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Soon after he was appointed managing director of the ABC in 2006, Mark Scott made a number of specific commitments. He said he would ensure that the ABC presented a greater diversity of views on social and political issues. He declared that the ABC TV Media Watch program would make it possible for those whom it criticised to have their views heard on the program itself. And he indicated that he would act in his position as ABC editor-in-chief in addition to his role as ABC managing director.

Mark Scott is a distinct improvement on his predecessor, Russell Balding. However, he has not fulfilled any of the commitments which he made four years ago. The ABC still does not have one conservative presenter on any of its main television or radio programs – even the editor of its recently created The Drum website, Jonathan Green, is a left-of-centre type with a journalistic background with The Age and Crikey. Jonathan Holmes, another ABC in-house leftie, does not allow for any of his targets to appear on the Media Watch program which he presents. Moreover, Mr Scott rarely acts as the public broadcaster’s editor-in-chief and prefers to pass responsibility for editorial decisions down through the ABC’s extensive bureaucracy.

The Sydney Institute Quarterly has been covering the controversy which followed the decision in August 2007 of the 7.30 Report’s (then) political editor Michael Brissenden – with the support of 7.30 Report presenter Kerry O’Brien – to reveal Mr Brissenden’s interpretation of an off-the-record discussion which he and two others had over dinner with the (then) treasurer Peter Costello in 2006. See Issues 34 and 35. This was unprofessional journalism at its worst. Not only did Michael Brissenden breach journalist ethics by welching on an off-the-record commitment. He also got the date of the dinner hopelessly wrong and provided misleading advice on camera about his (alleged) record of the discussion. Also, he was allowed to present his own story on the 7.30 Report.

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Mark Scott did not even sign off on any of the ABC’s responses to Senator Abetz. Rather the ABC bureaucracy dismissed his concerns by pointing out comments made by others on the ABC in the past. Mark Scott did not involve himself in this matter as the ABC’s editor-in-chief. In this capacity, he has been missing in action virtually since he promised to fulfil this role.
In the lead up to the 2004 election, Margaret Simons wrote a monograph on the then Labor leader Mark Latham. Titled *Latham’s World: The New Politics of the Outsiders* (Quarterly Essay, Issue 15, 2004), the short biography indicated that its author was very much a supporter of Mark Latham and very much an opponent of the then prime minister John Howard. She described herself as belonging to the “middle-class Left” and wrote that “if Latham ascends to power, then it will be a signal of succession to our generation”. She added: “We will be in our prime. It will be our turn to run the place, and I’m sure things will be different.”

Ms Simons’ only disagreement with the then Opposition leader turned on the fact that he had refused her many requests for an interview. Simons seemed to think that she had an entitlement to interview Latham and that he had a duty to respond to her queries.

Some years ago Melbourne University Press came up with the idea that the former Liberal Party prime minister Malcolm Fraser should write his autobiography. There had been two earlier substantial works on Fraser and the Fraser Government. Namely, Philip Ayers’ *Malcolm Fraser: A Biography* (William Heinemann, 1987) and Patrick Weller’s *Malcolm Fraser PM: A Study In Prime Ministerial Power* (Penguin, 1989).

Fraser supported the Ayers’ biography – he gave numerous interviews and provided access to his papers and the book was very sympathetic to him. Fraser also provided access to his Cabinet and personal papers to Weller and put the author up at this home Nareen where he gave several interviews.

In March 2010 MUP released *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs* under its The Miegunyan Press imprint. It is an unusual memoir since it has two authors – Malcolm Fraser (the subject of the book) and Margaret Simons (who is described as the narrator).

In “A Note from the Narrator” at the front of the book, Simons depicts her roles as “being the curator of this account of Fraser’s life and work” and “to intercede between the ‘I’ and the reader”. Throughout the book Fraser is described in the third person. The end of *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs* contains a section titled “Additional Note by Malcolm Fraser” – which reads as follows:

While I join with Margaret Simons in thanking all of those mentioned in the acknowledgements for their time, effort and support, Margaret Simons herself deserves a special mention. I was always reluctant to write, or to be involved in writing a book of this kind because it would have meant many hours and days, even weeks, trawling through archives of the life that I had led. So many contemporary histories are written too much from memory and without sufficient reference to the raw facts of what occurred at the time. Memories can be, as I know of [sic] myself, notoriously fallible.

Apart from being an author whom both Tamie and I believe has brought the pages of this book alive, Margaret has done not only the writing but also the assiduous research that the book required. She has done this with unfailing care to make sure the facts are right. This regard for detail is especially important since the book turns some current myths about my public life on their head. The collaboration with Margaret has been enjoyable and I thank her for the way in which she has devoted herself to bringing the book to finality.

Malcolm Fraser
12 October 2009

Malcolm Fraser’s note reads like a disclaimer. He describes memory, including his own memory, as “notoriously fallible”. And then he implies that it was his co-author’s responsibility “to make sure the facts are right”.

At Page 753 the authors write that “Professor Brian Costar read the entire manuscript”. Dr Costar is a professor at Swinburne University and is a published writer on Australian politics. Certainly Professor Costar should have been able to correct errors in the Fraser/Simons manuscript.

Aware that not so long ago Margaret Simons had demanded that Mark Latham should respond to her queries, I emailed her on 29 June 2010 – and again the next day – with the following query:
I have just finished reading Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs from cover to cover. I bought my own copy – thus making a personal contribution to the book’s sales.

