burden on society while Aristus, through his saving, remains wealthy and able to continue to spend and support workers and merchants.

Mondor spends lavishly and earns the praise of onlookers for benefiting workmen and merchants. Aristus spends prudently while disposing of part of his income charitably and saving the rest. The mistake the onlookers make, Bastiat avers, is to suppose that what is not spent by Aristus is not spent at all. What is not seen is that others spend what is charitably given; and what is saved finds its way, perhaps through bankers, into spending on capital works. In the end Mondor is ruined and becomes a burden on society while Aristus, through his saving, remains wealthy and able to continue to spend and support workers and merchants.

By its superiority in the realm of political economy.
they spent. A shortage of spending overall would result unless business took up the slack by investing more and more. And why would that automatically happen? Well, it probably wouldn’t, according to Keynes. He didn’t look beneath the surface. Bastiat always did. Best to go back to Aristus.

Bastiat assumes that the money saved by Aristus will be as much spent as the money Aristus directly spends. It will not be buried in the garden but invested or lent for profit. Those taking ownership of the money and paying a premium for doing so will equally attempt to deploy it for profit. Why else would they pay a premium to take ownership of the money?

Now there is a circumstance in which Aristus might have buried the money. That is when his wants are sated, as are those to whom he might give his money. We can safely assume that Bastiat dismissed this possibility. In the conclusion to the first part of his free-trade tract Economic Sophisms (first published in two parts, in 1845 and 1848), he described the idea of there being a “superabundance of products” as one of a number of a “pestilent errors”. Without a doubt, if economists were to ever to think as Bastiat, they would perforce need to rethink the very foundations of their economics. Instead they unconsciously occupy a world akin to that of Mandeville’s fabled bees (1705): a prosperous vibrant community brought to ruin when its members forswear all luxury and excess.

Mandeville’s fable has similar import to Keynes’s essay “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren” (1930), in which he looks forward to a time of plenty when work becomes optional. In both cases demand for goods and services will fall below the level required for full employment. Well, it is now the time of Keynes’s great-great-grandchildren and still no superabundance in sight.

The mistake of taking either piece of fiction seriously is rooted in a distortion of reality. In reality, all countries, societies, communities and most individuals are rife with unsatisfied wants, and ever will be. Two conclusions follow. First, hiccups aside, collective savings will be funnelled one way or another into investments, provided the market is allowed to work; and, vitally, to work its way through difficult times. Second, government (so-called) stimulus spending, which, as we speak, is being urged on all governments to undertake post-pandemic, will disrupt market processes and end up being counterproductive. As Bastiat puts it:

creating labour for the workmen [through public works] serves to justify the most wanton enterprises and extravagance [and] is nothing else than a ruinous mystification … which shows a little excited labour which is seen and hides a great deal of prevented labour which is not seen.

Looking below the surface to understand the hidden effects of public policy, as Bastiat does, doesn’t mean looking into the future. No one has a crystal ball and so many unexpected factors can come into play to mould the future. For example, some say that President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society” programs in the mid-1960s, designed to ameliorate poverty and disadvantage, led to the current mass of fatherless black American families. Women became married to the government, it is sometimes said. There is some truth in this, no doubt. But how much? It is impossible to disentangle the myriad social and economic trends, the causes and effects, which led to where we are; and this applies quite generally, no matter what state of play we are seeking to explain.

Bastiat does not generally adopt or depend upon a time profile to reveal the unseen. The unseen is as much a creature of now as is the seen. That they play out over time is incidental. His is a logical profile. Of course, time is so pervasive in the way we think that his stories occupy time but that, if you like, is simply a device to separate one effect from another.

Am I dancing on the head of a pin? I don’t think so. We don’t have the luxury of knowing the future when judging policies. Adults (read conservatives as distinct from the Left) look at the logical effects of policies at the time they are being developed. In this important respect, Bastiat’s focus on the unseen is not quite the same thing as the concept of unintended consequences.

Sociologist Robert Merton brought the concept of unintended consequences to the fore in 1936. However, it has a much longer heritage. For example, this is Adam Smith in The Theory of Moral Sentiments in 1759:

Everybody allows, that how different soever the accidental, the unintended and unforeseen consequences of different actions, yet, if the intentions or affections from which they arose were, on the one hand, equally proper and equally beneficial, or, on the other, equal improper and equally malevolent, the merit or demerit of the actions is still the same, and the agent is equally the suitable object either of gratitude or of resentment.

In other words, though a path might be paved with good intentions, if its unforeseen end is Hell, it’s Hell just the same.

Instructively, an unintended consequence, by...
That Which Is Seen, and That Which Is Not Seen

definition, is unforeseen and lies in the unknowable future. That is not what Bastiat talks about. Unlike an unintended consequence, what is not seen is in fact quite seeable but often studiously ignored. In his world, bad policies and actions can’t hide behind the opaque cloak of an unknowable future. A better analogue to Bastiat’s scrutiny and investigation of the unseen is far-reaching, wide-angled, cost-benefit analysis.

All of Bastiat’s “parables”, and his refutation of various arguments in favour of protectionism in Economic Sophisms, follow a logical trail calculating who benefits and who loses and netting the result. Incidentally, though no longer an unabridged freetrader in the age of mercantilist China and globe-trotting corporations, I am happy to be a fellow traveller with Bastiat, vintage mid-nineteenth century. And, I can’t but agree that the candlemakers in his satirical tale had a poor case in arguing that the sun represented unfair competition and should be blocked.

While times and circumstances have changed radically, Bastiat’s insights and arguments remain compelling in principle and in logic. Yet, what underscores them, his insistence on peeling away the surface in order to interrogate what lies beneath, still so often fails to make the cut across all areas of public policy. That which is seen holds sway. And it’s easy enough to find examples. We may, in fact, be living through the most blatant example of its kind in human history.

In April this year the London School of Economics released an occasional paper: “When to Release the Lockdown: A Wellbeing Framework for Analysing Costs and Benefits”. The importance of this paper is its date (quite early in the pandemic) and its focus on the costs of the lockdown: under headings of loss of income, unemployment, mental health (suicide, domestic violence, addiction and loneliness), confidence in government and schooling. And I will add one that is missing, which is the incidence of illness and death due to delays in obtaining medical assessments and treatments for non-Covid ailments.

None of these costs are at all mysterious or difficult to comprehend. They are surely not unintended consequences. They are known consequences in plain sight; that is, for those willing to look. Yet one of the authors of the occasional paper said this of the UK government’s requirements for lifting the lockdown: “what they are really on about are the number of deaths and the number of cases. They do not take account of the wider reality of this lockdown on wellbeing”.

Months later nothing changes in the UK, in Australia or in most places. A combination of cases and deaths is the defining metric. It is monumentally superficial. To change tack. Before the Wuhan virus pushed Greta Thunberg aside, combating climate change was the great moral challenge of our generation and will, no doubt, resume centre stage when the virus fades away. Again, the proffered solutions, orchestrated and subsidised by governments, occupy a two-dimensional world. Even Michael Moore in his documentary Planet of the Humans was able to put on 3D glasses and identify the glaring defects of the current staple of supposed renewable energy solutions. If Moore can do it, surely governments can? Apparently not.

It is plainly silly to claim that the cost of wind and solar energy is now competitive when it continues to require massive subsidies. It is wilfully deceptive to quote the cost of producing such energy without taking account of a range of ancillary costs—including, but by no means only, the costs of providing reliable back-up power and transmission costs. The issue here has nothing to do with the climate debate per se: whether there is, or is not, an urgent warming problem to solve.

The issue is to do with the need to have the curiosity and intellectual integrity to consider all of the costs and benefits of proposed solutions; to have the type of mindset of Bastiat.

It is to do with the need to have the curiosity and intellectual integrity to consider all of the costs and benefits of proposed solutions; to have the type of mindset of Bastiat.

It can’t be an accident. So many things are done by government, like regulatory overreach, without apparent cognisance of their unseen effects. This happens much more rarely in the private sector, presumably because adverse effects in the private sector can’t easily be shifted onto someone else. Governments, on the other hand, are masters at shifting accountability. Notice the similar technique applied by the Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, and the Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews, in blaming their respective federal governments for their failure to protect people in nursing homes. But I think it goes beyond a blame-shifting mindset. It’s a dullard mindset, I think. A deficiency of imagination; perhaps born of a lack of real-world experience when it comes to many of those in public services advising government, and many in government. And, evidently, it must be an
enduring deficiency.

As a further example of many, take the doubling of the dole—called euphemistically “job-seeker payments”—instituted by the Australian government as part of its lockdown suite of policies. A report in the *Australian* by Rebecca Urban on August 16 described the devastating effect it has had on a remote Aboriginal community. “Covid-Fuelled Grog Violence Hits Remote Kids”, it is titled. Did anyone in the federal government think through the effect that doubling “sit-down money” might have on remote communities already suffering from alcohol-related problems?

A final point. You might think Bastiat’s emphasis on the need to take account of unseen effects is something others have also said in different ways. Perhaps. Yet no one, I think, has said it with more flair and force. And that counts when the message is as much required as ever it was.

Peter Smith wrote “Money Printing in the Age of COVID-19” in the July-August issue.

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**Carnies**

The dark was coming on  
When we reached our destination,  
The sweep of beach where even  
Close on dusk the streaming  
Wetsuits of the surf school  
Pulsed like beacons in the swell.

On the rise above the sand  
Caravans and a skeleton  
Of the Big Top laid out on sawdust,  
Guy ropes being raised by types  
As leathery as the old bank managers  
Forever walking on the tideline.

The performers were making up  
In shadow play in backlit caravans,  
As low tide became a line  
Of phosphorescence, cigarettes flickering  
In the dunes, murmurs from the shapes  
Of hoodies, just living in the moment.

Heading back to the weekender,  
Boards on top the crazy Kombi,  
My son gives a magic send-off  
To the carnies edging the tent upright,  
Spinning wheels, grinning back at us  
Clowning in a floodlit sideshow alley.

**Cornelius in the Lingerie Factory**  
*Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 1955*

Just off the boat and only  
Man on the floor, the young  
Dutchman works the press  
Surrounded by Calabrian women  
Giving him the evil eye.  
At smoko, they titillate the boy  
By holding up bras and panties  
Against their voluminous black dresses  
While dancing the Tarantella.

When the boss calls in the afternoon  
And sits with the order book  
In the glass booth, Cornelius  
Strides between the rows  
Of sewing machines shouting orders,  
Pretending not to notice behind his back  
The sniggers of “Il Duce”, limp fascist  
Salutes and Maria’s falsetto echo  
Through a stocking-puppet Punchinello.

*Stephen Gilfedder*
Since the epoch-defining Pax Thatcher–Reagan, orthodox conservatism has entailed an absolute belief in the absolute virtue of the free market. The coiled rattlesnake of the libertarian Gadsden Flag can perhaps be said to have been refigured as a rattlesnake in the shape of a dollar sign; “Don’t Tread on Me” has metamorphosed into “Don’t Tread on the Free Market”. Whilst the Left often defines itself by principles and ideals (however vague), those on the Right have developed a propensity to define themselves by the technocratic ideals of bureaucratic efficiency and sound economic stewardship.

To me as a conservative, this approach is at times difficult to accept. To be sure, I am sincerely convinced that market capitalism is the system of economic governance which has produced the greatest economic and social dividend of all the systems of economic organisation that have yet been tried. But I am, as my pillorying friends on the Centre-Left would say, a confused conservative. Alarmed by the rate at which Australian resources, domestic dwellings and educational institutions have been purchased and swayed by international interests, it has become harder and harder to justify my reflexive belief that completely unfettering the forces of the free market is inherently good.

So why the divergence between Centre-Right economic precepts and Centre-Right values? My contention is this: the great theorists of the neo-liberal pantheon (think Ricardo, Smith and Friedman) operated in times and societies very different from our own. Their exhortations to unfetter the free market were set against the backdrop of a prevailing social order which emphasised the primacy of philanthropy, the solidarity of national communities, and the free exchange of ideas. These men conceived of free markets as the best servants of the free societies they inhabited.

Understanding this context should lead us to an important realisation; free markets are a means to an end and not an end in themselves. Where the forces of the free market imperil the institutions and values which make political, cultural and individual freedom possible in the first place, it is the duty of those on the Right to proportionately restrain or redirect the great invisible hand, lest it come to taketh more than it giveth.

One of the foremost precepts of Centre-Right thought is ownership of profit. Where an individual or a corporation generates profit, it is desirable that to the largest extent possible, that profit be left to them to re-invest or spend. In short, we have a right to the fruits of our toils. Yet Locke and Smith, when writing on these matters, could not possibly have envisaged that corporations would one day come to hold wealth greater in value than entire national economies. This wealth now gives corporations enormous power to espouse and prosecute a social agenda. Millionaire CEOs wearing rainbow socks and issuing circulars about the importance of gender-neutral pronoun usage may appear kitsch and contrived; but the trend of the “corporate conscience” rears its darker side where financial clout is used to altogether censor an opposing perspective.

When Israel Folau famously quoted a passage from the Bible which stated that “drunks, adulterers and homosexuals will go to hell”, the Australian national rugby union team was threatened with all manner of sponsorship withdrawals (not least from major sponsor Qantas) and Folau himself faced the suspension of numerous personal sponsorships.

Libertarians and stringent conservative proponents of the free market would respond to Folau’s scenario along these lines: Folau is free to hold his opinions, and Rugby Australia and its sponsors free to hold theirs. Where irreconcilable differences appear, the parties can and should go their separate ways. A free marketeer would state that Folau was always free to play sport elsewhere (which he has since done) if he valued his opinions more than his pay cheque.

This approach ignores the realities of natural
monopolies. There is only one Australian national rugby union team. Not everyone is a Kerry Packer-esque multi-millionaire who can simply establish alternative sporting competitions as fancy takes them. To justify the decision of Rugby Australia and its sponsors to effectively bully Folau from his place in the national side on the grounds that he is free to take his labour to another team that will accept him (and his views) ignores the principle of the matter; why should any person’s continued participation in economic life (in this instance, as a professional rugby player) be precluded by the expression of lawful personal opinions?

I do not believe the paid position in a French rugby league team that Folau has since taken up proves the proposition that the market has achieved a just outcome; Folau is on a far lower salary, and has had to move halfway around the world away from family and friends, change sports (yes, rugby league is a different sport from rugby union) and play at a lesser, sub-national level in order to continue earning some kind of income from his skills.

The state may ban symbols and expressions on pain of fines and even imprisonment, but only our monolithic corporations can threaten an individual with complete exclusion from economic life. Should conservatives just turn their heads and sigh at the inconvenient but unavoidable corollaries of achieving maximum economic efficiency? I believe the time has come to say, “No”.

The free market has also posed problems in tertiary education. The proactive and organised involvement of the far Left in universities, in tandem with the general lack of interest of the Centre-Right, has created a generationally entrenched, self-perpetuating cultural-Marxist hegemon in our major tertiary institutions.

Enter the free marketeers; if we don’t like the ethos of our universities, we can and should establish new ones, or endow new programs and degrees. The experience of the Ramsay Centre’s attempts to establish a centre for Western civilisation should, however, demonstrate the folly of this approach.

Endowed by the late health insurance magnate Paul Ramsay, the Ramsay Centre purposes to create an understanding and appreciation of Western civilisation, and its relationship with the progress and enlightenment of humanity. The centre was to be fully funded from the endowment by Ramsay; no expense was to be spared. This should have guaranteed the centre’s acceptance by any of the G8 universities; how could it not be in the interests of a university to host a fully-funded centre of learning that would serve the purpose of attracting more students and expanding the academic offering? And yet, the University of Sydney’s initial intention to host the centre was rebuffed by hostile resistance from staff and students. Is this so surprising, given that the cultural Marxism institutionalised in these places deems the celebration of Western civilisation to be inimical to their vision of “progress”?

The strict free-market approach also neglects to consider that major universities are multi-billion-dollar corporations with recourse to the limitless purse of government. Is it therefore reasonable to rely on conscientious philanthropists negotiating the minefield of tertiary-sector regulation to establish micro universities so that conscientious students can forgo an internationally recognised degree from a well-established university to study at a philosophically sound but relatively under-resourced and under-recognised institution? If our conclusion is “No”, then we must accept that the invisible hand is not strong enough to either reclaim universities which have been co-opted by hegemonic Marxist ideologues or create new universities capable of providing a comparable alternative on a comparable scale.

An interesting counterpoint to the Ramsay Centre example is that of Confucian Institutes, which have successfully been embedded in universities throughout the world with funding from the Chinese Communist Party and its affiliates. Ostensibly promoting Chinese language and culture, these centres are more realistically viewed as CCP-backed Trojan horses designed to bolster the volume of pro-CCP academic literature and counter on-campus criticism of the Chinese government.

This has been made apparent by the case of Drew Pavlou. A philosophy student enrolled at the University of Queensland, Pavlou was a vocal critic of China’s persecution of minorities such as the Uighur people, and of its systematic repression of free speech and debate. For the crime of participating in and helping to co-ordinate pro-Hong Kong democracy protests, Pavlou faces expulsion from the university.

How can convening and participating in a protest be grounds for expulsion? Were campus protests not once seen as an indispensable, even banal, element of university life? It does not require much imagination to draw a link between the university’s stance on this matter, and the fact that 60 per cent of its international students hail from China. Offending their sensitivities, or the nationalist sensitivities of their wealthy families back home, would be seen by the university leadership as “bad for business”.

This was explicitly confirmed in documents made available to free-speech stalwart and China hawk Senator James Paterson of Victoria. It was
revealed that the UQ Vice-Chancellor Peter Hoj was to be paid a $200,000 bonus for successfully “furthering ties with China”. It is imagined that, ancillary to furthering ties with China, there was an expectation that threats to the relationship would be appropriately countered; but surely the dismissal of a student for the propagation of commentary critical of the CCP would be a bridge too far? It would seem not. If COVID-19 has served any purpose, it has shown just how dependent are Australia’s G8 universities on full-fee-paying international students.

Again, the free market purists would dismiss this with simple reference to the forces of supply and demand. China’s middle class is growing, and so is their demand for tertiary education. Australia can meet this demand with supply and should do so to the maximum extent possible to achieve the maximum possible dividend. As the Romans would say, Pecunio non scentum.

Universities, however, were never intended to be commercial agents in the business of peddling degrees. They were, and supposedly still are, purposed with immaterial and not always profitable aims: the fostering of fearless and rigorous debate and research, and encouraging the pursuit of truth for the benefit of all.

Their key performance indicators should only ever be the quantity and quality of research output, and not budget bottom lines. The acceptance of international students does not run counter to this objective; indeed, their different perspectives and experiences serve to strengthen it. But an over-reliance on a single commodity (in this case, international students from China) detracts from diversity and, from a financial perspective, fails to spread the risk of exposure to a single market that would be baulked at by the most hard-nosed private equity investor.

This is not to say that free trade is inherently bad, or that Australia was wrong to conclude a free trade agreement with China. Such a policy mindset is underpinned by Ricardo’s Theory of Comparative Advantage, a theory which essentially dictates that nations should only produce what they can produce more efficiently than others, and trade with other nations for the purpose of obtaining all other items. Finding validation in the works of seminal modern-day theorists such as Friedman, this theory has exponentially trebled global output and wealth. It is, in a technical sense, completely sound.

Yet the theory is predicated only on building material wealth. It does not give due consideration to the forces of realpolitik, and was never intended to do so. Ricardo’s theory assumes a global order where rational actors are driven only by rational economic decisions to the exclusion of ulterior strategic motives. A conservative’s duty is to ensure that the free trade modus operandi remains conversant with the actual political and moral implications of deepening economic ties with nations not governed by the same political or philosophical precepts as ours.

This is not to paint China as the cause of all difficulty. As noted above, Australia has historically been dependent on countries such as Britain and America as guarantors of our security. Whilst America has always been the superior military might, the relationship began when we were something approximate to equals. Indeed, the signing
of ANZUS occurred at a time when Australia’s air force was the fourth-largest in the world. Despite America’s subsequent military ascendency, Australia always maintained a vital and productive defence production industry. Since the turn of the century, however, worrying trends have been observed. In the first instance, the actual volume of defence materiel output has declined, and the number of defence production companies operating in the country has diminished from over twenty to just under ten. Most worryingly, however, the number of wholly Australian-owned and Australian-controlled defence corporations has shrunk. Since 2006, eight once-major defence production companies have shifted off-shore.

The purist Ricardian perspective would point to the greater efficiency that the merger of these companies with established and more highly-developed overseas entities would achieve (presumably). This is questionable, noting that the French corporation commissioned to build our next fleet of submarines will likely complete the job over the course of a decade, by which point advances in technology will render any operational advantage nugatory. Even if off-shore manufacturers could produce our materiel in a timelier fashion, the value of a functioning domestic defence industry is not so much in the output, but rather, in the control and exclusive cognisance of the intellectual property which underpins its operationality.

It is control of these things that gives us true sovereignty in diplomatic decision-making. Whilst Australia is hardly likely to find itself in a war against France, America or Britain, one does wonder at how our reliance on the industries and defence corporations of these nations shapes our foreign policy. Is it not harder to say “No” to foreign military conflicts when domestic safety is dependent on the goodwill of a given nation? New Zealand was bold enough to say “No” to the visit of a US nuclear submarine in 1984. That led, two years later, to the US repudiating any treaty obligation it had to come to New Zealand’s aid should that country come under attack. With the current American President set on ensuring that America’s “quid” is not left without “pro quo”, it is legitimate to question how America and its defence heavyweights might respond in the event of any divergence with Australian military strategy. Whether such a divergence is ever likely to happen is beside the point; as a sovereign nation, Australia should have the right to choose its own destiny without fear of compromising its domestic defence capabilities.

Even fighting on the same side as the nations where defence production is concentrated can prove problematic. By way of example, Australia’s Oberon-class submarines went unserviced for the duration of the Falklands War. Naturally, the priority of British submarine manufacturers was the upkeep and strength of its own country’s assets.

In an environment where the American Pacific hegemon looks to be withdrawing, and another hegemon looks to be expanding, it is unwise to allow the domestic defence industry to disappear through collapses and mergers, with the specious justification of “efficiency”.

Conservative voices across the globe are emphasising the importance of a post-COVID-19 recovery that is driven by supply-side reforms and the empowerment of beleaguered private industries. This makes sense; conservatives understand that the invisible hand of the free market, if left to its own devices to the largest extent possible, guides resources to their most efficient and cost-effective use with maximum material benefit to society. Yet as a wise Corsican general once noted, laws sound in theory are often chaotic in practice.

Untempered by a healthy grounding in realpolitik and our own clear sense of the moral tenets on which we will not compromise, the unchecked removal of fetters on the free market in the name of material enrichment can trigger political and economic concatenations that compromise the freedoms which, in the spirit of Edmund Burke, it is our duty to preserve for posterity. What good is a free market if it progressively removes our ability to exercise political agency, makes once-great repositories of free thinking and learning dependent on the goodwill of authoritarianists, and erodes a nation’s ability to act autonomously in the best interests of its own external and internal security?

In a post-COVID-19 world, conservatives must lead with reference to, but not be blindly led by, the forces of the invisible hand. Where this hand would lead us down paths requiring the sacrifice of national self-determination and civic freedoms, it is our duty to hold firm and resist. Only then can we fulfil the exhortation of Lord Acton: “Liberty is not a means to a higher political end; it is the highest political end in itself.”

Jack Allen is an undergraduate in Law and Arts at Monash University. In 2019 he was student delegate to the Conference on National Conservatism held by the Edmund Burke Foundation in Washington DC.
We can’t say we were not warned: since 2017 Labor representatives have been announcing their intention to ban, if not criminalise, so-called “conversion therapy”. Back in 2017, the Victorian Health Minister, now Attorney-General, Jill Hennessy declared their new Health Complaints Act would “provide the means to deal with those who profit from the abhorrent practice of gay conversion therapy … which inflicts significant emotional trauma and damages the mental health of young members of our community”. According to Ms Hennessy, the crime of conversion therapy is so grave it demands “reverse onus” of proof in which the “accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that he or she is not guilty of an offence”.

In October 2018, the Labor government’s LGBTI task force, its Commissioners for Gender and Sexuality, Health Complaints and Mental Health, the Victorian Human Rights Law Centre and the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society at La Trobe University (whence had arisen the “Safe Schools” programs), released a so-called research paper titled “Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice, Responding to LGBT Conversion Therapy in Australia”.

Although the La Trobe report was based on only fifteen anonymous complaints received from widespread solicitation in LGBT precincts, it was to prove a powerful instrument of propaganda. Promoting the illusion of erudition, it called for the Health Complaints Act to be strengthened and to consider “legislative and regulatory options to restrict the promotion and provision of conversion therapies and similar practices, including by faith communities and organisations and both registered and unregistered health practitioners”.

The La Trobe report includes an account of kidnapping, torture and sexual abuse of a seventeen-year-old girl which, though it beggars belief, warrants police investigation rather than tacit acceptance by some Labor politicians and use as a political tool.

But, in February 2019, Victoria’s Andrews government backed the report, declaring it will “bring in laws to denounce and prohibit LGBT conversion practices”, with no apparent conviction of the need to check the facts, let alone involve the police. Such dilatoriness in the pursuit of alleged sexual abuse of children has not been recent form in Victoria.

In October 2018, the Victorian government invited discussion on “Legislative options to implement a ban of conversion practices”, not as to whether they should occur, but “on the best way/s to implement a ban of conversion practices”: essentially, should criminal or civil actions be employed.

On the last day of parliament in November 2019, the Labor government of Queensland tabled a “Health Amendments Bill” in the very midst of whose bureaucratic tedium was the provocative intention to ban “conversion therapy”, and inflict up to eighteen months jail on miscreants. The government cited the La Trobe study as evidence for the need for its actions.

In January 2020, in the public hearings in the Queensland Parliament, despite repeated questionings, none of the proponents for the ban could provide any evidence of coercive “conversion therapy” being undertaken in the state. One politician wondered why legislation should be passed to criminalise something which did not exist.

Nevertheless, despite considerable opposition from the public, on August 13, 2020, a Bill was enacted. Some opponents to hormonal affirmation of childhood gender dysphoria drew hope from modified wording which seemed to suggest therapy could be offered if it was “reasonable … appropriate … and safe”. But, to those committed to the ideology of gender fluidity, in which mind negates chromosomes, and body must be aligned with feelings, it is not reasonable, appropriate or safe to deny the mind, and hormones and surgery should be employed to re-align the body with feelings.

Although gender fluidity ideologues grizzled that the final law was not as stringent as they wanted, its
effect will be to their advantage. Its ambiguity and the spectre of incarceration will reduce the number of therapists willing to involve themselves with gender-confused children. Referral to an “affirming” clinic will be an easy option.

On the same day, August 13, 2020, the Labor/Green government in the ACT released a shocker of a Bill which was enacted with a rush on August 27, the last day of parliament, this time even before the Second Reading speech had been published. Called the “Sexuality and Gender Identity Conversion Practices Bill 2020”, it will criminalise, with up to twelve months in jail, any person who performs a “conversion practice” on a “protected person” (for example, a child) whether or not “the recipient, or a parent or guardian … consented to the practice”. Furthermore, “Removal of a protected person … from the ACT” by “a person” for the “purpose … of conversion practice” will merit a large fine, twelve months in jail, or both.

Any person who received “conversion therapy” and suffered “loss or damage”, such as “distress, humiliation, loss of self-esteem, loss of enjoyment of life”, will be able to seek financial compensation through the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal which “is not … limited in the amount of money that it may order to be paid”.

The ACT Labor government emphasises that “The Bill is a significant Bill”, “likely to have significant engagement of human rights” and, therefore, “requires more detailed reasoning in relation to the Human Rights Act 2004”. It cites the harms of “conversion therapy” reported by the La Trobe study, plus alleged lack of “evidence to suggest any benefits” or that “sexuality or gender identity can be changed by undertaking conversion therapies” as justification for restrictions on freedoms delineated in the Human Rights Act.

Regarding freedoms of thought, conscience, religion and belief, the Act will “not permit the manifestation or demonstration of religious belief, or the expression of information or ideas, that seek to change a person’s sexuality or gender identity”, let alone practising “conversion therapy”. The right of freedom of movement will not apply to those seeking to take a protected person for “conversion therapy” outside the ACT. The right to education will exclude “teachings that can be defined as ‘conversion practices’”. The right to privacy does not include “conversion therapy” practised at home.

It should be emphasised that these limitations on traditional human rights do not apply just to professional therapists such as paediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors. They apply to “any person” involved in any influential way with any child confused over gender, or any adult seeking help for unwanted sexual preoccupation. The limitations and the threats will extend to parents, carers, teachers, counsellors, pastors and priests.

Though the public is not yet privy to the Victorian or South Australian Bills, which are awaiting their turn to ban conversion therapy, some insight of what might be expected from ideologues emboldened by their comrades in Canberra is provided by other recommendations of the La Trobe report.

Freedom of speech will be curtailed: “Public broadcasts” promoting “conversion therapy” will be banned. Freedom of association will be curtailed: parents of gender-confused children will only be able to seek help from therapists with specific accreditation gained by special education that emphasises attempts to “convert” a child back to a gender congruent with chromosomes are “not consistent with their professional obligations” and will invite “disciplinary actions”. Freedom of education will be restricted: schools must have similar accreditation.

What is conversion therapy?

The ACT Act declares that “Sexuality and gender identity conversion practices” means “a treatment or other practice the purpose, or purported purpose, of which is to change a person’s sexuality or gender identity”.

To those unfamiliar with the Orwellian nightmare of dictatorship in which words can mean their opposite, or the wonderland in which Alice worried they can mean anything you want, the “conversion therapy” to be banned by Labor might be understood as the process of converting a natal boy into a hormonally and surgically constructed girl. But that meaning is not the one that applies in the wonderland of gender fluidity. In that dictatorship where feelings rule o’er biology through the force of chemicals and scalpels, the term means the exact opposite: the “converting” of a child back to an identity congruent with chromosomes, back to the sex in which it was born.

Despite the promise of twelve months in jail for committing the crime, the ACT Act makes no attempt to give any details of the practice it will proscribe. To the contrary, it details exclusions: any efforts to convert a child towards the opposite sex. Excluded will be social “affirmation” to that sex with the granting of new names, pronouns, dress, toilet and dressing facilities, the “blocking” of puberty, the administration of cross-sex hormones, the removal of breasts and other appendages, and the associated encouragement, counselling, promotion, advertising and education.

Clearly, the Act will criminalise traditional counselling, psychotherapy and psychiatry which
might seek to find and allay individual and family predispositions, abuses and associated mental disorders, such as autism, which are unsettling the child’s identity. There will be no place for such “watchful waiting” with statistical optimism that the affected child will join the large majority of gender-confused children in whom feelings align with chromosomes during puberty.

As proponents for hormonal intervention declare, “neutrality” is not an option: there are sins of omission as well as commission. A crime will be committed if parents, teachers, doctors or anyone influential in the lives of the children do not refer them to a clinic which practises “affirmation”. Offences will be committed if mandatory reporting of “child abuse” is neglected: failure of a parent to support the transgendering of an offspring comprises abuse; failure of a teacher to report such abuse is an offence.

Does affirmation therapy work?

There is no evidence that “affirming” a child to the opposite sex renders it better off. In the short term, being the focus of attention may improve mood. In the longer term, adults who have transgendered commit suicide at a rate twenty to thirty times that of the ordinary population. The current experimentation with “affirmation” therapy is precisely that. The outcome in the lonelier years of adulthood is unknown, though the growing phenomenon of disillusioned “de-transitions” is indicative.

Worse, as well as the unknown, “affirmation therapy” has known side-effects unacknowledged by its proponents. Hormonal blockers have widespread effects, interfering with brain structure and function. After only four months of use, cross-sex hormones may shrink an adult male brain at a rate ten times faster than ageing, and transgendering children will be using them for life.

Puberty blockers are administered with the false claim they provide more time for a confused child to consider its sexual identity. But this is biologically implausible: they block primary and secondary mechanisms for sexualisation, while damaging the limbic system which integrates cognition, emotion, memory and reward into an “inner world view”. Veterinary studies confirm blocked sheep are less adept in mazes, more emotionally labile, and fear change. How can a “neutered” child maturely consider a sexual future?

Are there alternatives?

It must be asked: do any members of Labor governments reducing human rights while amplifying criminal codes ever try to evaluate things for themselves? Or does the tribe simply fall in behind the ideologues baying for incarceration of heretics? Regarding children, half-savvy staff could have found “A Developmental, Biophysical Model for the Treatment of Children with Gender Identity Disorder” by Kenneth Zucker et al, which explains the compassionate, non-coercive, non-aversive, supportive program of “watchful waiting” through which almost all children will recover, without any hormones or strokes of the knife. An inquisitive politician might have wondered why such a program should be criminalised as “conversion therapy”, with incarceration of therapists and parents who seek it.

Regarding adults with unwanted sexual preoccupations, half-savvy staff could have found Haldeman’s “When Sexual and Religious Orientation Collide: Considerations in Working with Conflicted Same-Sex-Attracted Male Clients”. Rightly, Haldeman considers the arguments against “conversion therapy” which are, presumably, familiar to the zealous, but he also reports that “For some, religious identity is so important that it is more realistic to consider changing sexual orientation than abandoning one’s religion of origin.”

Haldeman quotes Miranti: “the spiritual and/or religious dimensions inherent in each individual could possibly be the most salient cultural identity for a client”. And he argues for a “person-centred approach” which is not necessarily the “traditional gay-affirmative therapy” which should not “deny individuals the right to therapeutic support in making the accommodations necessary to living lives that are consonant with personal values”.

Haldeman is not advocating coercive psychotherapy, nor suggesting medieval aversion therapies should be resurrected. Application of electric shocks, induction of vomiting or administration of pain of any sort to create an aversion to undesired sexual preoccupations, and “convert” to the desired, are things of the past. So should be the administration of cross-sex hormones and castration but, ironically, such practices are now permitted, indeed justified, in the attempted conversion of the body of a child towards the feelings in its mind, as specified in Section 2, 2 (a), of the ACT Bill.

Is sexuality immutable?

Given proclamations by ideologues that sexual identity and orientation are fixed and unchangeable and that attempted change is inevitably harmful and, therefore, should be criminalised, even if freely sought, a study emerging from Melbourne demands consideration. It is the first of its kind from Australia and its results will be provocative. It challenges dogma.
The study is being undertaken by the little-known Coalition Against Unsafe Sexual Education (CAUSE) and it seeks to record and report experiences of adults who have overcome unwanted sexual preoccupations by themselves or with help from others by means of counselling or psychotherapy which was neither coercive nor aversive.

Recruitment for the survey is being sought via social media, so the study bears the same imperfections and limitations as the La Trobe report, but no more. It is dependent on self-selection and essentially unverified testimony but, in apparent distinction to the La Trobe study, it is not anonymous. Respondents have identified themselves, though the researchers, of course, are bound to confidentiality.

The respondents were invited to answer a questionnaire, Sixty have thus far completed it, and some have gone further: twenty have also provided written testimonies, ten have also provided video testimonies, and two have also provided audio testimonies. Respondents were invited to grade outcomes, such as reduction of anxiety, on a 1-to-10 scale, with a score of 0 indicating no change. Most respondents who submitted additional testimonies have permitted their publication on the CAUSE website.