I plan to write about MF:TPM in the forthcoming edition of The Sydney Institute Quarterly. In order to be fair, I want to give you the opportunity to respond to the following questions:

1. Did Malcolm Fraser read the entire text prior to publication? I ask this because the autobiography has a number of significant factual errors which should have been evident to Mr Fraser.

2. At page 754, Malcolm Fraser writes that you had the task of making “sure the facts are right”. Does this mean that Mr Fraser handed over the fact-checking task to you?

3. At Page 753, you and Malcolm Fraser write that Brian Costar “read the entire manuscript”. In view of this, what responsibility does Professor Costar take for errors in the text?

4. In view of the fact that you have said that you knew in January or February that Malcolm Fraser had resigned from the Liberal Party, was any consideration given to placing a corrigendum in the book – when it was published in March – covering the several comments to the effect that Malcolm Fraser had retained his Liberal Party membership?

Here’s hoping for a response so that my assessment of Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs can be as accurate as possible.

Margaret Simons declined to answer both emails. Her silence on this issue lends weight to the view that Malcolm Fraser did not read the book in its entirety before publication and that Mr Fraser expected Ms Simons and Professor Costar to act as fact-checkers.

Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs is no easy read. Perhaps due to the fact that this book is the work of two authors, it is all over the place and is quite repetitive in places. The authors describe their work as “a thematic account of a government”. It’s just that, on occasions, the themes keep re-occurring.

Take, for example, Fraser’s long-standing claim that John Howard’s stance on unauthorised boat arrivals in Australia in the early 2000s was akin to the anti-Catholic sectarianism engaged in by Nationalist Party prime minister Billy Hughes at the time of the conscription debates during the First World War.

The authors mention Hughes’ divisive role in the conscription plebiscite debates at Pages 18-19, 176, 264-265 and 427. Also the fact that Fraser met Peter Carrington (who became a Cabinet minister in Margaret Thatcher’s government) when he was Britain’s High Commissioner in Canberra in the 1950s is mentioned at Pages 196 and 503. There are many such examples.

Since Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs is a significant book about an important figure in Australian history, the following list of errors, undocumented assertions and omissions is made in the interest of an accurate debate on Australian political history. Due to the messy structure of the book, it is most efficiently analysed in page order.

**HISTORICAL HOWLERS IN MALCOLM FRASER’S MEMOIRS**

- Page 57. The authors claim it was Britain in the early 1950s “that inspired George Orwell’s 1984 – a place where government control was total”.

  In fact, 1984 was Orwell’s chilling assessment of the communist totalitarian systems prevalent in the Soviet Union and parts of Eastern Europe when the book was published in 1948.

- Page 93. The authors claim that Catholic political activist B.A. (Bob) Santamaria advised Prime Minister Robert Menzies not to attempt to ban the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) since this “would split the opposition to communism and undermine the campaign to isolate them”.

  In fact, Santamaria initially opposed the proposal to outlaw the CPA but then changed his mind and urged a “yes” vote in the referendum on this issue which was held in September 1951. Santamaria’s change of mind is not mentioned by the authors.

- Page 134. The authors claim that “China under Mao Tse Tung had invaded Tibet, entered North Korea and threatened India and Taiwan”.

  In fact, China never invaded North Korea. Rather, China supplied troops and weapons in support of
North Korea’s invasion of South Korea in 1951. The Menzies Government committed Australian troops to the Korean War in July 1950.

- Page 163. The authors claim that “the contenders” for the Liberal Party leadership in January 1968, following Harold Holt’s death, were Paul Hasluck and John Gorton.

In fact, the leadership was contested by four men. Namely – Leslie Bury, John Gorton, Paul Hasluck and Billy Snedden.

- Page 174. The authors claim that: “Before the Labor Party Split, it had been the left of politics, with its strong Catholic base, that had favoured state and aid for non-government schools”.

In fact, up until the 1960s, both the Labor and Liberal parties opposed state aid for non-government schools. The Liberal Party, at the Federal level, embraced the principle of state aid in the lead up to the 1963 election. Labor did not support state aid until some years later. The Coalition’s support for state aid played an important part in the fact that the Menzies Government won seats from Labor at the 1963 election.

At Page 176, the authors claim that in the early 1970s the actions of opponents of state aid “included illegal occupations of Catholic schools by picnickers who were encouraged to swim in the pools and use the facilities...”. This assertion is not supported by documented evidence. No specific illegal occupation is cited. What’s more, only a very small minority of Catholic schools had swimming pools four decades ago – and few have them now.

- Page 321. The authors claim that the Fraser Government lost control of the Senate in 1980.

In fact, following the 1980 election, the new senators took their seats on 1 July 1981 – it was then that the Fraser Government lost control of the Senate.

- Page 329. The authors claim that, on coming to office in late 1975, Fraser gave positions in the outer ministry to “two talented men who had come into parliament in the 1974 election: John Howard was Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs and Ian Macphee was Minister for Productivity”.

In fact, Macphee was excluded from the first Fraser Government. He was not appointed a minister until 8 November 1976.

- Page 329. The authors claim that Don Chipp “was also left out of the ministry following the 1977 election” and that “he resigned from the Liberal Party shortly afterwards”.

In fact, Chipp resigned from the Liberal Party in March 1977, formed the Australian Democrats in May 1977 and was elected to the Senate in the December 1977 election.