Of the sixty, thirty-five are biological males. Twelve are aged between eighteen and thirty-five, thirteen between thirty-six and fifty, thirty between fifty-one and sixty-five. Twenty-three are Australian, twenty-six American, with others from Europe and Asia. Forty-six are Caucasian, five Arabic, two Maori, three Asian, three Latino and one Jewish. Forty-one had reached tertiary levels of education, seventeen secondary, and three primary.

Nine had started counselling under twenty years of age, thirty-six between twenty-one and thirty-five, twelve between thirty-six and fifty, and three beyond fifty. Ten had started counselling within the last five years, eight within six to ten years, twelve within eleven to nineteen years, fifteen within twenty to twenty-nine years, and fifteen more than that.

Nine had professional non-religious counselling, twelve had only religious counselling, twenty-six had both professional and religious counselling, and thirteen had received no counselling.

Ninety-two per cent reported reduced anxiety, with an average score of 5. Ninety-five per cent reported improved self-image, with an average score of 5.1. Seventy-five per cent reported improved relationships, with average score of 3. Sixty-seven per cent reported improved health, with an average score of 2.

Before psychotherapy, forty-four of the sixty declared they were lesbian or gay, nine they were bisexual or other, and seven transgender. With psychotherapy, of the fifty-three lesbian, gay, bisexual and other respondents, fourteen declared themselves to be heterosexual and married or in a relationship, six declared themselves still same-sex-attracted but in a heterosexual marriage, sixteen declared themselves heterosexual but celibate, and eleven still same-sex-attracted but celibate. Two declared themselves neither heterosexual nor same-sex-attracted but to be in a heterosexual relationship, and four declared themselves to be “other”.

With therapy, of the seven who had been transgender, four had entered heterosexual marriages or relationships, two were heterosexual but celibate, and with one, whose identity had become congruent with chromosomes, the status of her relationship was not clear.

James Parker, relinquishing a homosexual lifestyle, declares, “I chose to enter therapy in my 20’s … every segment of my life went into the therapist’s room … I engaged in many different types of therapies. They transformed my entire life … I believe that to deny someone that opportunity is plain evil.”

Leah Gray, relinquishing a lesbian lifestyle, declares, “In no way has any help that I received been harmful. It has only ever been helpful in terms of the treatment that I sought.”

Jem Bate, relinquishing a transgendered past, declares, “I feel that I am more myself now than I ever have been and am happier as well.” Asked “Are you more at peace?” Jem answers, “Definitely.”

Their stories will be treated with derision by ideologues for gender fluidity, as many religions excoriate heretics, and any future counselling in many Australian states will be banned.

Conclusion

If the sixty respondents had been living in modern Canberra they would have been denied counselling for unwanted sexual preoccupations: their right to pursue their own destiny. Their stories will be treated with derision by ideologues for gender fluidity, as many religions excoriate heretics, and any future counselling in many Australian states will be banned. Nevertheless, their story has a right to be
heard. They attest that, for some, change is possible. They would argue that the government should stay away from counselling.

Draco was a seventh-century BC Athenian legislator whose sanctioned violence favoured the elite and was said to have been “written in blood”. The laws being passed by various Labor states are Draconian with regard to sexuality. They favour an ideological elite and, though not written in blood (or are they?), may be measured in time behind bars.

In Athens, democracy evolved despite Draco. Here, Draco’s descendants are traducing human rights: especially the right of the child to be protected from experimentation.

Dr John Whitehall is a professor of paediatrics at a Sydney university. He has written several articles for Quadrant on childhood gender dysphoria, most recently in the September issue. A referenced version of this article appears at Quadrant Online.

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**Poemfan**

I stalked you in your metaphors  
And made your simile ring;  
Whose underwear found at Stanza’s End?  
They couldn’t prove a thing.

I learned your words upon my walks  
To pray them while I run;  
Your voice inside my coldest breath  
Can warm me like the sun.

The place you park your bicycle  
Is circled in my mind;  
The gravel-crunching metre  
Of footsteps close behind;

And when you trip between the lines  
You’ll see me standing there—  
Gulping down your poetry,  
Alliterating air;

I am Poemfan Number One,  
The others—far below;  
Dedicate your book to me,  
Autograph it slow;

I will spell my name for you—  
Clearly, firmly—that will do.  
Now I’m inerasably  
Your Poemfan for eternity.

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**Mocco Wollert**

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**Caressing you**

Caressing you  
I feel the tremor  
of vibrating stars,  
the softness  
of snow settling on grass.

Your caresses  
light fires in me  
burning away air,  
taking words and wetness,  
extploding.

I crave your caresses  
afterswards  
before we slip gently  
into the darkness  
of satisfaction.

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**David Dalton**
work → home

she says the words but forgets what they mean
stop looking at me please
these mice that squeal inside the cracks,
these mice like spinach leaves wilting in the heat,
like drowned teabags with misshapen strings

•

on a thirtieth-floor commission-flat balcony
an olive tree outgrows its fourth pot this month
and in the gravel the glass of a broken bottle
shines like hematite under the moon
outside an empty pub where a grandfather eats his moustache

•

a woman sleeps in your bed,
her shoulderblade is an overcast sky,
her hair is a dark stream
it falls on the carpet, then ripples and splays
she swivels around but she has no face

•

a riderless bike slinks up the side of a house
the stars gather between the powerlines
and nothing’s what you think it is
in the afternoon a man with a blank expression
walks backwards and wheels his vespa

•

a trail of pink ice cream spreads down the footpath,
a blue virgin mary stands in an electric box
on someone’s abandoned front porch,
but your eyes are too heavy to support
so with tweezers you pry them open,
wide as the crack of light that dislocates itself
between the window and the blinds,
like the mice, and sometimes, under the cluttered street signs
that scramble into blank, a body walks stuck in its mind
and its ghost lags in the space behind

it longs for the endless sea. fleeting love,
would you please stop looking at me

lou verga
How big a problem is climate change? And is the solution “back to nature”, a repudiation of industrial civilisation and the high-energy societies we’ve built over the last 200 years? Or is climate change one of a number of important environmental issues, perhaps not the most important? And is the solution more progress, more development, more high technology, such as nuclear energy? Michael Shellenberger’s *Apocalypse Never* makes a case against catastrophism, a case for environmental progress, and ponders how environmentalism became “the dominant secular religion of the educated, upper-middle-class elite in most developed and many developing nations”.

Shellenberger is a California-based environmental activist. Unlike many environmental activists, he’s been there and done it, from agricultural co-operatives in Nicaragua in the 1980s to the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil in the early 1990s, and he attended the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. He’s been to the Congo to study wood-fuel use, rainforest habitat protection and development aid. And he’s been to Indonesia to “see for himself what the situation was like for factory workers”. Shellenberger co-founded in 2002 the New Apollo Project, a renewables and clean technology program picked up in 2007 by then presidential candidate Barack Obama and backed by him as President with some $150 billion from 2009 to 2015. But it became increasingly clear to Shellenberger that:

In the end, there is no amount of technological innovation that can solve the fundamental problem with renewables. Solar and wind make electricity more expensive for two reasons: they are unreliable, thus requiring 100 percent back up, and energy-dilute, thus requiring extensive land, transmission lines, and mining. In other words, the trouble with renewables isn’t fundamentally technical—it’s natural.

Like some other environmentalists including James Lovelock and James Hanson, Shellenberger came to see nuclear power as essential to reducing carbon dioxide emissions. In recent years, he’s been a prominent nuclear energy advocate, but is adamant he’s not a lobbyist for the industry and accepts no funding from “energy companies or energy interests”.

Now, Shellenberger has broken ranks a second time. He was in London in 2019 during the fortnight of major Extinction Rebellion demonstrations, was bothered by the movement’s “heavy focus on death”, and set out to write the book that became *Apocalypse Never*, distancing his eco-modernism from the environmental alarmism, which, his subtitle proclaims, hurts us all:

Anyone who believes climate change could kill billions of people and cause civilizations to collapse might be surprised to discover than none of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports contain a single apocalyptic scenario.

Shellenberger devotes about the first 100 pages of the book to debunking many of the articles of faith that are mobilised to give substance to the idea that we are in the midst of an environmental catastrophe, that the end of the world is nigh. Natural disasters are not getting worse, and we’ll have time enough to adapt to sea-level rises. The Amazon is not the lungs of the world and is not being destroyed willy-nilly. It is a gross exaggeration that plastic is significantly fouling the oceans, eliminating plastic straws is an irrelevancy, but improving waste management systems in developing countries would help. We are not in the midst of a “sixth extinction”, and polar
bears are not endangered. So-called “sweatshops” in the Third World lift millions out of the crushing poverty of subsistence farming into more affluent, urban lifestyles. Fossil fuels and plastics saved the whales, turtles and elephants—“we save nature by not using it, and we avoid using it by switching to artificial substitutes”. And going vegetarian doesn’t reduce your carbon footprint by much. This part of the book has a lot in common with the recent best-seller Factfulness: Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About the World—and Why Things Are Better Than You Think by Hans Rosling and his two daughters.

Shellenberger personalises the story with vignettes drawn from his first-hand experiences. Bernadette is a subsistence farmer in the Congo. She’s livid that baboons and other wildlife come out of the Virunga National Park created to protect habitat and raid her sweet potato crops. She and her family will go hungrier as a result. Nearby, Goma, a city of two million, relies for energy on charcoal produced from the Congo forests. They need hydro-electric power, gas for cooking, and fertiliser and machinery to raise agricultural productivity, but can’t afford it. Proposed projects are blocked by international environmentalists and no longer supported by donors such as the World Bank. “As climate change emerged as an elite concern in the 1990s, efforts within developed nations to cut off financing for cheap energy, industrial agriculture, and modern infrastructure to poor and developed nations grew stronger.” Continued poverty and use of the forest for charcoal are the result.

Suparti is a twenty-five-year-old Indonesian from a small village, who escaped the rural poverty of her family to work in a Barbie factory in the city, and then in a chocolate factory. Her wages have more than tripled since coming to the city. She has a flat, electricity, a television, a motor-scooter, and cooks, with gas, food purchased from a shop. She has a standard of living that far exceeds what would have been hers had she stayed on the farm.

Shellenberger’s style is lively and accessible, yet factual and well documented (with over 100 pages of endnotes). The stories of Bernadette and Suparti, as well as other anecdotes from his many travels, illustrate the daily challenges of life in the energy-poor world. Reports on his interviews with some of them, pressing them to clarify what seem exaggerated claims, and walk them back. For example, he interviews IPCC author Michael Oppenheimer about claims that sea-level rise presents an “unmanageable problem”. Oppenheimer clarifies that he really means “unmanageable” is an exaggeration.

After debunking these end-of-the-world articles of environmentalist faith, Shellenberger tackles nuclear energy, which Vaclav Smil calls a “successful failure”. It successfully produces lots of electricity but has failed to sustain public support in the developed world. Shellenberger thinks this regrettable failure is the result of misleading anti-nuclear campaigns and a fear of nuclear weapons and radiation. He discusses Fukushima, Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, carefully assembling the low attributed fatality and morbidity rates: “It’s not that nuclear energy never kills. It’s that its death toll is vanishingly small.” He concludes:

The stories of Bernadette and Suparti, as well as other anecdotes from his many travels, illustrate the daily challenges of life in the energy-poor world.
Only nuclear, not solar and wind … can affordably create the hydrogen gas and electricity that will provide services … currently provided by fossil fuels … And yet the people who say they care and worry the most about climate change tell us we don’t need nuclear.

Shellenberger goes into the history of the war on nuclear energy, particularly the conversion of major environmental groups like the Sierra Club, and anti-nuclear-weapons groups like the Union of Concerned Scientists, to a focus on stopping nuclear power plants. He provides evidence that the Sierra Club deliberately set out to drive up the regulatory costs of nuclear plants to make them less economic. And Shellenberger agrees with the realist strategists who think nuclear weapons have contributed to the long peace between major powers since the Second World War, and that there is no prospect that nuclear weapons will ever be eliminated. His purpose is to refute the presumption that stopping nuclear power plants will somehow contribute to eliminating nuclear weapons.

In a chapter provocatively titled “Destroying the Environment to Save It”, Shellenberger sets out to demolish the idea that renewables alone are the answer. The critical problems are unreliability and low power density. Large-scale storage is impossibly expensive (even if batteries do get incrementally better and cheaper), and low power density means lots of land and other resources are needed to generate power at scale, which also means lots of end-of-life waste. Wind power also kills birds, bats and insects, and its large-scale towers across the landscape now almost universally generate community resistance.

Shellenberger dates renewables advocacy back to the German-born American technological utopian John Etzler and his 1833 manifesto, The Paradise within Reach of all Men, without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery. A notable omission from his account is a post-fossil-fuels future powered by wind and hydrogen envisaged by the British scientist and declared Marxist J.B.S. Haldane in his 1923 lecture “Daedalus, or, Science and the Future”. Shellenberger credits US environmentalists Barry Commoner and Amory Lovins with providing the framework that became “the policy agenda of nearly all the country’s environmental organisations” involving “massively redesigning the major industrial, agricultural, energy, and transport systems” to provide a “synthesis of man and nature” based on organic farming, natural materials (not synthetics or plastics), smaller cars and houses, energy and resource efficiency, biofuels and renew-

able electricity. But Shellenberger is commendably realistic about human beings and the centrality of high power density energy sources to modern civilisation, concluding that the “transition to renewables was doomed because modern industrial people, no matter how romantic they are, do not want to return to pre-modern life”.

But what of big oil and gas companies advertising and advocating for renewables? While some of this is probably just greenwash, Shellenberger argues that the big oil and gas companies have a common-cause interest in renewables: “The big oil and gas companies know perfectly well that batteries can’t back up the grid. The places integrating large amounts of solar and wind … are relying more and more on natural gas plants …”

Shellenberger spends a couple of chapters demonstrating these common-cause interests in anti-nuclear, pro-renewables advocacy and policies between oil and gas interests, environmental groups, and senior Democrats, particularly in California. While some may seek to discredit this as a paranoid conspiracy theory of a shill for the nuclear industry, Shellenberger documents the relationships in considerable detail, and unlike conspiracy theorists, has a credible common-cause interest to underpin his claim—renewables can’t reliably power the grid, and in the absence of nuclear, gas will do the job.

Shellenberger has a crack too at celebrities, like Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, “flaunting their high-energy lifestyles” while “moralising for low-energy lives”, hypocrisy he says upsets many climate activists, including Greta Thunberg. Shellenberger, however, explains the inevitability of the hypocrisy:

The reason even the most sincere greens consume large quantities of energy is simple: living in wealthy nations and doing the things people in wealthy nations do, from driving and flying to eating and living in a home, requires significant quantities of energy.

Shellenberger decries the effect this moralising is having on the world’s poor. The UN developed the notion of “sustainable development”, including that poor nations could grow rich without using much energy. There is also a view that poor nations can “leapfrog” fossil fuels and go directly from burning wood and dung to using renewables, which is described as “avoiding the mistakes made in the industrialised world”. The World Bank and other donors are increasingly following this “sustainable development” model and winding back investments in major infrastructure like large-scale dams, centralised power grids, flood mitigation and the
Climate Change is Not the End of the World

like. But, as a former World Bank economist told Shellenberger, “not a single country in the world has become developed through that route”.

In the final part of the book, Shellenberger ponders why environmental advocates have been so successful in their anti-development agenda. He looks to the legacy of Thomas Malthus and his myriad of fellow travellers since his 1798 treatise An Essay on the Principle of Population, which inspired Thomas Carlyle to call economics the dismal science. Traditionally, Marxists have been hostile to Malthusian thinking, because it condemns the poor apparently as a matter of natural law. But, says Shellenberger, Malthusianism switched sides after the Second World War and became “a left-wing political movement in the form of environmentalism”. Paul Ehrlich with his “Population Bomb” and the Club of Rome with its “Limits to Growth” are heirs to this Malthusianism.

By the 1980s fears of overpopulation lacked credibility. The population growth rate had already peaked, and China had introduced its one-child policy. Malthusians switched to resource scarcity and environmental degradation, followed by climate change. Now, it’s not that fossil fuels are scarce, or running out, it’s that the atmosphere has a limited capacity for carbon dioxide. The obvious answer, nuclear power, which uses few resources and doesn’t emit carbon dioxide, is rejected by Malthusian environmentalists. Shellenberger notices a pattern going back to Malthus himself, who opposed contraception: “Malthusians raise the alarm about resource or environmental problems and then attack the obvious technical solutions.”

Shellenberger discusses the semi-political character of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the incentive towards alarmism created by authors seeking inclusion in the Summary for Policy Makers and the attention of a media headline, the influx of opportunists and exaggerators, and the character assassinations of dissenters, who often just want to respectfully report the science. Nevertheless, Shellenberger regards as basically sound the underlying detailed analyses in the less-often-read technical chapters.

Shellenberger argues that contemporary environmentalism has become a secular religion. He quotes leading environmentalist Bill McKibben that the underlying problem is spiritual and that through our industrial civilisation we have lost our connection to nature. Shellenberger is scathing about the appeal-to-nature fallacy, that natural things are better for people and the environment than artificial things, but accepts that its intuitive appeal is very strong. He also criticises the idea that nature achieves “harmony” like a self-regulating system.

While secular environmentalism appears quite a break from our Judeo-Christian heritage, Shellenberger argues it replays the old archetypes. Instead of human problems stemming from a failure to adapt to God, they now stem from a failure to adapt ourselves to nature. Apocalyptic scientists are cast in the role of priests, interpreting to us the demands not of God, but of nature. Shellenberger believes “secular people are attracted to apocalyptic environmentalism because it meets some of the same psychological and spiritual needs as Judeo-Christianity and other religions”. It provides purpose—to save the world—a story in which they can be heroes and find meaning, all the while “retaining the illusion … that they are people of science and reason, not superstition and fancy”. It’s not that Shellenberger has a problem with religion. But the “trouble with the new environmental religion is that it has become increasingly apocalyptic, destructive, and self-defeating”.

Shellenberger reflects on the fear of death and our desire to transcend it through an “immortality project”, a way of living beyond the grave, whether through children, art, writing, business or other means. Climate activism can be such a project, creating a special purpose, to save the future for our descendants.

But what of those, like Extinction Rebellion, who seem to have a morbid fetish for death and the climate apocalypse? Shellenberger says:

If the climate apocalypse is a kind of subconscious fantasy for people who dislike civilization, it might help explain why the people who are the most alarmist … are also the most opposed to the technologies capable of addressing them, from fertilizer and flood control to natural gas and nuclear power.

Clearly, Shellenberger sympathises with the British columnist who described Extinction Rebellion as “an upper-middle-class death cult”.

Quadrant October 2020
However, Shellenberger doesn’t connect apocalyptic environmentalism with the Marxist anti-capitalist movements and thinkers of the past, nor with the more recent post-colonial, anti-Enlightenment scholarship and activism that has become so prominent. They all seek to destroy, or at least revolutionise, liberal, capitalist, industrial societies. He therefore seems a bit naïve about the scope and scale of the movements attacking the foundations of our civilisation.

Nevertheless, Shellenberger rejects the anti-capitalist, postmodern, apocalyptic will to destroy and revolutionise. Instead, he promotes an “environmental humanism” in which “we must ground ourselves first in our commitment to the transcendent moral purpose of universal human flourishing and environmental progress, and then in rationality”:

Environmental humanism will eventually triumph over apocalyptic environmentalism … because the vast majority of people in the world want both prosperity and nature, not nature without prosperity.

Shellenberger has done a great service in breaking ranks and exposing the exaggerations, omissions and distortions that drive the apocalypse-is-upon-us narrative, reaffirming mainstream science and humanist ethics, and making the case that environmental alarmism hurts us all. He offers hope that we can tackle the challenges of climate change without sacrificing living standards if only we can come to terms with nuclear energy, the twentieth-century’s promethean gift.

Dr Michael Green has a PhD in Systems Engineering.

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Great Aunts

Love at arm’s length—one step to the side, then
Diagonally down; approachable
With deference, their affections informed
By if Dad was a favourite nephew,
Or Mum that glib, unreliable girl,
Who’d led a gullible daughter astray.

Cigarette smoke and old-fashioned perfume
Swirled around us on entering the room;
Posing for photos after cheeks were kissed
(and the Cold Cream taste was wiped from our lips).

Predictable sightings were seasonal—
Christmas Day, and a New Year’s barbecue
At a second cousin’s house near Kingston,
Or maybe the beach, but you’d never see
A Great Aunt swim; instead they would sit, on
Fold-out chairs, in a curved sisterly line,
Chuckling and smiling at me as I passed:
“Haven’t you grown, David?” Consensus point—
Grand-nephews did, when summers divided
Grade X from Y. They died sporadically
Over three decades—Nan quite early on—
Counting down funeral by funeral
The clan chiselled them
Into legend but, without their binding
Power, it fragments at cousin-level;
Scattered across unfamiliar islands
We pocket our memories, and begin to build.

David Dalton
Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends
by Anne Applebaum
Allen Lane, 2020, 224 pages, $35

As celebrity writers go, Anne Applebaum is of a distinctly global kind—her fame follows her byline from suburban Washington to Warsaw and from Budapest to Fleet Street. In covering all these places, she stands out from her journalistic lot for her local expertise of each, although her beat is a generic and timeless one—she chronicles the “twilight of democracy”, the dismantling of modern republics, from within. By putting into play countries arguably far further down the path to autocracy than the US, her journalism reads like a refined version of the doomsday prophesying that prevails among her never-Trump colleagues—the Frums, the Rubins, the Boots and the Kristols of the world.

She sometimes indulges in sour partisanship too, but nonetheless remains one of her profession’s rare talents with a parallel claim to fame as a historian. Before earning a Pulitzer for her commentary at the Washington Post, Applebaum drew wide plaudits for her expertly researched works on Ukraine’s Holodomor, Stalin’s gulags and the rise of the Iron Curtain in Central Europe. In a number of ways, she seemed predestined to just this kind of writing career. Her great-grandfather fled conscription in the 1880s under the Russian emperor Alexander III. Her father is a star attorney on matters of antitrust and trade. While her mother curated Washington’s Corcoran Gallery, the young Anne read history and literature at Yale, attending Wolfgang Leonhard’s famous course on Soviet history, visiting her forefathers’ Belarus in 1985 and eventually crossing the pond as a post-grad Marshall Scholar at the LSE.

Applebaum’s intellectual vagaries reflect the sensibility of a distinct kind of American descendant of East European émigrés who never felt entirely cut loose from her distant roots and seized the opportunity to revisit them with the fall of the Berlin Wall. While writing for a number of British magazines in the 1980s and 1990s, she went on several reporting trips east of the Iron Curtain that resulted in a travelogue—Between East and West—foreboding some of the region’s present political

Loving and Hating Democracy

Jorge González-Gallarza Hernández
Conundrums. Already in the heady aftermath of 1989, the nationalism that reared its head after decades of Soviet suppression augured a ticklish coexistence with the universalist creed of liberal democracy that the region embraced as a condition of membership in the West.

Applebaum has the historical discernment to critically appraise, in hindsight, the zeitgeist of giddiness among her milieu of Cold Warriors at the time, yet she leaves this important task to those not encumbered with the urgency to sell books. This lack of self-criticism has earned her more or less damning reviews from Douglas Murray, to her right, and to her left from Ivan Kratsev, whose work with Stephen Holmes from March this year—The Light That Failed—could have given Applebaum a hint or two had she chosen to delve deeper into the matter. Few know better than Applebaum the forces of history that have led the post-Soviet East to settle the competing claims of national sovereignty and liberal democracy in a way that has disappointed the West’s expectations. Yet her book portrays the democratic backsliding of late in Poland and Hungary as almost exclusively the single-handed work of opportunistic demagogues. In Twilight of Democracy, Anne the never-Trumper gets the better of Anne the historian.

In 2016 Applebaum’s warnings about the fragility of post-Soviet democracies gained an eerie prescience applicable to Trump’s distrust of republican checks on his power. Waxing alarmist about the demise of the American republic is something of an over-subscribed beat across the mastheads she writes for, but her prized contribution lies in grounding these fears in a larger global story about the inevitable transmutation of right-wing populism into proto-totalitarian tyranny. Other writers focus their alarm on the precedents set in Erdogan’s Turkey or Duterte’s Philippines, but the parallels Applebaum draws to Hungary’s Viktor Orbán and Poland’s Law & Justice Party (PiS) sound more clairvoyant for a simple reason. The national-populist turn of Poland’s PiS and Hungary’s Fidesz in the early 2000s a distant prequel to Trump and Brexit—“A Warning from Europe: The Worst is Yet to Come” was the ominous title of her Atlantic essay. PiS and Sikorski’s Civic Platform splintered in 2001 from a big tent born out of the political arm of the Solidarity movement, while Fidesz underwent its own distancing from Europe’s mainstream Christian Democrats. With a lag and for markedly different reasons, the US Republicans and the pro-Brexit share of the UK Tories have indeed realigned around much the same national populism as their Central European peers.

One can only admire Applebaum’s ability to navigate across cultural environments, as much as her sincere wish to see the liberal-democratic ideal travel inversely to her forefathers’ journey—from its Western cradle to its Eastern edge. The pity is the immodest one-sidedness of her account. Applebaum is uniquely qualified to trace the pull factors that have diverted Poland and Hungary away from the liberal promise of the 1990s and into their present crossroads, but Twilight of Democracy doesn’t do that.
The book shoehorns their vastly different political predicaments into a meta-narrative—*The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*, the book’s US subtitle.

To be fair to Applebaum, she does warn in the foreword against expecting the kind of sweepingly researched, multi-perspective impartiality that she has accustomed her readers to. The electoral appeal of populists, she humbly concedes, eludes a single explanation, and the individuals she describes as exemplars of it are of a single demographic, reflecting her own rather narrow experience of the phenomenon. And yet her experience of intellectuals-turned-populists is conferred general import for the simple reason that a journey of that nature is, in Applebaum’s mind, simply oxymoronically. For her, knowing the fragile nature of liberal democracy necessarily immunises one against the populist temptation to distrust the elites guarding the system. Yet amongst this demographic, the antibodies have given in, and Applebaum indicts her former friends for breaking something of an unwritten covenant with liberalism. A similar theme was developed in the 1920s by Julien Benda in *La Trahison des Clercs*, which has inspired her book. Applebaum’s commitment to pluralism and the open exchange of ideas is real, but when it comes to liberal shibboleths such as multiculturalism, EU integration or immigration, the temptation to demonise and second-guess her dissenters proves overpowering. For Applebaum, intellectuals who turn to populism were never intellectuals in the first place but budding authoritarians, frustrated under-achievers, mental degenerates or some combination thereof.

Applebaum describes PiS—which enjoys an expanded majority since President Duda’s re-election in July—as somehow in pathological thrall to a conspiracy that incriminates the Kremlin for crashing a plane carrying Poland’s entire government on its way to commemorating the Katyn massacre in April 2010. Yet she fails to give any evidence that this so-called “Smolensk lie” has any sort of broad sway over the Polish public—because it doesn’t, other than the few voices Applebaum does cherry-pick. She describes the party’s socially conservative agenda as driven by homophobic bigotry, the same ready-made, dumbed-down narrative that spares her and the NGOs that peddle it the journalistic brunt work of explaining the less sensationalist issues that actually divide the bulk of Polish society—adoption by same-sex couples and the degree of sexualised content in primary and secondary school curricula, for instance.

More of the same in Hungary, where Applebaum credits Orbán with the superhuman ability to whip up racism and anti-Semitism to divert attention from his entourage’s crony dealings. For Applebaum, the fact that Hungary has relatively few migrants at present somehow makes opposing any new ones necessarily xenophobic. Similarly, she thinks only anti-Semitism can inspire resentment at George Soros’s influence on Hungarian politics. A sober explainer of Polish and Hungarian politics *Twilight of Democracy* is not.

As for the UK, Applebaum bad-mouths her pro-Brexit colleagues for whipping up nativism and nostalgia for British grandeur in pursuit of an imagined sovereignty that Brexit cannot deliver. In Applebaum’s world, a vote for Brexit cannot possibly be the result of reasoned argument over the downsides of membership in the EU. Reason points one way only for her; ending up elsewhere exposes you as a nutjob.

There’s a long scholarly precedent behind Applebaum’s reflex to psychiatrise her political detractors. In 1950, a team of sociologists and psychologists at Berkeley sought to explain the rise of fascism in pre-war Europe by correlating its appeal to a set of personality traits resulting from adverse childhood experiences. Despite some grotesque statistical flaws, *The Authoritarian Personality* enjoyed a decade of acclaim until the study’s methodological absurdity became too large to ignore. Theodor Adorno and his colleagues, as it turned out, weren’t so much interested in the link between authoritarian politics and human psychology, but in discrediting as a proto-fascist anyone who would venture into conservative territory. There’s a reek of this in every page of Applebaum’s book, which makes its argument not only dubious, but thoroughly unoriginal.

*Jorge González-Gallarza Hernández (@jorgeGGallarza) is a senior researcher at Fundación Civismo in Madrid.*

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**Elizabeth Beare**

More than Meets the Ear

*Van Gogh’s Ear: The True Story*

by Bernadette Murphy


During the heady political days of 1968, at a warren of a student house in Sydney’s then ungentrified Glebe, a young artist moved in, making the seventh of us living communally. He was nineteen years old and my best memory of him would say he...
was sunny. His happy nature shone. His room was a tiny one, off a landing on the stairs, his window looking down on the overgrown yard. On the small patch of grass there our group household, with our two mandatory cats, would sit drinking wine and occasionally testing out hallucinogens. In that fine crumbling old house I would arrange flowers, as the song says, in a recently purchased op-shop vase on the dining table which I had painted electric pink in this springtime of our lives.

The original six of us were at Sydney University, whereas the newcomer studied at the Julian Ashton Art School, famed for its old-style approach to drawing. Students there learned to draw first, before tackling oil painting, and they practised drawing by sketching plaster models of human body parts: skulls, hands, feet and even ears.

We were all amused one day when our friend brought home some plaster pieces no longer required at the art school. On a shelf, beside the model of a human ear, this personable young man had written “Vincent’s Left-Overs”, sitting as it did underneath a van Gogh print of a small room furnished only with a single bed and chair. On the wall opposite he had put up a print of van Gogh sunflowers, for he was clearly living the life. A year later, this sunny young man was dead, victim of a sudden and rare disease.

This memory came vividly and sadly to mind for me recently when my husband, fond of Impressionist painting, brought home an obviously popular book still current on the “staff pick” shelves of the bookshop. He thought, he added subtly, that I might enjoy it too, because it was written by a woman of a certain age who developed an accidental interest which was to become something of an obsession with her for some years; just as reinter-pretating King Arthur (see Quadrant, September 2018) had become for me, he implied.

The book’s title simply consisted of the famous meme alluded to so long ago by my sunny friend: Van Gogh’s Ear. As a title it sufficed, for everyone knew the story already: on Christmas Eve 1888 during a fit of madness, while living in Arles in Provence in the south of France, an Impressionist painter who signed himself simply as Vincent, briefly sharing his lodgings with a fellow Impressionist painter called Gauguin, had cut off his ear and presented it wrapped as a present to a local prostitute. Less than two and a half years later, Vincent van Gogh had long left Arles and had committed suicide in the Auvers-sur-Oise region of Paris. The book’s subtitle, though, suggested something else, for it promised The True Story.

Bernadette Murphy is an English woman with a degree in Art History who had never published before on van Gogh. She says she had found the tea-towel and fridge-magnet souveniring of his works and the tourist tours of Arles somewhat off-putting for her appreciation of his greatness. Tourists came for the legend, but many of the sites, including that of the Yellow House where van Gogh lived, had been obliterated by German bombing during the Second World War. Only later in her book, as she came to “know” Vincent well, does she admit to the emotional impact his paintings could have upon her, pointing out how very innovative his work was, how his use of vibrant colour showed in painting a world previously only seen in nature, something often forgotten in the colour-saturated world of today.

Bernadette (if I may) had escaped academia thirty years before to live and work permanently in Arles, and knew the area and its culture well. Mildly at a loose end, and as this famous self-mutilation had put Arles on the tourist map, she decided to investigate “that fateful day”. She revisited Vincent’s paintings in her art books and his story as told online by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, where she noted that according to this reliable source Vincent had actually cut off only a part of his left ear, not the whole thing. So why, she wondered, had the whole ear been assumed in various biographies and tales? Not only this, as she investigated more thoroughly what was known of Vincent’s life in Arles, a number of other small discrepancies began to emerge, and on went her detective hat.

With extraordinary thoroughness and meticulous care, she took on the case as a forensic one, looking only for discrepancies and documented evidence for and against certain positions taken as fact in the narrative about van Gogh in Arles. “Evidence” was her catchcry, made all the more difficult by the bombing, which had destroyed certain records and made reconstruction of the town plan quite oblique at first as she checked who went where and when during the emergency and before and after it. Luckily, she was a trained researcher. As a long-term resident she was also more able than most outsiders to fight her way through the complex French bureaucracies that held the documents she sought: and she sought so
many, in Arles and elsewhere.

She searched avenues no one else had bothered to examine, compiling merely as a start a full list of all residents of Arles during van Gogh’s time, identifying a number of those who were in his many paintings, immersing herself in the manners and viewpoints of the time to better comprehend why some locals petitioned for Vincent’s removal after his illness and others did not. She forensically examined the petition and found some spurious names in the thirty signatures. In doing so, she has managed to diminish the bad reputation Arles had gained as a heartless place trying to evict Vincent as a nuisance.

Contrary to what previously had been thought, Murphy showed that the town was not particularly against Vincent, that those few who opposed his presence had a financial interest in his departure, and that he was by no means always the madman of later characterisations. Especially significant in producing the popular account was a lurid 1930s novel by Irving Stone called Lust for Life, which was later made into a similarly lurid 1956 film starring Kirk Douglas. This cemented the legend of van Gogh’s absinthe-induced madness which Murphy was proceeding to demolish.

Her investigations found Vincent could even be quite liked and his work respected by some of the townspeople who knew him and that absinthe was rarely sold in Arles. She looked at postal deliveries (four a day!) and train timetables and weather reports to challenge differing accounts or minor things unremarked. She chased up the few newspaper accounts of the self-mutilation, found the police investigation reports, and what she could of the hospital documentation, relying mostly there on written depictions of the institution and two of Vincent’s paintings.

She read all of the correspondence, luckily available online, and without earlier redactions, between Vincent and others, especially those with his emotionally co-dependent brother Theo, an art dealer. Theo sold Vincent’s paintings and supported him for his talent and out of love in spite of, or perhaps because of, Vincent’s already recognised bouts of mental illness interspersed with periods of normality. Tackling the various biographers, Murphy showed that there was selective bias in the parts of the letters used and the parts ignored.

A reviewer in the Guardian of this BBC Book of the Week quipped that Murphy’s basic query and her international search for documentation could be characterised as “lobe-trotting”—did just the lobe or the whole ear come off? And with a knife or a cut-throat razor? It is a fascinating issue, for ear-taking is part of the atavism in European culture. Bullfighters offer the ear of their killed bull to their lover in the stand, we make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, soldiers have “souvenired” ears from defeated foes and kidnappers have severed an ear from a victim to impel payment. In the end the solution to Vincent’s severing was found to have travelled to California. Hidden away in an old box was a medical drawing of the actual wound, and I won’t spoil the story by telling you the result here. Nor will I tell you who, due to Murphy’s diligent research, the mysterious “prostitute” named “Rachel” turned out to be, verified by her local descendants, nor why she was the recipient of this grisly (and perhaps gristly?) present.