- Page 377. The authors claim that the Fraser Government “retained Medibank as a universal taxpayer-funded means of health insurance”.

In fact, Medibank was gradually watered down by the Fraser Government until it completely disappeared in 1981. See R.B. Scotton and C.R. Macdonald, *The Making of Medibank*, (School of Health Management, University of New South Wales, 1993) and *Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch Dog* (Issue 55).

- Page 524. The author’s claim that “this book is the first time that Fraser has defended his government’s record on financial deregulation”.

In fact, this has been one of Fraser’s constant themes during the past quarter of a century. Philip Ayers’ biography, published in 1987, contains a full defence of Fraser’s record in this area. There are many other instances.

- Page 557. The authors claim that Malcolm Fraser “has always believed that Australia can, and should, support bigger populations”. This claim is made on several occasions in the book.


- Page 593. The authors claim that Phillip Lynch’s decision not to return as treasurer after the 1977 election “led to John Howard’s promotion to that position”.

In fact, Fraser made Howard treasurer before the 1977 election – following his decision to remove Lynch from that position. Howard became treasurer on 19 November 1977, the election was held on 10 December 1977 and Lynch was appointed Minister for Industry and Commerce on 20 December 1977.

- Page 629. The authors claim that by 1990 Bob Hawke “had now won four elections – the same number as Fraser”.

In fact, only three Australian prime ministers have won four or more elections – and Fraser is not one of them. Of all people, Mr Fraser should know this. Robert Menzies who won on eight occasions (including 1940) and Bob Hawke and John Howard who won four elections each. Fraser won three elections – in 1975, 1977 and 1980. Two other prime ministers have equalled Fraser’s record of winning...
elections – in 1975, 1977 and 1980. Two other prime ministers have equalled Fraser’s record of winning three elections – namely, Billy Hughes and Joseph Lyons.

- Page 722. The authors claim that John Howard “was a contender” for the Liberal Party leadership following John Hewson’s decision to call for a vote of support in his leadership in May 1974. This comment is repeated at Page 724. In fact, Howard did not contest this ballot. The contenders were John Hewson and Alexander Downer – and Downer won.

- Page 734. The authors claim that George W. Bush was elected “U.S. President in 2001”. In fact, George W. Bush was elected in November 2000 and became President of the United States in January 2001.

WHAT’S MISSING FROM MALCOLM FRASER’S MEMOIRS

The thesis in Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs is that Malcolm Fraser has been a consistent genuine liberal – a small “l” liberal – throughout his political career. He regards himself as being in the tradition of Robert Menzies, the Liberal Party’s founder.

In his memoirs Fraser fudges history, or declines to elaborate on matters which are inconsistent with his depiction of Menzies and of his own self-image. The authors overlook, or diminish, all evidence which queries their claim that Menzies and Fraser were ever anything than small “l” Liberals.

- Pages 61-62 and elsewhere. According to the authors, Robert Menzies, commenced the dismantling of the White Australia Policy.

In fact, Menzies resisted any significant watering down of the (then) bipartisan White Australia Policy. Menzies stepped down as prime minister on 26 January 1966 and was replaced by Harold Holt. In March 1966 Holt announced the first substantial reforms to the White Australia Policy and effectively dismantled it.

As Glenda Tavan documents in The Long, Slow Death of White Australia (Scribe, 2005), Harold Holt, Immigration Minister Hubert Opperman and senior public servants set in place decisions to substantially reform the policy on the day after Menzies announced his resignation.

- Page 93. According to the authors, Robert Menzies “never had his heart in the legislation” to ban the Communist Party.

In fact, as Menzies’ biographer Allan Martin has documented, Menzies was a fervent supporter of the need to outlaw the Communist Party during the early years of the Cold War. Indeed, when prime minister during the early years of the Second World War, the Menzies Government did ban the Communist Party. This was at the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The authors also fail to mention the fact that in the mid-1960s the Menzies Government strengthened the provisions of the Crimes Act – i.e. the national security legislation – which was not the act of a small “l” liberal.

- Page 225. According to the authors, Malcolm Fraser’s confrontation with John Gorton showed how far Fraser was prepared to go “to defend principle”.

In fact, the book acknowledges that Fraser leaked material to journalist Alan Ramsey designed to discredit Gorton. Also, Fraser’s reasons in the book for taking the action that destroyed Gorton’s prime ministership are remarkably thin. Especially since Gorton, in his time, was very much the type of small “l” Liberal whom Fraser now admires.

- Pages 429-430. According to the authors, “the Lebanese and Vietnamese [who arrived in Australia after 1975] were refugees from particularly bloody conflicts”.

In fact, the Vietnamese were refugees because they exhibited a genuine fear of persecution following the communist victory in the Vietnam War. Fraser’s treatment of Vietnamese refugees was both appropriate and generous.

However, the Lebanese who arrived in Australia after the Lebanon Civil War of 1975-1976 were not refugees in the accepted sense – since they were not in genuine fear of persecution.

Fraser’s decision to extend the requirements to make it possible for the Lebanese to come to Australia under the refugee quota became known as the “Lebanon Concession”. As the authors acknowledge,
Fraser told Gerard Henderson in 2006 that he could not recall details of this decision – which has turned out to be one of the greatest policy failures in Australian political history. The issue is skimmed over by the authors. For details of what actually happened – based on an analysis of the Cabinet Papers for 1976 – see Gerard Henderson’s column in the Sydney Morning Herald, 9 January 2009 and 16 January 2009. See also Gerard Henderson’s SMH column on 31 October 2006 and Gerard Henderson’s Islam in Australia, Policy Exchange, 2007, pp111

- On occasions, the authors just ignore some matters which were important to the Fraser Government. The Fraser Government effectively took over in December 1975 with a mandate to repair the economic problems caused by the grossly inefficient Whitlam Government and to cut back on expenditure which had blown out as a result of Whitlam’s policy of big spending supported by large borrowings.

In early 1976, several Liberal senators crossed the floor to defeat the Fraser Government’s proposed abolition of funeral benefits for pensioners – which Patrick Weller has described as a “small allowance that was expensive to administer”. Fraser immediately surrendered and reversed the decision. This was a very public sign that Fraser would not enact the necessary cuts and affected the entire term of the Fraser Government. But it does not receive a mention in Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs.

MEMORY AS THE ONLY EVIDENCE

As previously pointed out, Malcolm Fraser concedes at the end of his memoirs that “memories...can be notoriously fallible”. The same point is made elsewhere in the book. Moreover, as Fraser told the ABC Radio National The Book Show on 9 April 2010, he did not keep a diary or contemporaneous notes of conversations.

Yet, in quite a few sections of Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs, the authors rely completely or substantially on Fraser’s memory. For example at Page 201 the verbatim account of Fraser’s discussions with US officials in 1970 appears to be based entirely on Fraser’s recall some four decades later. Later in the same chapter, Fraser’s account of what he acted against is based on an aide memoir which is not dated and, consequently, it is not clear whether this is a contemporaneous note. There are many such instances where Malcolm Fraser’s memory is the only evidence for claims made by the authors. Some instances illustrate the point.

(i) Malcolm Fraser, John Kerr and 11 November 1975

In her “A Note from the Narrator”, Margaret Simons reported that Fraser told her before the publication of the book: “If the headlines when the book comes out are ‘New Information about the Dismissal’, then in my view we will have failed.” But some of the headlines following the release of Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs did focus on the Dismissal. Why? Because extracts rights to this section of the book were sold to The Australian.

According to the authors (Page 304), at 9.55 am on 11 November 1975 Fraser received a phone call from the Governor-General Sir John Kerr which proved to be “one of its most momentous phone calls in the history of Australian politics”. According to Fraser, Kerr set the conditions which would cover a caretaker government following the dismissal of Gough Whitlam as prime minister. The Whitlam Government was dismissed at around 1 pm later that day.

Fraser first made this claim in Ayers’ biography in 1987. Kerr denied that such a phone call had taken place and produced a contemporaneous note in support of his position. Kerr always believed that Fraser had confused the phone call, in which he asked whether the Opposition was sticking to its decision to block supply, with the conversation which took place some hours later at Government House, when he commissioned Fraser as prime minister, following Whitlam’s dismissal.

Kerr’s case was documented by Gerard Henderson in The Weekend Australian on 7-8 November 1987 and 14-15 November 1987 and also in Gerard Henderson’s Menzies Child: The Liberal Party of Australia. The authors make no reference to Kerr’s position in Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs – which is manifestly unfair to Kerr, who died in 1991.

One of the illustrations in the book is a photographic copy of the note which Fraser claims that he made at the time of Kerr’s phone call. The handwriting account of Fraser’s conversation with Kerr is in a different style and is significantly lighter than the bottom of the note which reads as follows: “9.55 11 Nov 1975 JM Fraser”. Kerr’s view was that any such note would have been made at the time that Fraser was sworn in as prime minister in the afternoon of 11 November 1978.

There is no independent record of when Fraser dated this note. We have to rely on his memory that the note was dated at the time he says it was dated –
despite the evidently different writing style and darker colour. This in spite of the fact that Fraser concedes that his memory is “notoriously fallible”. This issue is covered in greater length in Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch Dog (Issues 46 and 47) and in Gerard Henderson’s article in the Canberra Times, 29 March 2010.

(ii) Malcolm Fraser and Diem’s Assassination

According to the authors at Page 133.

A key moment in Fraser’s reconsideration of his support for the Vietnam War was his reading of the former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s memoir In Retrospect, published in 1995. McNamara had been one of the architects of the war, and in his memoir he wrote a forensic dissection of the mistakes that had been made and his own part in them. Fraser learned for the first time that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US Government had been complicit in and indeed had initiated the deposing and assassination of the South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem, in 1963, when Fraser had been an idealistic backbencher. The Americans had concluded that Diem could not effectively unite the South Vietnamese, but they had given no consideration to finding somebody to do a better job, and nobody did.

In fact, it was widely known – as early as 1963 – that the US, via the CIA, was involved in Diem’s assassination. It is inconceivable that a well connected Liberal MP, like Fraser, would not have known about this at the time. As Philip Ayers commented when reviewing the book for Quadrant (May 2010): “It was common knowledge in the 1960s and there was plenty of evidence. I read about it back then”.