But I can summarise for you that the explanation Murphy offers for the wrapped package and why van Gogh mutilated his ear and sent the result to “Rachel”, while speculative, is well supported by Murphy’s decoding of a series of word-clues about Vincent’s mental condition which were jotted down on the actual night by Gauguin, a key participant, as events unfolded. Her explanation depends on her evidence that van Gogh was a compassionate and considerate person, driven to establish an atelier, an artists’ colony, in Arles, and that his failure to do this was a deep disappointment to him. Bewildered by his illness, as Murphy shows, he projected it onto others in an attempt to diminish its significance. She makes much play too about van Gogh’s earlier religiosity (he’d trained as a pastor), which she suggests likely turned him to experience a Christ-like compassion during a heightened schizoid episode brought on by Gauguin’s desire to leave Arles. The result of this was for Vincent to self-mutilate to prove his worth by providing a healing gift from his own body.

A PBX documentary on Bernadette Murphy and her search and other reviews online will act as spoilers for those who can’t wait for the big reveal or don’t want to read the book itself. What I will say is that this book shows that no one should ever place too much faith in a meme until the back-story has been thoroughly examined. Murphy makes a good claim that Vincent was not hooked on absinthe, that he probably was not an alcoholic, and that he may have been suffering from a form of bromide poisoning, inducing his delusions and visions, given his genetic susceptibility to them. Her research established the unrecognised fact that he had been treated with bromide for years due to the general diagnosis of “epilepsy” that was made in this period for a wide range of mental illnesses. Her discussion of his mental illness and its well-meant treatment in the local hospital can bring you to tears. There is still no agreement as to what particular mental illness plagued him.
There are still medical conferences about just that, where Murphy is invited as a contributory guest, so sensitive is her appraisal of Vincent’s history of breakdowns. As I have found in my own lineal family and collateral relatives, there is no joy in this field, even now with improved medications and diagnostics. Murphy’s Chapter 10, “Troubled Genes”, which investigates van Gogh’s family background, demonstrates recurrent instances of mental instability among his close relatives down the generations; even level-headed Theo suicided only a few years after Vincent. This familial finding suggests what seems scientifically to be increasingly the case: there is a physiological genetic base to such things. However, the caution is that circumstances can also be relevant, as to any overt expression of disorders. Thanks to Murphy’s new appraisal we now have a more nuanced view of the stressors placed upon Vincent van Gogh.

Although leavened by some van Gogh illustrations in colour, there are 253 pages of dense but highly readable argumentation in this book, and fifty-five pages of chapter reference notes. Some readers may find this daunting, as the referencing is of PhD quality, albeit unobtrusively done with tiny numbering. Online reader reviews are mixed, some saying “too much information”, and advocating a more summarising approach; “dogged” is a term also used for Murphy’s dedicated persistence. Apparently it is a slow read for some and a well-paced detective story for others. One crucifyingly unfair comment washes away Murphy’s informative and lively style as “workaday”. Many others, the majority I suspect, simply love the whole thing, mentioning especially the authorial insertion of her personal process of discovery. When you are trying to combine a story of detection and interpretation with a need to produce the evidential goods, it seems inevitable that some will say, as one reader did, Why didn’t she just write a novel about her new findings? Such readers need to go off and find another book, not this one.

Give it the time, though, and you will get the rewards. Bernadette Murphy has love enough of Provence to make Vincent’s yellow sunflowers in skies as blue and wide as Australia’s recall for me a young man’s sunny nature, and skill enough to let me find in Vincent’s swirling starry night a memory of them both.

Elizabeth Beare wrote about her travels in the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak in the June issue.

In Passing

They have washed it away,
In a deluge,
They have trampled it under their feet,
They have brought it all to submission,
With the tide of the great sea,
They have cleansed the old foundations,
The harbour they have long laid waste,
They have left the fractured sunlight,
The woods, the trees, the hills,
No one now disturbs it,
No one cries aloud,
No ships to port may come
And the birds scream
At dawning.

Sophia Nugent-Siegal

The story for this poem is taken from a digression in the Iliad which states that, after the Trojan War, the Gods washed away the Greek fortifications and cleansed the land because they had been built in haste and without the necessary sacrifices.
The first film that the late Christopher Reeve made, after his breakthrough role as *Superman* (1978), was *Somewhere in Time* (1980), directed by Jeannot Szwarc. It was Reeve’s favourite of all his movies. The screenplay was by Richard Matheson, from his book *Bid Time Return*, and the haunting score was created by John Barry, the composer for eleven James Bond films.

*Somewhere in Time* is a romantic drama that addresses eternal love, grief and loss. Add to this the intertwined themes of aching musical motifs: Rachmaninoff’s *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, and John Barry’s *Somewhere in Time* theme.

The heart of the film is a love story in which playwright Richard Collier (Reeve) is transported, through self-hypnosis, back to 1912, where he meets and falls in love with stage actress Elise McKenna (Jane Seymour) but is finally forced back to his own time, leaving her behind.

Travelling through time via auto-suggestion appeared in Mark Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889) which told the story of an engineer who, after a blow to the head, goes back to sixth-century England. Twain’s novel is considered one of the foundational texts in science-fiction time travel.

*Somewhere in Time* was derided by critics in its day as sentimental and melodramatic, but after a cable television broadcast a decade later it became a cult hit with a devoted fan base.

The story begins in 1972 when Richard Collier is having a debut of his first play at a local college. An elderly woman approaches him through the crowd and hands him an antique pocket watch, whispering to him, “Come back to me.” Collier has no idea who she is. After the play, the woman returns home and dies in her sleep.

Eight years later Collier, now a successful playwright, is suffering from writer’s block. To stimulate his imagination, he goes on a road trip, passing the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, and feels compelled to go inside and look around. In the hotel’s Hall of History he sees a photograph of a woman from the early 1900s, Elise McKenna, the “most famous actress of her time”. He is fascinated by her and in the local bookshop finds press clippings and photographs, including one of her in later years, and recognises her as the woman who had given him the watch.

He visits McKenna’s former housekeeper but she refuses to speak to him—until he shows her the watch. She tells him it was McKenna’s most precious possession and allows him to come in. In a bedroom, Collier discovers McKenna’s music box, which plays a variation of Rachmaninoff’s *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Collier’s favourite tune. He discovers a book written by one of his former teachers, Professor Gerard Finney, on time travel.

Believing now that there is some kind of connection between McKenna and himself, Collier goes to Finney, who suggests that time travel might be possible through auto-suggestion, but there must be no objects, from the present time, to distract him, or else the hypnotic state would be broken. Finney also warns him that his efforts, even if successful, could fatally weaken him.

Collier checks into the Grand Hotel and makes an attempt at the self-hypnosis technique but fails. Discouraged, he explores the hotel’s archives, where he uncovers an early twentieth-century guest register from the weekend that McKenna had performed there, and finds his name, written in his own handwriting. This encourages him to try the self-hypnosis again. Eventually succeeding, he awakens back in the early 1900s, still at the hotel. He checks in, requesting the room number he had seen in the old guest register.

While strolling beside a lake he encounters Elise McKenna, who asks, “Is it you?” Her manager,
William Robinson (Christopher Plummer) has told her that a man will appear to distract from her career and, with self-interest in mind, warns him to keep away. But Collier continues to seek her, and they fall in love.

Collier attends the play that McKenna is performing at the hotel but during the performance she goes off script, improvising a personal monologue to Collier, which panics the production crew and infuriates Robinson.

Afterwards, during a photo session, when she is having difficulty posing, Collier quietly enters the room behind the photographer, and she smiles at him. The photographer snaps her expression, which is the same one in the photo that Collier had seen in the Hall of History in 1980.

Robinson, distrustful of Collier’s influence on his protégé, requests a private meeting. But Collier is tricked and overpowered by two of Robinson’s associates, tied up and left in the hotel stable. Robinson tells McKenna that Collier has left suddenly, but she doesn’t believe him.

The theatrical company departs but McKenna stays behind, finding and reuniting with Collier, and they spend the night together. In the morning, over breakfast, as he is turning out the pockets of his jacket, a penny dating from 1979 falls out. This object breaks the hypnosis, as he was warned it might do, and he reawakens back in 1980.

Distraught, he makes many attempts to return, using the same techniques, but fails. Broken-hearted, and weakened by his persistent efforts to go back, he falls ill and dies. The film closes with a short mystical interlude where he and McKenna meet in the afterlife.

Richard Matheson, the author of the source novel, Bid Time Return, and writer of the screenplay for Somewhere in Time, was born in 1926 in New Jersey, to Norwegian immigrants. He attended the Missouri School of Journalism and during the 1950s published a series of western novels. He found his niche in 1956 with a sci-fi story, The Shrinking Man, which was made into a Hollywood film, for which he also wrote the screenplay. His vampire novel I Am Legend was made into the films The Last Man on Earth (1964) and The Omega Man (1971) and most recently as I Am Legend (2007), starring Will Smith.

Matheson continued writing in the western genre, with screenplays for 1960s television shows Have Gun Will Travel and Cheyenne, but became more recognised for his work on Rod Serling’s first Twilight Zone series, where he contributed a dozen segments, including Nightmare at 20,000 Feet (1963), introducing William Shatner as the protagonist. Matheson also scripted Rod Serling’s introductory and closing statements for the programs. He wrote the story and screenplay for Steven Spielberg’s first film, Duel (1971), which was inspired by a truck that had tailgated him on the day President Kennedy was assassinated.

In Bid Time Return, the character of Elise McKenna was inspired by the life of American actress Maude Adams, born in 1872, and her manager, Charles Frohman, who was the basis for the William Robinson character. Matheson had visited Piper’s Opera House in Victoria City, Nevada, and saw a portrait of Maude Adams, who had once resided there. Adams made her career playing Peter Pan, and died in 1953 at the age of eighty. Matheson became fascinated by her photograph, commenting, “Creatively, I fell in love with her. What if some guy...
did the same thing and could go back in time?“
He researched Adams's life and moved into the
grand Hotel del Coronado near San Diego to write
the novel, dictating most of it into a tape recorder.
Bid Time Return won the World Fantasy Award for
Best Novel.
Ray Bradbury considered Matheson “one of the
most important writers of the twentieth cen-
tury”. Stephen King said, “When people talk about
the genre [horror], I guess they mention my name
first, but without Richard Matheson, I wouldn't be
around. He’s as much my father as Bessie Smith was
Elvis Presley’s mother.” The film director Roger
Corman remembered him as “a close friend and the
best screenwriter I ever worked with. I always shot
his first draft.”
Matheson died in 2013 at the age of 87.

Matheson’s novel Bid Time Return differs from
his film script for Somewhere in Time in sig-
nificant ways. In the book, Collier does not suffer
from writer’s block but has been
diagnosed with an inoperable tem-
poral-lobe tumour, which is the
reason he has decided to take a road
trip, in the limited time he has left.
The scene where the elderly
McKenna places the pocket watch
in his hand and says “Come back
to me” does not appear in the book.
There is an old woman present at
the debut of his college play—she
is in her late eighties and Collier
is only nineteen—but she does not
speak to him.
In the novel, during his inves-
tigation into Elise McKenna’s life,
Collier discovers that Robinson
died on the Lusitania when it was torpedoed by a
German submarine in 1915. (Maude Adams’s man-
ger, Charles Frohman, died on the Lusitania.)
McKenna’s character is much earthier in the
book. She owned her own private railroad car and
a 200-acre farm, which produced wood, pigs and
poultry, farming being her passion.
The play that McKenna performs at the Hotel
del Coronado is The Little Minister by J.M. Barrie,
author of Peter Pan. Barrie created the role of Peter
Pan expressly for McKenna, who is physically
described, not as traditionally feminine, as in the
film, but as having the stature to be able to play
either a girl or a boy.

Collier travels from 1971 to 1889 (rather than from
1980 to 1912, as in the film). McKenna tells Collier
that she had been expecting him and that is why she
asked, “Is it you?” but the reason for her expectation
is explained: she had twice been advised by fortune
tellers—the first time by an Indian woman who told
her that a man would find her under unusual cir-
stances, and the second time by a gypsy who
told her she would meet a strange man on a beach.

McKenna’s manager in the book is fit and physi-
cally confrontational and he and Collier have a fist
fight which is only halted when Collier reveals to
him that he has come from the future and knows
Robinson will die on the Lusitania.
McKenna does not improvise any monologue
during her performance at the hotel expressly for
Collier but stays on script.

After she and Collier have spent the night
together, she asks him if he will come and live with
her on her farm. When he asks if she ever cared for
Robinson, she replies, “Not as a man … as a father,
perhaps. I never really had a father, never saw him
after a very early age. So I suppose he took that role
in my life.”

When Collier reaches inside his vest pocket and
finds a 1971 penny, he tries to throw
it away, but is unable to let go of it—
“The penny remained on my hand like some hideous growth”—and
it catapults him back to his own
time. In the film, this transporta-
tion happens in front of McKenna,
who screams in horror; but in the
novel, she is fast asleep in an adjoin-
ing room.
The book concludes with a post-
script by Collier’s brother, Robert,
describing Collier’s rapid decline
and death, and concluding that the
terminal illness most likely initi-
ated his obsessive desire to return
to a more idealised and hopeful
past. He quotes a doctor who had confided to him
that the kind of tumour his brother had “could cause
dreaming states and hallucinations of sight, taste
and smell”.

The most profound difference between the book
and the film is the pocket watch scene—a critical
and unusual transformation of the text by Matheson.
In the film, there is only one piece of hard evidence
that rules out Collier’s time travel as any kind of
hallucination—the antique watch given to him by
the elder McKenna.
initiates contact and gives Collier the watch, in front of others, asking him to “come back” to her.

Therefore, Collier and McKenna either shared a common hallucination—which is improbable—or Collier did, in fact, travel back to the early twentieth century and return the pocket watch to her, in some kind of ontologically paradoxical time loop.

I am curious as to why Matheson would do this. Perhaps he, and the producers of the film, felt that an inoperable temporal-lobe tumour was a bit dark for the 1980s romantic movie-going public and a simple paradoxical time-travel story was more palatable.

There is much evocative writing in the novel capturing the ambience of the late 1800s, such as this reflection by Collier:

An odd thought just occurred to me … it is that famous men and women I have read about are now alive. Einstein is a teen-ager in Switzerland, Lenin is a young lawyer, his revolutionary days far ahead of him, Franklin Roosevelt is a Groton student, Gandhi a lawyer in Africa, Picasso a youth, Hitler and De Gaulle schoolboys. Queen Victoria still sits on the throne of England … H.G. Wells has only recently published The Time Machine … Henry James has just fled to Europe … in Vienna, Gustav Mahler is commencing his duties as conductor of the Royal Opera.

And later, when Collier is first allowed into McKenna’s bedroom unchaperoned:

“Do you realize—?” she started. “No, you couldn’t, but believe me when I tell you that it is so—that it is nothing short of incredible for a man to be sitting next to me in my hotel room? Me wearing nightclothes? With not another soul around? It’s … supernatural, Richard.”

John Barry, the composer of the elegant and constitutive score of Somewhere in Time, was English. He was already a legend in the world of film music, having written scores for eleven of the James Bond films, perfecting the signature “Bond sound”—brass, jazz and crescendo themes—as early as Goldfinger (1964). He had also written the Grammy and Oscar winning scores to Born Free (1966) and The Lion in Winter (1968).

Jane Seymour, who was a personal acquaintance of Barry and his wife, suggested him to the producers of Somewhere in Time, but the budget for the film was so small they could not afford him. When Seymour showed the script to the Barrys they both liked it, so Barry decided to do it for no upfront money, for backend only. It went on to be one of his most successful recordings.

What is perplexing to me is the number of negative reviews this brilliant film garnered from critics who ought to have known better.

Pulitzer Prize winner Roger Ebert, film critic for the Chicago Sun-Times, said, “the movie surrounds its love story with such boring mumbo jumbo about time travel that we finally just don’t care … the whole movie is so solemn, so worshipful toward its theme, that it’s finally just silly”. Which “we” is Ebert referring to? I care. Hundreds of thousands of people all over the world continue to care.

Vincent Canby, of the New York Times, said: “Somewhere in Time … does for time-travel what the Hindenburg did for dirigibles … the music is largely by Rachmaninoff, whose ‘Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini’ is played more often than sanity can easily accommodate …” Perhaps it was more than Mr Canby’s sanity could accommodate, but for any composer or serious lover of music, this extraordinary theme is perfectly integrated into the drama.

Wagner called these signature musical theme repetitions, when identified with the appearance of characters, leitmotifs. Both of Somewhere in Time’s signature themes, Rachmaninoff’s and Barry’s, are strong enough to withstand leitmotif repetition. In fact, once you get either of these melodies in your head, they will not leave you alone.

I think where most of the contemporary critics lost their way was in failing to understand the effect of this movie on ordinary people. Working in the rarefied world of “serious” film and theatre criticism, they simply overlooked a popular cinematic phenomenon. Somewhere in Time is deceptively structured in the manner of a historical period piece and time-travel film, but it is really a modern fairy-tale, a Jungian dream-myth with enduring longevity, that slipped through the cracks of the critical comprehension of its day. Like Cinderella or Alice in Wonderland, it combines suspension of belief (fantasy) with belief in things unseen, more akin to spiritual belief.