(iii) Malcolm Fraser’s Thwarted 1976 Expenditure Cuts

According to the authors at Page 355:

Fraser remembers that in January 1976, after cabinet had spent weeks pouring over programs and making cuts, the Secretary of Treasury Fred Wheeler told him that, in his view, the government had now identified enough cuts. Any more might be counterproductive. Fraser says, “I wanted to press on further with expenditure cutting, and Wheeler, not in [John] Stone’s presence, said that he wouldn’t do more: the country had had
enough shocks. He said, “The budget will be coming around and you will have plenty of time to have another go later”. Unfortunately, he persuaded me.

In fact, there is no evidence to support Fraser’s memory. This claim was first made in Philip Ayers’ biography in 1987. As the authors acknowledge, Treasury officials do not recall giving this advice. Certainly no such advice was offered in writing – which was normal Treasury practice at the time.

Once again, the authors present Fraser’s recollections of a conversation which took place over three decades ago in direct quotes.

(iv) Malcolm Fraser and John Howard’s Attitude to Vietnamese Refugees.

Then there is Fraser’s claim about John Howard’s attitude to Vietnamese refugees in May 1977. According to the authors at Page 425:

Fears about settling Asian refugees were not confined to the general public; there were people inside the government who were worried as well. Fraser remembers that at one of the first cabinet meetings at which the commitment to take large numbers of Indochinese refugees was discussed, John Howard sat silently through the debate, but “sidled up to me afterwards in a corridor and said, ‘We’re not going to take too many of these people, are we?’ And I just looked at him and said, ‘John, we have just had a debate in cabinet’. And he said, ‘Yes, but we’re not going to take too many of them, are we? It is just for show, isn’t it?’“

“I said, ‘Look, what you say to me in the corridor is meaningless. If you want to say something, you can say it in cabinet. If you want to re-open the debate, you can say it in cabinet.’ But he never did.” Fraser’s recollection of this encounter was first aired in January 2008, when the 1977 cabinet records were released to the public under the thirty-year rule. In fact, Fraser’s account of the [alleged] conversation was known well before the publication of his memoirs. For example, writing in the *Weekend Australian* on 16-17 November 2002, Phillip Adams wrote how “Fraser was telling anyone who’d listen how Howard had opposed his decision to grant asylum to a number of Vietnamese refugees” in 1977.

The authors’ account of this (alleged) conversation relies on Fraser’s ability to recall a conversation, in direct speech, which took place over three decades ago. This in spite of the fact that Fraser admits to having a notoriously fallible memory.

Howard has denied Fraser’s account. For starters, when the conversation is alleged to have taken place, Howard was not in the Fraser Cabinet. Rather, he held a position in the outer ministry – as the Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs. It is inherently unlikely that a junior minister, speaking on a matter outside his area of ministerial responsibility, would have addressed so dominant a prime minister as Malcolm Fraser in this way. Moreover, if Fraser was so displeased with Howard’s position in May 1977 – why did he promote him to Cabinet when he appointed him Treasurer in November 1977?

Support for John Howard’s position on this issue comes from Ian Macphee, who is close to Fraser. Interviewed on the *7.30 Report* on 1 January 2010, Mr Macphee said that he did not remember Howard “ever arguing in Cabinet” about Vietnamese refugees in the second half of the 1970s.

(v) Malcolm Fraser on Loyalty to Political Leaders

Then there is the matter of Malcolm Fraser’s contradictory positions. According to the authors (Page 619), Fraser believed that John Howard was disloyal to the (then) Liberal Party leader Andrew Peacock in 1985. Apparently Fraser “was shocked by this naked evidence of disloyalty”. But Fraser appears to have forgotten that he urged Howard to challenge Peacock on the eve of the 1984 election – advice which Howard rejected. See Michael Steketee’s article “The Night Malcolm Fraser urged Howard: got for it”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 July 1985.

Also, in this context, Fraser overlooks the fact that he brought down John Gorton in 1971 and successfully dislodged Billy Snedden as Liberal Party leader in March 1975. Certainly Fraser was a better leader than Snedden. Yet Gorton was a better leader than his successor William McMahon, who led the Liberal Party to defeat in December 1972.

CONCLUSION – ON DEATH AND MAO

In early 1975 I was invited, by Tony Stanley, to apply for one of two vacant positions in Opposition leader Malcolm Fraser’s office. I did not obtain the job – but in January 1976 took up a senior position in the office of Kevin Newman, a Tasmanian based member of the Fraser Government’s outer ministry. I remained in this position for four years.

In 1975 and 1976 Malcolm Fraser had a lot of appeal. He was much more substantial than such previous
HOW MALCOLM FRASER SAVED NATO (ALLEGEDLY)

The only “big story” in Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs turns on the claim (Pages 482-483) that Fraser’s intervention with (then) United States Vice-President George H.W. Bush was instrumental in the US’s decision to support Britain in the Falklands War in 1982 and that this, in turn, preserved the NATO Alliance.

Bush visited Australia in late April 1982. According to the authors, at a meeting at The Lodge, Fraser convinced Bush that the US should support Britain in the Falklands War. It was known at the time that Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, was sympathetic to Argentina. The line in Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs is that before his conversation with Fraser, Bush had not thought through the implications for the US-Britain relationship, and for NATO, if the US abandoned Britain. On hearing Fraser’s thoughts the following events took place:

Bush looked at his watch. He said, “Malcolm, I think that I am going to have to disrupt your dinner party. The National Security Council is sitting down to examine this matter in three minutes’ time; I think that I better key myself in to the discussion. Have you got a telephone?” Fraser showed him to the office. Bush made his phone call and emerged about an hour and a half later, giving Fraser the thumbs up. Fraser asked him what would have happened if he hadn’t made the call. “Kirkpatrick would have won the argument in ten minutes” he said.

On 23 February 2010, shortly before the launch of his political memoirs, Fraser was interviewed by Mark Colvin on the ABC Radio PM program. The issue of the Falklands War was discussed in that part of the interview which did not make it to air – it was placed on the PM website. On 3 March 2010 Colvin made use of this for an article which he posted on the website of The Drum – titled “The day Fraser may have changed history”.

Colvin gave some credibility to Fraser’s assertion that his intervention in this issue “may have changed” history. He quoted from the full Fraser interview – where the former prime minister revealed that the National Security Council meeting on 30 April 1982 commenced at 7 pm Canberra time.

The problem here is that 7 pm on 30 April 1982 in Canberra was 5 am that morning in Washington DC. Fraser’s claim that he alone convinced Bush of the need for the Ronald Reagan administration to support Margaret Thatcher over the Falklands is far-fetched enough. But Fraser and Simons also want readers to believe that the National Security Council commenced its meeting at 5 am on 30 April 1982. This is possible – but most unlikely (see Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch Dog Issues 44, 45, 47).

Malcolm Fraser told Mark Colvin:

[George H.W. Bush] said the National Security Council was sitting down at 7 o’clock our time to discuss this very issue. I know that turns out to be an odd time for the National Security Council to be sitting but we checked later and it was accurate.

In fact, this statement is incorrect. No such checking occurred. Margaret Simons responded to doubts about Fraser’s claim in a piece she wrote for The Interpreter website on 17 March 2010 titled “Fraser and Falklands”. Simons produced no specific evidence to support the claim and conceded that there was some evidence which threw doubt on Fraser’s assertion. In conclusion, Simons wrote that there is a file in the Reagan Papers which may resolve the issue but added that “the budget for our book did not extend to the USA for me to go and see what’s there”.

Clearly this claim has not been adequately fact-checked and it remains to be seen whether any new edition of Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs will acknowledge that Mr Fraser’s memory has not been thoroughly checked.
leaders as John Gorton, William McMahon and Billy Snedden. He was an articulate anti-communist, having been one of the few Liberal MPs with the intellectual ability and political skills to defend the Australian commitment in Vietnam. Moreover, Fraser exhibited a sound approach to economics – being an able critic of the Whitlam Government’s program of big-spending financed by taxation and borrowing.

However, it soon became apparent that Fraser was not quite what he seemed. First up, there was his surrender on the pensioner funeral scheme benefit (which, for the most part, was not paid to pensioners). If the Prime Minister would not stand up to a few Liberal Party dissidents in the Senate – in which the government had a majority – it did not seem likely that he would have the courage to take really tough decisions. And so it proved to be.

And, then, the communist totalitarian dictator Mao Tse Tung died on 9 September 1976. Malcolm Fraser released a press statement mourning Mao’s death. Then on 14 September 1976 – with the support of Opposition leader Gough Whitlam – the Prime Minister moved a condolence motion in the House of Representatives.

Mr Fraser said that Mao had “secured the basic necessities of life to China’s people” and brought about internal peace within the country. This was the same communist dictator who had brought about the death of millions of Chinese in the forced-famine that was the Leap Forward. And this was the totalitarian leader who had purged one tenth of China’s population in the disaster which was the Cultural Revolution.

From an intercom in my office, I listened to Fraser and Whitlam proclaim the wonder of Mao. It was a dreadful moment. Later I learned that four backbenchers had had the decency – and courage – not to stand and pay their respects to Mao at the conclusion of the condolence motion. They were Liberals Bill Wentworth and Dr Kevin Cairns, the National Party’s Col Carige and Labor’s Dr Dick Klugman. From that day, I lost my admiration for Fraser. On the day after the Coalition defeat at the March 1983 election, I wrote a critique of the Fraser Government titled “Fraserism: Myths and Realities” – it was published the following June in Quadrant.

Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs makes no mention of the Fraser Government’s backdown on the pensioner funeral rebate or Mr Fraser’s effusive praise of the murderous Mao. It’s that kind of memoir.
I came across the nutcracker story in a history of The New Yorker written by American journalist Ben Yagoda About Town (Scribner, 2000). I fell upon it with delight. If Ross’s “fanaticism about language, his drive for correctness and transparency in writing”, as another writer described it, could drive him to such an extreme, it was also clear that it was motivated by his concern for the reader.

In light of where we are now, Ross’s dedication seems admirable.

MUGGED BY POST-MODERNISM

Clarity is up against it these days.

Universities have been mugged by post-modernism (although young academics, as rooted in po-mo as seedlings are in potting-mix, regularly claim they haven’t been). Under its influence, academic writing is too often an impenetrable thicket; armies could get lost in the paragraphs.

Meanwhile, commercial publishers no longer flush in shame if a finished book is littered with typos, malapropisms, unresolved plot-lines and tangled syntax. Just so long as the book is on budget and the marketing is in place.

In the media, the role of the line editor and sub-editor has been so downgraded it’s possible to read a news story and wonder blurrily if any human eyes – bar those of the original reporter – have seen it as it has progressed from computer to printing press to newsagent to your table.