Each year in October, the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Michigan, which served as the location for the film shoot, hosts a weekend convention for INSITE (International Network of Somewhere In Time Enthusiasts). Michael Shiels wrote in Forbes Magazine:

[The] Grand Hotel sits on a scenic bluff overlooking the Straits of Mackinac … it’s the world’s largest summer hotel and among its 390 uniquely decorated rooms are 35 suites named for the likes of Teddy Roosevelt, Lord and Lady Astor, and seven U.S. Presidential First Ladies.
This year, COVID-19 permitting, guests are encouraged to attend wearing Edwardian costumes. For US$1600 per couple, you can get a Lakeview room for two nights, including the grand reception, a big-screen showing of the film, panel discussions with some of the film’s celebrities and crew, and ferry-boat tickets. No motor vehicles are allowed on the island and all transportation is by horse and buggy or bicycle.

Tanda Gmiter wrote on MLive.com:

Reeve was the first one to return to Mackinac, [Seymour] said, and he called her after going to one of the weekend events. “Jane, we have to go back together … Oh my God, Jane, you have no idea what has happened to our little movie.”

Reeve and Seymour continued to make plans to go together but their work schedules always conflicted and it never happened. After he died she attended the event, bringing her children. Her daughter, Katie, was about the age Seymour was in the film, and one of her sons wore Reeve’s waistcoat and bowler hat as a tribute. Seymour told Michael Shiel, “Katie looks exactly like I did when we shot Somewhere in Time so the fans really love seeing her.”

Seymour, now aged sixty-nine, has just completed an Australian feature, Ruby’s Choice, playing a grandmother with Alzheimer’s. The film was shot in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, and Seymour had to go through two weeks of quarantine here before filming. As well as continual temperature checks and hand sanitising, masks had to be worn and there was a safety marshal on set who shouted, “Distance please!” whenever the actors got too close to each other.

When I was a kid, in the 1950s and 1960s, I had a huge comic book collection, including the first Superman comic. One of my favourite television shows was The Twilight Zone, which I watched every week on our fishbowl set. The mythological films of Ray Harryhausen were also amongst my favourites at our local Painesville movie house. And my first reading obsession was the James Bond novels of Ian Fleming; I read them all and later faithfully attended the first dozen film adaptations.

That some of the key artists in all of these early inspirations—John Barry, Richard Matheson, Jane Seymour and Christopher Reeve—would come together in 1980 to make my favourite grown-up romantic film, Somewhere in Time—coincidentally the same year I had my own critically-misunderstood popular hit “phenomenon” “Shaddap You Face”, and the year I also met my own soul mate and partner of now forty years, Lin van Hek—to quote Elise McKenna from the novel, “It’s supernatural.”

Jane Seymour is the only one of the four still alive. She is still making films, gardening and painting, and is the driving force of the Open Hearts Foundation charity. On her Facebook page there is a charming short iPhone video of her recent fourteen-day quarantine in Australia: https://www.facebook.com/JaneSeymourOfficial.

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**Prome-theoi**

The father snatches stars  
To bless his children with the flame  
Yet if he can’t control it  
Nor himself, they bear his blame

The mother’s arms are tender  
Clasping infants to her breast  
Though tenderness is worthless  
Should the father torch the nest

His daughter sheds her petticoats  
His sister turns to stone  
His mother sings his songs  
His sole remaining sin, her own

If God believed in anyone  
And anyone in Her  
She too would bow in serfdom  
To the father, mister, sir.

*Eli Narev*
I pass like night, from land to land; I have strange powers of speech …
—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Charles Lamb was fifteen when he saw the sea for the first time. Many years later, in *The Old Margate Hoy* (1823), he would relate his sense of disappointment. As a boy his knowledge of the sea had been derived from books: tales of wanderers whose journeys were often laced with romance and poetry. He had read of the mystique in the depths of the great oceans, and also of tiny isolated islands and the wonders of far-off continents. And who could not help but be impressed by the dangers of fatal rocks and whirlpools, water-spouts and sunken ships with their treasures? Or terrified by reports of hideous monsters of the deep, or naked cannibals and their stewing pots? Other stories told of pearl divers and conch shells big enough to be blown as trumpets, smugglers and the coloured corals of the grottoes inhabited by mermaids. And yet what he was to find himself recalling in the popular holiday spot of Margate, was a line from Walter Savage Landor: “Is this the mighty ocean? Is this all?”

Lamb was unimpressed by cliffs he categorised as “artless”, drab fishermen’s huts, mackerel boats and windblown scrub, while the fishermen themselves he saw only as “poor victims to monotony”. He relates, however, that with time he came to realise that outsiders such as himself, more suited to the larger cities and their attendant rivers, had no true understanding of the sea. In his view, fashionable holiday-makers went to such coastal resorts only to say they had been. Arriving with an excess of “land luggage”, they pitched their bathing tents in the sand in complete ignorance of the “nature of the place”. He asks us to imagine the similar absurdity of a fisherman hauling his nets and lobster pots down a fashionable London street.

Yes, he concludes, if you don’t belong, it is best you stay home.

Still in the early nineteenth century, but on the other side of the North Atlantic, on the island known as Nantucket—just south of Cape Cod—and the place its first peoples knew as “the faraway land”, we should consider a mix of individuals who did belong. Herman Melville in *Moby Dick or, The Whale* (1851), while describing the island as “a mere hillock, and elbow of sand; all beach, without a background”, regards its residents as owning the sea, “as Emperors own empires”.

A Nantucketer lived in a dwelling that had a raised platform on the roof known as “a walk”. The sea needed to be constantly watched. A single street on the island could boast to have housed at one time or another, however itinerantly, 1,344 sea captains. As children these men had clambered up ship’s ratlines as if born for the purpose while whaling phrases would be spat from their mouths as soon as they had developed the capacity to speak. An episode of such a boy harpooning a family cat was remembered fondly and had reached the status of legend. Though one in every four women could expect the sea to make her a widow, daughters still risked the loss of credibility on wedding a lad whose livelihood was land-based. These women were proud of their reputation for Quaker orderliness, but a persistent reek of whale oil still pervaded the Nantucket township despite it. They too would readily hail a messmate, knew what it was to “bring to” and could tell you the span of a jibboom or the length of a mainstay.

Big waves pound this island’s eastern shore, waves that have a 3000-mile fetch that extends to Portugal. The word *nausea* derives from the Greek *naus*, for ship; and in big seas even the most hardened sailors can experience seasickness. As a remedy, a Nantucketer would tie pork fat to a string, dangle and swallow the morsel, then pull hard on the string and repeat the exercise if need be. A Nantucketer also knew from experience the power of a whale’s flukes and of how one might...
find oneself clinging to a capsized boat in cold and dangerous water. Owen Chase, first mate on the ill-fated *Essex*—the ship twice charged and destroyed by a huge bull whale (an incident on which Melville partially based his epic novel)—would write of the confidence and self-possession that a Nantucketer felt on open water. The knowledge of its dangers “inured one, body and mind” and in a manner that outsiders considered, in his words, beyond belief.

And it was the Nantucketer, according to Melville, who:

> in Bible language, goes down to his ships; to and fro ploughing it as his own special plantation. *There* is his home; *there* lies his business, which a Noah’s flood would not interrupt, though it overwhelmed all the millions in China.

The “Bible language” Melville refers to is contained in Psalm 107. Its verses 23 to 30 read as follows:

> Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do tasks in the mighty waters, it is they who have seen the deeds of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. He speaks and raises the stormwind and it makes the waves loom high. They go up to the heavens, come down to the depths, their life-breath in hardship grows faint. They reel and sway like a drunkard, their wisdom is swallowed up. And they cry to the Lord from their straits, from their distress he brings them out. He turns the storm into silence, and its waves are stilled, and they rejoice that these have grown quiet, and He leads them to their bourn.

The biblical scholar Robert Alter tells us of the context in which “wisdom” here also means something akin to “craft”—so that not only is “the knowledge” of sailors open to testing, but more particularly their practical expertise. If the Lord wishes it, both may prove useless in the fury of a “stormwind”.

Edmund Burke in his treatise *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), decides that it is indubitably fear that provides the fascination, “either more openly or latently”, for “the Sublime”, adding that the ocean—as its prime example—strikes us as an “object of no small terror”. Joseph Addison, in a piece for the *Spectator* in 1712, observed that he knew of nothing that could affect the imagination more than the sea and added that its greatness could only have been the work of a supreme and divine being “neither circumscribed by time nor space”. He is specific about Psalm 107, reflecting that its ideas are “much more comfortable as well as rational” than the “pagan scheme of Virgil”—that which accords various gods to different causes. (Here as an aside, we recall in Homer’s *Odyssey*, that the delay in Odysseus’s return to Ithaca emanates from his binding of Polyphemus and the anger that this arouses in the parents of the chief of the Cyclopes, Poseidon, the sea god and nymph Thoosa, herself a daughter of Phorcys, the warden of the waves. Odysseus’s problems are compounded by the family’s allegiance with Proteus, the old man of the sea. These salts, it seems, stick together.)

But to return to fear. The Book of Common Prayer offers this appeal for a storm at sea:

> O most powerful and glorious Lord God, at whose command the winds blow, and lift up the waves of the sea, and who stillest the rage thereof; We thy creatures, but miserable sinners, do in this our great distress cry unto thee for help: save, Lord, or else we perish. We confess, when we have been safe and seen all things quiet about us, we have forgot thee our God, and refused to hearken to the still voice of thy word, and to obey thy commandments: But now we see how terrible thou art in all thy works of wonder; the great God to be feared above all: and therefore we adore thy divine Majesty, acknowledging thy power, and imploring thy goodness. Help, Lord, and save us for thy mercies sake in Jesus Christ thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Another prayer in the collection places more emphasis on the “jaws of this death” about to “swallow us up” and “the raging winds” and “the roaring sea”.

W.H. Auden points out in *The Enchafèd Flood* (1951), that Starbuck, the most experienced of the mates on Melville’s *Pequod*—and a Nantucketer—has a religious reverence for life and death: he knows that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That is why he will have no man in his boat who is not afraid of the whale.

Auden cites the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, where we are told the earth was without
form until the Spirit of God moved “upon the face of the waters”—and then—after the declaration that there should be light and the consequent making of “the firmament”, the waters were gathered “unto one place”, enabling dry land to appear. With this in mind, Auden describes the sea, therefore, as the great symbol of “primordial undifferentiated flux”—and furthermore:

that state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged and into which, unless saved by the efforts of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse.

Indeed, by the time a prophet composes the Book of Revelation (circa 95 AD), the sea already is considered unfriendly enough to be absent from the vision of a new heaven and earth. In the new Jerusalem—where there is no more death, sorrow, crying or pain (21:4)—the very first thing the prophet notices is that there is “no more sea” (21:1).

Symbolism aside, Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort constructed a table of variance in the moods of the sea—the two extremes being calm and hurricane—as early as 1805. Remembered as the Beaufort Scale, it refers to a Force Nine event, for example, as one at sea where there are high waves, “dense streaks of foam” and sea-spray which significantly reduces visibility. Such an event is the product of a wind that on land is strong enough to disassemble slates from rooftops. Force One, on the other hand, describes the sea as a mirror, and in this circumstance on land, smoke would rise vertically from chimneys. Force Twelve, the other extreme, speaks of waves over fourteen metres high and winds that are rarely experienced on land.

Being seemingly stranded in mirror-like conditions—

As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean—

as Samuel Coleridge described it, or, in “a desert of water” as Charles Darwin experienced on HMS Beagle at one point in 1831, may lack drama by comparison with towering waves of fifty feet and more, but it still can present its own dangers for the crew of a craft dependent on the force of the wind. Even in the absence of danger, such a crew can come to resent the aptly named “dead calm”. In storm Darwin noted:

the albatross and little petrel fly as if [in] …
their proper sphere, the water rises and sinks as if fulfilling its usual task, the ship alone and its inhabitants seem the object of wrath …

Before writing The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Coleridge had not been to sea. Rather than acute observation or reflection on his own experiences, he employed what he referred to as the “esamplastic power” of the imagination—the adjective one of his own making and describing the drawing of material from a variety of sources to make a unified whole. Those acquainted with the poem will know that it involves a ship that has crossed the equator and is driven by storms towards the southern pole before eventually being able to set a course for more temperate climes. The strange occurrences that befall the ship and its crew are related in the poem by the same seafarer who, arguably at the most memorable point in the tale, kills a great sea-bird—an albatross—as it emerges through fog. Originally from the Arabic al-qādās, the word albatross made its voyage into English by way of the Portuguese alcataz (gannet) and was later modified by the Latin albus (white), so as to distinguish it from the frigate bird which happens to be black. Be that as it may, the arrival of the bird in the poem had seemed to herald much-needed southerly winds, enabling the ship’s crew to extricate themselves from still and freezing conditions. However, the gratuitous slaying of the bird then serves as a portent for what occurs as the poem progresses and despite the fact that sailors regularly killed albatrosses and found them good eating (see the 1772 James Cook journals, for instance), the killing of such a bird soon became a popular expression connected to the bringing of bad news or the bearing of a burden.

Joseph Conrad would have scoffed at the implication that any man’s actions, beliefs or theories could have a bearing on what he himself took for the ocean’s supreme ambivalence towards all who enter or sail upon it. For Conrad, the sea was “the formidable Work of the Seven Days, into which mankind seems to have blundered unbidden”. Yet he also described life at sea as the only world that counted.
of courage and fidelity—and of love”. In his novel *The Shadow Line: A Confession*, Conrad tells of a newly appointed ship’s captain, young and beset with both a youthful ambition and its concomitant naivety. He is yet to reach that demarcation point beyond which the romance of ideals must be put to the test and where many of these ideals must be left behind. The sea, as ever, proves an able educator.

The British philosopher Michael Oakeshott, in *On Being Conservative* (1956), makes reference to Conrad’s notion:

> For most [of us] there is what Conrad called the “shadow line”, which when we pass it, discloses a solid world of things, each with its fixed shape, each with its own point of balance, each with its price, a world of fact, not poetic image, where what we have spent on one thing we cannot spend on another; a world inhabited by others besides ourselves who cannot be reduced to mere reflections of our own emotions.

Oakeshott describes a reality which can seem harsh perhaps, yet is nowhere brought home so succinctly than when at sea. It is the reality of Santiago, the old Cuban fisherman who ventures into the Gulf Stream in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). He cannot recall the precise moment, out on the water, that he first began to talk to himself aloud, yet he is alone, but for his catch and some interested sharks. He knows he needs the company.

In the Charles Dickens novel *Dombey and Son*, Floy Dombey is asked by her younger and terminally ill brother Paul: “The sea, Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?” Floy offers something inefficacious about it being merely the noise of the Brighton waves, yet Paul feels he knows better, he suspects these waves are always saying something.

The English painter J.M.W. Turner would have told Paul that the sea served as an example of what he called a “greater truth”, one that typically freed the imagination to separate itself from that which only addressed the eye. David Ansted in *The Representation of Water* (1863), advised that the sea imprinted on us most powerfully in the realisation that “the whole surface of the earth … almost every rock has been washed and worn by the waves, has been eaten into by marine currents”.

James Joyce provides the most effusive literary response to Paul Dombey’s question in *Ulysses*. Having already been told of Leopold Bloom’s admiration for water—“its universality: its demo-

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The toil of the Nantucketer requires his own songs to be work songs:

> So be cheery, my lads, let your hearts never fail, While the bold harpooner is striking the whale!
Throughout the decline of his health, young Paul Dombey continues to ask: “The sea, Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?” And in the nights before his death he dreams of rivers and streams and their desire and determination to meet with it.

At night, the Nantucketer, in Melville’s words, “out of sight of land, furls his sails … lays him to his rest, while under his very pillow rush herds of walruses and whales”.

Universally lauded as an expert of the oceans and its depths, at ease now in his bunk and seeking solace from the rigours of his day, the Nantucketer could not know, however, the origins of the strange noises that might seem to emanate from fathoms down from where he reclines and which in fact—not that he can know this either—are being amplified by the wooden hull of his ship. These eerie repetitions that perplex him—and perhaps his grandfather may have attributed these to a sea maiden or some other imagined creature—will not be identified as or termed whale songs, for more than another hundred years. It is plausible, current science tells us, that these songs would have journeyed, been heard and responded to over an average distance of some thousand miles. By way of example, this is the distance from Nantucket Island to Newfoundland. Even to a Nantucketer—and if we remember Owen Chase’s words—this would have been considered beyond belief.

As for Master Paul’s question, there appears but one answer.

I remain.

Barry Gillard has contributed several pieces of fiction and non-fiction to Quadrant recently. He lives in Geelong, on Corio Bay.

Stellan

he wears a ragged yellow mackintosh
tattered jeans with holes, shoes a size too small
and you can see the stars through his soul

he sends off golden galleons afloat in the night air
lights the tapered candle atop the magician’s cloud cloth

he is sunkissed, godgiven
yet he will not be seen by lightsome noon
he is your dream, an illusion of the night

his fire-eyes spark to life
he paints water-lilies on a wine-dark sea

he is raven-coloured, anointed in ambrosia
he stays to the shadow of street lamps
he guards the gates of horn and ivory

he drives the brightest chariot across the silver sky
he shoots burning arrows to light the world

and when day arrives he rests his weary head
against a bed of red poppy flowers
he is Stellan

Dana Rice
Around the globe a poisonous vapour has been released into the atmosphere that infects the minds of people and drives them mad. Robert Graves described the infection in his novel *Count Belisarius*:

If the Greens set up a statue of a victorious charioteer and inscribed it: “To the glory of such-and-such, winner of the Foundation Stakes, and the greater glory of Christ single-natured”, the Blues would gather together at night and deface the inscription, then behead the statue and paint it blue; however, the Greens would perhaps retaliate by attempting to set fire to some wine-shop or other which the Blues used as their headquarters. It was not safe to be out in the streets after dark … the war was even waged against the dead.

Neither the dead nor their statues were exempt from desecration during the Victory Riots that swept Byzantium in the wake of Belisarius's victory over Persians in 528.