With technology and the internet spurring things along, kids are encouraged to treat spelling and grammar as if they are optional. Already, teachers complain their pupils struggle to articulate their feelings and thoughts because they haven’t. Under its influence, academic writing is too often an impenetrable thicket; armies could get lost in the paragraphs.

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With technology and the internet spurring things along, kids are encouraged to treat spelling and grammar as if they are optional. Already, teachers complain their pupils struggle to articulate their feelings and thoughts because they haven’t acquired the language skills to do so. A speech pathologist writes in The Sydney Morning Herald, “Talking seems to have gone out of fashion... Children aren’t describing any more how their school concert looked – instead they just email the photos.”

At the same time, all voices - no matter how confused, uncivil or ignorant - are deemed equal. And so, a guest on the ABC’s program Q&A may be delivering an opinion, developed over years of research and experience, while anonymous tweets flit across the screen, sending up the speaker’s line of argument. The ABC says it wants tweets that “inform and entertain our broader audience”.

Against that, reading Yagoda’s tales of writers and editors musing over what the reader will and won’t understand is like escaping the toddlers’ playground. Or better, arriving in the study of one of The New Yorker’s most loved writers, E.B. White. White wrote for the magazine for most of his life, from 1926 until his death in 1985. He too could be dismayed by the anteaters.

He complained to Ross after an editor changed the word “hen” in his copy to “her”. White’s piece was about pigeons and squabs; a hen, it might be thought, was a reasonable inclusion. But no. In despair, he noted, “Ten years ago, I would have been reasonably sure it was a typo. Today, with pigeon-checking at the pitch it has reached, I can’t be sure ... A writer loses confidence in himself. I am not as sure of myself as I used to be, and write rather timidly, staring at each word as it runs out, and wondering what is wrong with it ...”

(To be fair, Ross worried about the anteating too. He fretted to H.L. Mencken in late 1948, “We have carried editing to a very high degree of fussiness here ... I don’t know how to get it under control.”)

This is the E.B. White who wrote Stuart Little and Charlotte's Web and whose unassuming, lucid, wry writing was instrumental in shaping the voice of The New Yorker in the first place.

E.B. was also the White who later resurrected a primer written by one of his old English professors, turning it into The Elements of Style, that good-humoured guide to writing good prose that has now sold over ten million copies.

If anyone understood clarity, it was White. The carefully revised handbook with its numerous rules and asides has gone into four editions and multiple reprintings since it appeared in 1959. It has influenced generations of students, writers, teachers and readers, not just in the United States but around the world and here, in Australia. In fact, wherever people care about words.

Its status is now so cemented that over the years it has been turned into a ballet, a video and an operatic song cycle - with percussion supplied by teacups, a typewriter and a duck call.

An illustrated version of the fourth edition came out in 2005: a basset hound makes a point about commas; a portrait of a stern Simone de Beauvoir appears over the sentence, “She found only two mistakes”, an example of rule 20: keep related words together.

Last year, American writer Mark Garvey, brought out a kind of biography of The Elements of Style. He called it Stylized and its frank subtitle is A Slightly Obsessive History of Strunk and White’s The Elements of Style (Touchstone, $39.99)
It turns out to be a white rabbit of a book and it will take you down the rabbit-hole and into a world where people happily debate colons, commas and clarity.


The books overlap like spreading branches of a family tree. E.B. White turns up in Garvey and Yagoda and, of course, in Elements of Style while Leonard is the natural star of his own guide, but gets a cameo appearance in Garvey.

Meanwhile, Yagoda and Garvey both explore what it was that The New Yorker brought to thought and writing. Garvey insists, at one point: that The New Yorker and Elements are genetically linked because of White.

All four books help explain why people write at all.

GIVING UP ADJECTIVES AND CHOOSING NOUNS

What Fowler’s Dictionary of Modern English Usage is to the British, The Elements of Style is to Americans. As Garvey makes clear though, Elements is far more than a guide to grammar. Fundamentally, it is about sighting a line of order in the chaos. Its most famous rule is: omit needless words.

That rule is not White’s though. It belongs to William Strunk Jr who authored the original guide on which Elements was based.

In 1918, Strunk, an English professor at Cornell, one of the ivy-league universities on the east coast of the United States, self-published a 43 page quick reference guide to clear writing for his students. It was meant to make his life easier and marking papers simpler. The following year, White enrolled in his class and bought a copy.

Strunk and White remained in touch for the next several decades but White forgot about the “little book” as the students liked to call it until, well after Strunk’s death, a fellow Cornell graduate sent him a copy in 1957 as a memento.

Charmed all over again by the guide’s brisk rules and the memories it brought back of his “funny, audacious and self-confident” professor, White wrote an essay about the guide and its creator. An alert editor at Macmillan’s educational arm, Jack Case, spotted it. Case believed that if the guide was as good as White said it was, it would be worthwhile to republish it in an updated form and with White’s essay upfront.

The project took over White’s life. The first edition, published in April 1959, went into 25 printings and sold over two million copies. There was a second edition in 1972 and a third in 1979, which sold 300,000 copies in its first six months. (The fourth, in 1999, came out after White’s death.)

Students and teachers loved the little guide. While Strunk’s barks remained, White’s tone, and his experiences as a writer, added warmth and humour. He warned students to give up their reliance on adjectives and choose their nouns more carefully: “The adjective hasn’t been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place.” Avoid fancy words, he ordered. “Do not be tempted by a twenty-dollar word when there is a ten-center handy.”