The iconoclasm phenomenon reveals something of utmost importance about sculpture—that it is a porous membrane separating dream from reality. Whether it is mute stone or bronze, sculpture possesses the power to provoke such rage and violence it might well be a living being. The Old Testament was definite concerning the worship of images, though Eastern Orthodox Christianity accepted the use of religious images. The earliest worship of Venus figurines extends back 35,000 to 40,000 years. Ancient Greece preferred human forms to anima cult figures. For Aristotle an image was an appropriate intermediary that “bridges between the inner world of the mind and the outer world of material reality”.

Sculpture is metamorphosis aided by palpability and weight that is apprehensible and powerful. Greek statues of Venus represent love in its most lovely aspect as a sexually desirable object and metaphor whose success was measured by how lifelike it was. The quarrymen at Carrara called the quality *pietra viva*, living stone. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder speculated: “A statue must live: its flesh must come to life, its face and expression must speak. We must believe that we touch it and feel it warm under our hands. We must see it stand and feel it speaks to us.”

People these days are so inundated with artificial digital images, they no longer respond with such immediacy to sensual stimuli. Reality has become confused by so much false information in a fog of unreality. To people in preliterate oral cultures, a statue of Cecil Rhodes readily metamorphoses to the Rhodes and coloniser of empire, who strode across the landscape of Africa as a demon god destroyer of their world. The story of Pygmalion's creative dream describes how the sculptor fell in love with the statue he created and the gods, taking pity on him, infused the marble with life.

Pliny the Roman encyclopaedist recounts how the Venus carved at Cnidus by the great Greek sculptor Praxiteles seemed so lifelike “that a man once fell in love with it and hiding by night embraced it, and that a stain betrays his lustful act”. The cupid that he carved at Parum likewise suffered when “Alcetus, a man from Rhodes, fell in love with it and left upon it a similar mark of his passion.”

Iconoclasts demonstrate how hatred and passion directed on cold stone and bronze can transform it to flesh and bone and give it a pulse. It is less a tribute to the sculptor’s art, than a testament to how extreme emotion can delude.

Statues of famous historical figures are much more than artistic representations and memorials, they are symbols, symbols that recall heroic events, values and abstract ideas, embodied as a god heroes. Stone, the most durable of memorial materials, meant eternity, a fact that poses a special challenge to iconoclasts.

The widespread desecration and defacement of ancient Greek and Roman sculptures is evidence of the fervid opposition to the idolatry of the Greeks.
and Romans by early Christianity and later Islam. The Catholic Church defended the use of icons of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Apostles. In “On the Divine Image”, St John of Damascus defended their use in response to the Byzantine iconoclasm of religious war with the invading Umayyads. Phillip Adams mentions the hammering off of the private parts of 2000-year-old statues as evidence of the Church’s prurience while regretting the same zeal was not applied to priestly misconduct. The prohibition of idolatry relates to the belief that the idols are considered gods, hence it is erroneous to assume that all idolatry is of this type, when in some instances, idols may only have been representations of gods. Just how this can be decided with certainty and defended is a mystery.

In April 2015 the South African novelist Christopher Hope was greeted outside the main campus of Cape Town’s university by surging crowds of jeering black student protesters smearing human excrement over a bronze statue of Cecil Rhodes. The students then commandeered a tow truck to unseat and overthrow the statue from its plinth, “not as genial lord of all he surveyed but as diabolical looter-in-chief”.

Hope’s trip in search of the new South Africa took him from town to town on a journey of desolation and indiscriminate destruction of statuary that encompassed not only Rhodes, though he appeared to be a favourite target, but also Jan van Riebeeck, Hendrik Verwoerd, Prime Minister J.C. Strydom at Krugersdorp; even Robert Broom and “Mrs Ples” at the Cradle of Humankind and Gandhi at Johannesburg came in for the treatment. Paul Kruger at Pretoria had to be hidden behind barbed wire and someone manage to place a minuscule rabbit in Mandela’s ear. Rabbit or hare is haas and also means “hurry”. The war on statues was without end.

In his account of these travels, The Café de Move-on Blues, Hope concluded:

Smashing statues is about argument with history, argument that has gone viral and is no longer contained and confined to academic debate between professors of history where the weapons are papers delivered at symposia and quiet confrontations in hallowed halls, but open warfare by a class who see themselves as victims on the losing side. History is incomplete and, invariably, the point of view taken will depend on who writes it. One of the truisms about this is that history is always written by the victor—hence is incomplete and biased and to be questioned in its veracity.

We all of us have wished at some time to return back in time and rewrite our past, whether a thoughtless remark, some error or mistake, a tragic accident; but the hand writes and moves on in the grand march of History, we cannot erase a single sentence, not one jot to exculpate ourselves. No technology can allow us to cut-and-paste the embarrassing bits.

The Czech writer Milan Kundera declared that the crimes of the Russian empire, the deportation of a million Lithuanians, the murder of hundreds of thousands of Poles, the liquidation of the Crimean Tartars all remain in memory despite there being no photographic documentation and being declared fabrications. Kundera interpreted the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia as a carnival of hate filled with “a curious (and no longer explicable) euphoria. Photographs, like statues, are witnesses to events and personalities, those that made history.”

Statues are witnesses to the past. We can hate them, wish them gone, but their removal makes no difference, it is a senseless violation and protest that attests to our rancour at how badly history has treated us. Like knocking out teeth, it leaves gaps that remind us forcefully of what has been removed and is now missing. The gaps themselves are irritating reminders of what is false.

Christopher Hope’s journey in search of the new South Africa took him to town after town where statues of Rhodes and Kruger had been mutilated and destroyed in an unprecedented spontaneous wave of enraged iconoclastic violence directed against past symbols of oppression. It was not so much the idea of revenge against hated symbols, the letting-go of pent-up fury over decades of discrimination which poured out across the nation, as the unthinking nature of the violence, that comes through—it was the indiscriminate fury that struck him. It achieved so little and did nothing to improve the lot of the people it engaged. Perhaps it is left to the outsider to see such anger vented on the symbols of injustice, to question its less than constructive outcome. The statues were mere objects, Rhodes and Kruger were long dead, they were beyond harm, a part of the history of South Africa, no matter how many of their statues were torn down, broken, upturned and violated. It was up to historians in their quiet studies to judge them and their actions in retrospect, to approve or disapprove, not a mindless mass of humanity filled with hate such as Hope witnessed outside the Cape Town university campus.

Iconoclasm is a periodic phenomenon extending as far back as ancient Egypt, with erasures and defacement of Pharaonic hieroglyphs and statues, that breaks out from time to time from religious,
political, ideological or theological disputes, the overthrow of some hated ruling regime when the power vacuum left is filled by social unrest and violence. As Shakespeare eloquently expressed it, “Let loose the dogs of war”.

What is it about sculpture that makes it such a popular target? There are other less violent, less destructive ways to protest. The simplest answer is that sculpture is more public, more vulnerable, and more readily attacked.

Iconoclasm is a contagion that demonstrates more than any other the public character of sculpture as a readily comprehended symbol. Icons seem to be just as irrepressible as sculpture. As much as it seeks to suppress it, idolatry finds expression in Hollywood cinema idols and celebrity culture. The hero with a thousand faces, Joseph Campbell called the composite character in mythology. One series of idols is replaced by another. It is in human nature to represent abstract thought in physical objects as bridges linking ideas, beliefs, sentiments and emotions.

Statues are objects that link us to abstract ideas and heroes. Buildings and sculpture are public art whose common denominator is they are plastic three-dimensional objects. Like two inseparable sisters, it is sculpture that is the purer, higher, more vulnerable, and architecture that is more practical and useful of the two. In his film The Battleship Potemkin, Sergei Eisenstein has a lion sculpture at the foot of the Odessa steps rise up in protest at the senseless shooting of the mother by the Tsarist troops as she chases her runaway pram. An architect by training, Eisenstein understood the visual power of sculpture. He could have dwelt on mutineers overthrowing statues, but instead he created one of the most memorable scenes in cinema by making a stone lion rise up against the violence, as we in the audience grieve at the slaying of innocence. Eisenstein presents us with a positive and artistic image whose creative power grips us so we too rise up in protest against the brutality of the Tsar's forces.

In a cathedral in St Petersburg in the 1970s, I saw old women, who had lived through the Revolution and kept their faith, kissing and embracing icons on the thick pillars as though they were not icons but living flesh. Art transports us by taking what previously was in the mind as thoughts, memories and feelings and externalising and giving them aesthetic form, thereby intensifying them.

The anti-clericalism of the French Revolution led to attacks on sacred statuary in Bruges well away from Paris: The heads of the statues taken from the town hall were brought to the marketplace and smashed to pieces by people who were very angry and embittered. They also burnt all traces of the hateful devices that had previously served the Old Law, such as gibbets, gallows and whips. Throughout these events the whole market square echoed to the constant cries of the assembled people, “Long live the nation! Long live freedom!”

Freedom is often more abused than honoured; freedom for one group can mean the enslavement of another, which was as true in ancient Greece as it is today in America. Smashing the statues of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee, or the Bristol slaver Edward Colston may be momentarily gratifying, but it does not alter the past one bit and, in addition, carries the echoing sound of freedom betrayed, just as it did at Bruges all those years ago. Whose freedom is it that is defended—yours or theirs?

There are invariably several sides to every argument. I received this message from a distinguished English academic in Bristol:

The Colston statue was not a particularly distinguished one as it had a rather awkward pose, but it did serve to remind us all that human motives are always mixed: he may have traded 80,000 slaves, but he also spent £100,000, a huge sum in those days, on charities and endowments, some of which are still functioning. I do not believe in historical revisionism, or attempts to airbrush the past to suit minority sensitivities (the black population is 2.8% in Bristol and 3.6% for the UK), let alone victim culture—a totally non-productive stance. So yesterday I baked a Colston bun in silent protest (they used to be given away to poor children); my brother and his wife came to tea in the garden, and very good it was.

Awkward in life as he was as sculpture—but what did overturning Colston’s effigy and hurling it into the Bristol harbour achieve? It let out anger on the day, but what about the next day and the next? Must people destroy good, as well as bad, art in order to feel good? And where does it all stop? The statue of Colonel William Light, who laid out Adelaide from Montefiore Hill, was daubed with the words “No pride in genocide” and “Death to Australia”.

Philip Drew is a Sydney architect.
The other day in the marketplace, who should I come across but Teutamus the haranguer.

Doing what, you ask? Haranguing, as usual. Standing with his back to the lighthouse, on that plank-and-tile platform he sets up on the Sidon side of the harbour steps, apostrophising all and sundry. With more success than most days, judging by the scores of people listening. Not that he gives you much choice. Even where I was, near the date-sellers’ stalls on the Gaza side, I could hear every consonant. What he was bellowing went something like this: “Metacontextualisation they call it! Metacontextualisation! As usual, friends, the longer the word, the uglier the reality. And what do they mean when they say they’re going to metacontextualise purple-cloth production? The death of Tyre, that’s what. One thousand two hundred and thirty-two jobs! One thousand two hundred and thirty-two! Can this city afford to lose so many? Can this marketplace?”

Below Teutamus stood ten or twelve supporters, mostly dye-workers. Most also, like him, fighting a losing battle with thinning or greying hair, or a widening girth, or all three. “Excuse me, what’s he talking about?” I whispered as I turned to the person on my right, a stylish young man with blue-tinted hair. No sooner had I spoken than I recognised him as the lighthouse-keeper’s son, and saw that he had his arm around a well-shaped girl on his right.

“Pylades!”
“Tyrius!”

Laughing at the unexpected meeting, we embraced one another.

“Didn’t know you were back, my friend. And wouldn’t have recognised you with the hair.” Which was not only sky-blue but skilfully cut. How buoyant he looked, how confident compared to the gawky boy I remembered.

“A souvenir of Alexandria,” he grinned. “Like it?” He parted the strands at the roots so I could better admire the colour.

“Do these things while you’re young, I say. What did your father say when he saw it?”

“You know Pa. Not much hair left, but he says what he has is Tyrian, and he’s threatening to dye it purple. But I don’t think you’ve met Thaïda.”

As soon as he said her name, and Thaïda turned in my direction her brown eyes and beautiful smile, when we began to exchange greetings, we realised we knew one another in a different setting. Her father was mapmaker to the Merchants’ Council, she reminded me. I’d seen her a few times waiting for him under the peristyle of the
Council building.

Introductions over, Pylades returned to my question. “What an idiot, that Teutamus! As always when he gets going, it’s hard to sort out the wheat from the chaff. I gather they’re going to close down the Dye-Works.”

This was news to me. “Impossible. Whatever for?”

“The MDG wants to move production to Sicily.” In Tyre, when you say the MDG, or the Guild, everyone knows you mean the All-Phoenicia Master Dyers’ Guild.

“More central position?”

“Not just that. Tyre’s costs are too high, they say, and purple-cloth sales at the eastern end of the empire are declining as a proportion of sales overall. The Master Dyers claim that the only way they can keep up with the whole-world market is by shifting the Dye-Works. Metacontextualisation, that’s their word for it. Metacontextualising production so that it will be in the centre of the marketplace. Labour costs in Sicily are a quarter lower than ours …”

“… and it’s closer to Hispania, Gallia, Britannia,” the fastest-growing markets for purple-cloth. The arguments were hardly unfamiliar. “For once Teutamus has a point. If the Dye-Works goes, Tyre may as well curl up and die.”

“As if the place wasn’t dead enough,” sighed Thaïda, fingering the pendant hanging at her throat. Her hand prevented my seeing it, other than that it was made of silver.

“A present from Pylades?”

She nodded and held it out for me to see. It showed the Lighthouse in Alexandria. I recognised it as the sort of keepsake you can buy from the silversmiths on the Esplanade.

“So, your two years are up?” I said to Pylades, recalling how proud his father was when the son left for Alexandria to study mapmaking in the Library. By arrangement with the lighthouse-keeper there, and with a recommendation from Thaïda’s father, the Tyrian had been living in the lighthouse-man’s household, doing watch every third night for his keep.

“Been back four days. Long enough to miss Alexandria. As far as I’m concerned, the only good thing here is …” He indicated Thaïda.

Then, as Teutamus’s voice boomed louder, he covered his ears with his hands, saying, “Does he think we’re deaf? Time he went to Alexandria to hear some real speakers, like the ones on the Esplanade. A day there, and he’d triple what he’s learnt in a lifetime here.”

At that moment Teutamus seemed to be finishing off, so we turned our attention back to what he was saying.

“A common front, my friends. That’s the thing you have to take away from what I’ve told you this morning, that Tyre needs a common front. Merchants’ Council, Guild, dye-workers, citizens, everyone. That’s why we’re here today”—he pointed to his fellow-workers—“to urge you to join us tomorrow, in the theatre at the third hour. Tell your neighbours to come, so we can get everyone’s support. And ideas, Tyre needs ideas that will make a difference. But first we have to set up the action team I mentioned, to save the Dye-Works. Tomorrow at the third hour in the theatre. Until then, friends, thank you for your attention.”

The applause which greeted his speech showed not only that his hearers were relieved to hear him conclude, as usual, but that on this occasion they saw the urgency of the situation.

“A dilemma for your father,” I observed to Pylades as Teutamus and his supporters dismantled the plank-and-tile platform, and left the marketplace.

“As you say,” he agreed. “I can’t wait to hear what he thinks.”
We had in mind an incident three years ago. Out of nowhere one morning, haranguing in the marketplace, Teutamus had turned on Tryphon, Pylades’s father, calling him a “fat-cat”.

The haranguer had been flailing the Merchants’ Council for funding repairs to the lighthouse plinth while refusing to give an obol to the Dye-Works for new latrines. The lighthouse-man did not take well to being belittled in public, nor to the dye-worker’s refusal in speech after speech to apologise, with the result that he and Teutamus had not spoken since that day.

“My guess is he’ll be at the meeting for Tyre’s sake but won’t serve on any action team Teutamus sets up,” I said.

“Well, he’ll know who to blame for that,” agreed Pylades. “Heaven knows the city could do with more men like Pa. He’s one of the few who moves with the times.”

“Which is more than you can say for Teutamus, even if he’s right this time,” added Thaïda. She seemed to dislike him even more than did Pylades, doubtless because through her mapmaking father she heard the Merchants’ Council’s viewpoint. “Everyone knows it’s time someone stood up to him. Told him to his face that Tyre needs to move on from the Dye-Works. You know, develop some new source of income. Preferably one that doesn’t stink.”

As Thaïda held her nose, Pylades and I exchanged glances. It was an east wind day, and yes, Tyre stank. Because we love our city, we Tyrians do not talk about the stench from the Dye-Works. We live with it because we have to, knowing that without the vats of rotting shellfish on the city’s outskirts, Tyre would have no dye, no income, no renown. Located to the east, most days downwind, the Dye-Works generally do not bother us. But twice or three times a month, sometimes for days at a time, the ponds and vats remind us that they are there.

Pylades endorsed his fiancée’s words. “I agree. Pa could propose a new lighthouse, put it to the Council that we build one bigger and better than Alexandria’s, to bring in the tourists.”

“That’s the way to make money these days,” I agreed. “Hand over fist, like the souvenir-sellers on the Esplanade.”

“Not to mention the barbers,” added Pylades. On that note, we parted, he and Thaïda having already bought figs and bread for the picnic they were planning, upwind from the Dye-Works, I having a bone to pick with the ink-maker about his so-called superior non-fading red. Next morning, I was up before dawn, to finish off a story before the meeting in the theatre. When the water-clock gonged the third hour, as I was pondering whether or not to delete a wordy and meandering subordinate clause superfluous to the narrative, Diomedes, the cook, came to tell me the lighthouse-keeper was waiting in the courtyard to see me. Although we are old friends, nowadays we seldom meet, as most days he sleeps in the daytime.

“Tryphon,” I greeted him. “I thought you’d be at the theatre by now.”

“When I didn’t see you there, I knew you’d still be writing. Pylades sent me, he needs information for a proposal he wants to put. We thought you’d be able to help.”

“Information on what?”

“The Seven Wonders of the World. Don’t laugh, I’ll explain later. We were going through the list last night and could think of only five.”

“The Great Pyramid, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Colossus of Rhodes,” I began.

“The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Lighthouse of Alexandria. That’s as far as we got.”

“The Statue of Zeus at Olympus.”
“That makes six.”

Neither of us could recall the seventh—the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, we found later—so I racked my brain trying to think which of my books would have the list.

“Who put the seven names together in the first place?”

“That’s what I was trying to remember. I know I have the list somewhere …”

I found it, but only after a long search through my notes, and when that gave nothing, with some lateral thinking. I had indexed it not under the man who drew up the list, Callimachus of Cyrene, nor under Wonders or Seven, but under Rome, on the same sheet of papyrus as the Seven Hills. I made a copy of the names and gave it to Tryphon, saying, “Time to be off.”

As we made for the theatre, I asked the obvious question, “Why does Pylades need the list?”

“I think he’s keen to take on Teutamus. We had a long talk last night.”

“Up there, remaking the world as usual?” I pointed to the lighthouse.

“Can you think of a better place? We talked about today’s meeting, and me proposing a new lighthouse. Then he went on about Tyre’s handicap being its image problem.”

“Image problem?” I had to laugh. “No doubt he picked that up in Alexandria.”

“Good, isn’t it? Anyway, he wants to propose that Tyre should start marketing itself. Instead of selling everything else, or as well, sell itself. But I don’t want to steal his thunder.”

“I don’t suppose you’re planning to speak?”

“And give Teutamus the satisfaction of seeing a fat-cat fall into line?”

“There’s something to be said for being late, then. Teutamus will have his action team by the time we get there.”

As turned out to be the case. It must have been nearly the fourth hour when we reached the meeting. The theatre was two-thirds full, the first time in years that Tyrians had turned out for a political meeting in such numbers. Teutamus’s moment of glory had come.

By a raising of hands, the gathering had already shown its backing for ten men willing to form the Save the Dye-Works Action Team. Other than Teutamus and two fellow workers, there were three craftsmen from the marketplace—including the ink-maker, as if he knows anything about anything—three shipmen and an observer from the Merchants’ Council. Which was as far as the Council was prepared to engage itself, preferring to take the most discreet part possible in negotiations with the Master Dyers.

The moment we walked in, Pylades’s blue hair leaping out at us, we spotted him and Thaïda near the back. We sat near them in places they had kept for us. Tryphon handed his son my list, which he took and memorised, thanking us with a raised hand.

The action-team members were sitting on the first bench of the theatre. Except for Teutamus who, as if no vote were needed to choose their chairman, had taken on the post. With the biggest audience he had ever assembled, he was haranguing as if for the first time in his life.

“Pathetic!” he was roaring. “So many people, so few ideas? What use is your action team if you don’t give it ideas to work with?”

From the accounts I heard afterwards, the suggestions which the meeting had put forward before we arrived were uninspiring, all having been tried without success. Whether it was the heat, or the citizens’ sense that they had done their duty by setting up the action team, or their fear of being ridiculed by Teutamus, the meeting was groping for a straw to save Tyre from drowning. It was at this point that Pylades, a third the age of the action-teamers, rose to speak.
“Yes, young man?” Teutamus was unable to suppress a smile. “What news from the lighthouse?”

“Some light on what we’re doing, I hope,” replied Pylades.

While the crowd seemed to like his response, they would take a lot of convincing from one so young. Pylades no doubt had this in mind as he made his way down to where Teutamus was standing, in the middle of the dancing circle.

But youth was not his only crime. Partly because he was Tryphon’s son and partly because of his Alexandrian appearance, a few of the older dye-workers greeted him with remarks like:

“You tell them, bluey!”
“Can’t your Pa speak?”
“Who’s your hairdresser, pretty-boy?”

And just as Pylades was about to begin, “Guess who’s been to Alexandria?”

The last remark brought forth a roar of laughter. When it subsided, as if he hadn’t understood, Pylades cupped his hand to his ear. “Guess who …?”

“Guess who’s been to Alexandria!” repeated the heckler, proud of his success.

“I have,” replied Pylades, “and …”

He turned to face the dye-worker—almost bald, as it happened—who had asked who his barber was—and said, “My hairdresser is Charistratus the Lydian.” Again the crowd roared, and even more so when, after the laughter ceased, Pylades continued, “You’ll find him on the Esplanade, near the southern end of the Heptastadium. Tell him who sent you, Pylades the Tyrian, and ask for the same thing, and he’s sure to give you a discount.”

From this moment, the young man had his fellow Tyrians in the palm of his hand. When they had finished laughing, he said, “Now, if I may speak seriously, what I want to say is this. And yes, I am drawing on my experience in Alexandria.”

Reaching into his belt he took out three coins, which he held up one by one to the crowd.

“I have here three obols. Not Tyrian obols, but newly struck in …?” He moved close to Teutamus and showed them to him.

“Alexandria,” announced the haranguer, not quite sure what Pylades was up to.

“Teutamus, can you keep a secret?” continued the lighthouse-man’s son, in a stage whisper.

“I’ll do my best,” he replied, clearly ill at ease.

“I wanted to bring Tyrian obols,” Pylades informed him, “but Pa wouldn’t swap. Even though he has bags and bags of them, which he counts every night, sitting up there in the lighthouse. Wouldn’t you like to be a fat-cat, too?”

This time the laughter was at Teutamus’s expense, and his discomfort was evident. Once again, only when the theatre was silent did Pylades continue his demonstration.

“Three Alexandrian obols, three questions, one coin for each.” He held up an obol. “First question. Which of these place-names is the odd man out, and why? Alexandria, Memphis, Tyre, Rhodes, Ephesus, Olympus, Halicarnassus, Babylon.”

He repeated the list, but did not need to. Almost every hand in the theatre was up.

“Yes, sir,” asked Pylades, choosing a citizen at random.

“You’ve named the Seven Wonders of the World. Tyre’s not one of them.”

“Well spoken, sir,” responded Pylades, throwing him the coin. He held up another.

“Second obol, second question. Why is Tyre not one of the Wonders of the World? Nor Rome, nor Athens, nor Antioch, nor most cities?”

Again, most of the citizens raised their hands. Pylades chose a woman at random.

“Yes, madam?”
“Tyre has no well-known monument, no great temple or statue …”
“Excellent, madam.” He threw her the obol and held up the last.
“Third obol, third question. A little harder than the others.”
He paused, making sure the silence in the theatre was total, then lowered his voice.
“Without spending an obol, I stress that phrase, without spending a good Tyrian obol, how can Tyre make itself the Eighth Wonder of the World?”
This time there were no raised hands. The people sat, waiting for the lighthouse-keeper’s son to enlighten them.
“Citizens of Tyre!” he admonished them, lowering his voice even further. “If you don’t mind this coming from a boy, shouldn’t you be ashamed of yourselves? Are you Phoenician or not? Aren’t we supposed to be the greatest trading people in the world? And are you telling me that you can’t even market your own city? Who says there are Seven Wonders of the World? Why not fourteen, or eight? What’s to stop us marketing ourselves as the Eighth Wonder?”
He let the idea sink in for a few moments, until, from the ink-maker on the front bench, there came the question in everyone’s mind.
“What with?”
“What with, sir? The Dye-Works, of course.”
The thought of our factory taking its place alongside the Temple of Artemis or the Pyramids made the Tyrians laugh at the incongruity. Unperturbed, Pylades went on.
“Yes, my friends, the Dye-Works. What industry in the world is as famous as our purple-dye manufacture? As spectacular to observe? Can’t you see that what we have to do is …”
As he went on to expound it, his idea was glaringly obvious. What better resource did Tyre have, he asked, than to bring paying visitors to the city to visit the Dye-Works. “Senso-tourism,” he called it. Great monuments the existing Wonders of the World might be, he said, but they were mere objects, satisfying one sense only, that of sight. You could look at them, and yes, touch them, maybe lick the stonework if you wanted, or in the case of Alexandria’s Lighthouse, strain from far below to hear the burning wood crackle, but that was all.
Not so our Dye-Works. Here you get all five senses full on, he reminded us. Not only smell but sight, sound, touch, and for those brave enough to try, taste. One could imagine a tourist circuit organised in such a way that people would pay separately to experience each sense, listening in one room to the noises coming from a tub of decaying shellfish, in another putting their hands into a vat and feeling the cloth, concluding with a tasting-room where the more daring members of a tour group might be persuaded to taste the dye-liquid. Cleverly promoted by Tyre’s merchants when abroad, such tourism would give the city a second source of income, and stave off the Dye-Works’ need for metaculturalisation. What was to stop the Merchants’ Council from launching a publicity campaign in Alexandria, Athens and elsewhere, through the traders on every ship leaving our port, to promote the Dye-Works as the Eighth Wonder of the World? One which, unlike the others, was not made of stone or metal, but centred on industry, on men at work …
The cheers and applause which greeted Pylades’s exposition of his scheme showed that he had convinced the assembly, and for days afterwards it was the talk of the marketplace. By the consensus of all, the lighthouse-keeper’s son had accomplished three things.
First, with his reference to fat-cats, he had avenged his father.
Second, not least with his sky-blue hair, he had confirmed that age and experience, even the collective wisdom of a city, are no match for youth’s eternal question,
“Why not?”

Third, he had served notice on Teutamus that his days as Tyre’s best-known haranguer were numbered. Better than that, that in Pylades our city now had the makings not merely of a haranguer but of an orator.

As for the idea he put forward, making the Dye-Works the Eighth Wonder of the World through senso-tourism, it has put the Guild’s plans to metacontextualise production on hold, and is making headway in the Merchants’ Council. If one is to believe the talk in the marketplace, that is. From what I heard yesterday, over a cup of Cypriot wine with Tryphon, the merchants like the idea so much that they have set up an action team of their own to appraise it, the action team has commissioned a working party to conduct a feasibility study, and it is anticipated that the working party will submit its report around this time next year.

Frank Murphy, who lives in Melbourne, is a linguist and teacher, and was formerly Head of Languages at Xavier College, Kew. This is the fifth of the stories in his Tyrian series to appear in Quadrant.

Thinking about Robert Harris the Poet

Cold Spring crept over the hedge-line again, and squints at the increasing zone of light where the early sun reaches further down the still-bare cherry-blossom; as if stretching an arm.

This collection of wooden energy waits with eager longing for greens and pinks to burst, urging eucatastrophe to be the norm.

It causes oohs and aahs including from some who stop beyond the gates in cars, and stare before driving away.

Many tiny birds flock through this still, bare world. The smallest impersonate tiny, brown leaves to escape the food cycle of currawongs and crows. Some occupy the safe realm of inner sticks.

The moon is always in the daylight sky these weeks, solitary as it becomes close-up, a giant pearl: a stun-eye thing above the Institute in Camperdown, a giant in its low-sky illusion.

Harris was said to be a gang of one and know some difficult stuff that came from the other side of lightning.

Ivan Head
Duty called and I responded. This column was smuggled out of my cell in deepest, darkest Danistan, where I've been working with members of my birth city's heroic Melbourne Resistance. Well, the full name of our group is actually the Melbourne Andrews Resistance, because Agent 19—she lives in Northcote—objected to the abbreviation “MR”. Too suggestive and supportive of the patriarchy, apparently. She was really very insistent on the change.

Matters weren’t helped when Agent 3—a Quadrant staffer, as it happens—idly observed that the abbreviation for French Resistance was “FR”. “That’s a contraction for a Catholic ‘father’ or priest,” Agent 3 mused, unwittingly provoking another feminist meltdown from our comrade. At one point Agent 19 screamed for seven minutes straight and then appeared to pass out, so I tried to remove her mask and check her breathing.

Agent 19 instantly swatted me away and stalked out of our meeting. She’s an odd one, but utterly dedicated to freedom, just so long as we get the words right.

I can’t precisely reveal how I was smuggled into Dan Andrews’s Melbourne. Let’s just say that one of the new coffins recently delivered to a Melbourne funeral home wasn’t completely empty. I waited in my hiding box until funeral home staff fell asleep from exhaustion while counting their week’s takings—it’s a triple-shift job in Melbourne these days—and then escaped to join my comrades.

My first mission for the Resistance seemed easy enough. I was required to demonstrate loyalty to the cause by venturing beyond the permitted five-kilometre boundary to buy Agent 1 some butter chicken. Carrying a false ID and moving with great stealth, I quickly obtained the dish and returned to headquarters without incident.

“Very nice,” said Agent 1, our leader, as he nibbled on his meal. “How’d you pay for it?”

“Credit card,” I replied.

“You fool!” Agent 1 roared. “Never leave a record! Always pay with cash! Never leave a trace of your movements!”

I lowered my head in shame and silently vowed to avoid such carelessness in future. Several agonising minutes later, Agent 1 spoke again. “Here,” he said, this time in what I took to be a gentle, conciliatory tone. “Eat this.”

When I looked up, expecting a flavoursome peace offering, Agent 1 was holding the receipt. This was a serious crowd, and I had to learn quickly or else I could imperil the entire operation.

Subsequent missions ran more smoothly. I bravely went fishing, remained outdoors for a full twelve minutes after curfew, and even walked away from a television set before Premier Andrews had finished one of his daily briefings. These may seem like inconsequential incidents to those of you fortunate enough to be living in the free world, but here in Danistan they are considered acts of insurrection.

On one or two occasions our ambition and overconfidence led to errors. An attempt to airlift elderly residents out of their nursing home failed when our fleet of drones was blown off course, eventually depositing the confused seniors outside the offices of the Age. One of them walked in, believing she’d merely been returned to her assisted living facility. I think she’s now the news editor.

And then there was the Monaro incident. Agent 35 wanted to get his 1972 Holden Monaro detailed, but the nearest secret undercover detailing joint was more than 600 metres beyond the permitted five-kilometre range.

Co-ordinating with our network of operatives, we soon devised a plan. Agent 35 would drive the vehicle to his five-kilometre limit and then transfer his Monaro to Agent 47, a resident of the adjoining sector, who would drive it to the detailing destination. All went well until the changeover. Agent 47 was a young man, not even thirty years old, and therefore had no idea how to operate a manual car.

He managed to bunny-hop the coupe for about 200 metres or so, but then happened upon a police checkpoint. When the officers motioned for him to stop, Agent 47 mixed up the brake and clutch pedals and inadvertently sailed right by. They say you could hear the barrage of gunshots even in Lower Templestowe.

Anyway, we thought our big breakthrough...
Josef Stalin was an enthusiastic practitioner of the obscuring arts. Not only did he cancel the lives of up to eight million human beings, but he also continued cancelling some of them in the afterlife. We were putting the final touches to our signs when the raid happened. Armed members of Thought Squadron, the Premier’s feared personal security unit, swarmed our headquarters, handcuffing us and dragging us outside to waiting windowless vans.

That’s when Agent 19 stepped forward, removed her mask for the first time in our presence, and began instructing the arresting officers. “There’s no need for any court appearances,” Victoria’s Deputy Chief Health Officer Annaliese van Diemen told the lawmen. “Just take them straight to Metropolitan Remand.”

“How long should we leave them there?” an officer asked. Van Diemen, our ally turned betrayer, who’d earlier come to public notice for comparing the coronavirus to Captain Cook’s arrival, didn’t seem to care. She dismissed the duration of our extrajudicial confinement as solely “a police matter”.

The van doors were closing as I heard Van Diemen’s final words. “Metropolitan Remand,” she said. “Abbreviation MR. That should make you Resistance boys very happy.”

Cancel culture—the removal of people, products and philosophies judged offensive by individuals whose actions reveal their own offensiveness—is scarcely a modern phenomenon.

Jefrey C. Howe
Aboriginal Sovereignty: The Hidden Agenda
KEITH WINDSCHUTTLE

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Growing Up Muslim in Australia
GABRIELLE LORD & “Asiya”

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THE BREAK-UP OF AUSTRALIA
THE REAL AGENDA BEHIND ABORIGINAL RECOGNITION
KEITH WINDSCHUTTLE

The real agenda behind Aboriginal recognition

THE HIDDEN AGENDA OF ABORIGINAL SOVEREIGNTY

Australian voters are not being told the truth about the proposal for constitutional recognition of indigenous people. The goal of Aboriginal political activists today is to gain ‘sovereignty’ and create a black state, equivalent to the existing states. Its territory, comprising all land defined as native title, will soon amount to more than 60 per cent of the whole Australian continent.

Constitutional recognition, if passed, would be its ‘launching pad’. Recognition will not make our nation complete; it will divide us permanently.

THE ACADEMIC ASSAULT ON THE CONSTITUTION

University-based lawyers are misleading the Australian people by claiming our Constitution was drafted to exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the Australian nation. This is a myth. At Federation in 1901, our Constitution made Australia the most democratic country in the world. The great majority of Aboriginal people have always had the same political rights as other Australians, including the right to vote. Claims that the Constitution denied them full citizenship are political fabrications.

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Bitter Harvest is a comprehensive appraisal of Bruce Pascoe’s book Dark Emu. Pascoe postulates that, rather than being a nomadic hunter-gatherer society, Australian Aborigines were actually sedentary agriculturalists with ‘skills superior to those of the white colonisers who took their land and despoiled it’. Dark Emu has enjoyed extraordinary public and critical acclaim, winning Premier’s literary awards in New South Wales and Victoria. Professor Marcia Langton called it ‘the most important book on Australia’. Its ideas have already been taken up in school texts. But nothing in Dark Emu justifies its success. Bitter Harvest is a forensic but highly readable examination which reveals that Bruce Pascoe omits, distorts or mischaracterises important information to such an extent that, as purported history, Dark Emu is worthless. Even worse, it promotes a divisive, victim-based agenda that pits one Australian against another.

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