The guide remained austere – although it gained 28 pages for its first edition – but the original four chapters covering form, structure, composition and the misuse of key words were revised for a 1950s audience and White added a fifth chapter, “An Approach to Style”.

Naturally enough, there were critics. The rules – do not break sentences in two; use the active voice – got up the noses of some. The post-moderns disliked its implicit acceptance that universal truths and rules existed. In the 1970s, feminists objected to the references to women with children, dishwashers and ironing boards. The phrase, “Chloe smells good, as a pretty girl should” caused special pique. (White hung on to her but after his death, in the last edition, Chloe became a more gender-neutral baby.)

Others criticised its WASP-y tone. One writer personified it as a bow-tied priss. Readers wrote triumphantly to point out contradictions and errors. “Do you think this dreadful little book will ever settle down and stay quiet?” White wrote plaintively to his publisher in 1960, a year after the first printing.

“No,” replied Case, “because English won’t.”

If Case had been a different kind of editor and man, The Elements of Style might have ended up very differently.

HAPPINESS RULES

By the 1950s, English departments were already being taken over by what White called “the happiness boys”, academics who believed rules stopped creativity.
While White worked on the revisions, Macmillan consulted a few of them, taking soundings on the book’s eventual market. The teachers suggested that Strunk’s rules should be watered down; there should be more licence. When this was tentatively put to the normally mild White, he retorted:

This book is the work of a dead precisionist and a half-dead disciple of his, and it has got to stay that way… I cannot and will-shall not, attempt to adjust the unadjustable Mr Strunk to the modern liberal of the English department, the anything-goes fellow… I have seen the work of his disciples and I say the hell with him.

“All right,” cheered Case, “let him take the offensive and whale hell out of ‘em.”

Garvey believes that rules are in our DNA. From Moses’ Ten Commandments to Paul Simon’s Fifty Ways To Leave Your Lover, we humans seem to understand that we cannot “get on with the complexities of anything – writing, thinking, working, playing, for some of us even shampooing – without first coming to grips with a few ground rules.”

One professor from Indiana points out that Strunk didn’t invent the rules; he just identified them:

They’re built into the language. If you want to build a good chair, you’ve got to figure out how chairs work. In the same way, you’ve got to figure out how language works in order to use it.

Mark Twain offered his own rules and there is plenty of overlap: “Use the right word, not its second cousin; avoid slovenliness of form”.

Elmore Leonard is just as gruff if more idiosyncratic: “Keep your exclamation marks under control.”

And back at The New Yorker, Ross was fierce about rules because he wanted his new magazine to cover any subject in the world. Therefore, he required order. His writers might be delivering stories from Hoboken to Hiroshima to Harare but at least whatever was being written about would be grounded in a common set of rules, in a common usage guide, in a uniform sense of clarity.

What Ross knew, what Strunk and White knew, and what Garvey makes clear is that it’s only by sticking to the basic rules that writers gain their freedom. Just as birds co-exist with gravity, friction and wind-forces, writers are kept aloft because the rules let them do so.

SADDLE-BAGGING

There is still the plight of The New Yorker writers to be considered, as they worked through the penciled queries on their ms. Indeed, it’s the lot of any writer with editors trained that way.

I once worked with a bunch of terrific, hard-nosed American journalists from the American magazine, People. Time Inc, the parent company, was then rolling in money. It had decided to start a local version here – Who Weekly – and it had sent the writers and editors over to live the life of Riley, on the harbour, on expenses, while they coaxed house-style into the new magazine and its Australian hires.

They introduced me to the practice of saddle-bagging. That is, when layers of editors justify their pay by demanding details.

A sentence might start out as: “Joe Blow went to the store to buy some eggs” but it would end up as, “Joe Blow, who was 180cms tall with brown eyes and buck teeth, once went down to the shops, which were a kilometre away, on a cold 14C day, to buy six eggs so his mother, who was a widow, could scramble them.”

The sentences sagged like old Mexican mules. Worse, the writers had learned to head off the editors by censoring themselves. Maybe they knew that such and such an actor had once learned to ride an elephant. Would they mention that? Not unless they also knew who the elephant’s mother was and what size shoe it took.

The search for clarity in extraneous detail is as counter-productive as muddiness or ignoring grammar. They are produced by a similar mind-set: one that doesn’t quite get what communication is, and where it leads.

Yagoda writes at one stage: “If they understand anything, writers know that the world is not characterised by absolute clarity.”

In fact, writers at The New Yorker, did stand up to the streams of queries. Ross – whose regular interjection on a manuscript was “Who he?” - once questioned short story writer Sally Benson about a character who lived in a mountainside cabin.

He asked, relates Yagoda: “How he come to be living on mountainside?” Benson snapped back, “I don’t know how he came to be living on a mountainside. This is just a story I made up, and I didn’t make up that part.”

How much should we expect readers to just get? Certainly, there were many New Yorker writers who were annoyed that apparently the “reader must never have to pause to think for a single second, but be
informed and re-informed comfortingly all the time...”

The practice is far worse today as newspaper and magazine bosses watch their journals compete with YouTube, DVDs, twitter and SMS. Once it was accepted that readers had large vocabularies, owned dictionaries and didn’t mind thinking. No such luck now when readers are treated like infants who might squawl their heads off if they find a chunk in their pureed vanilla custard. Worse, worry the bosses, they might refuse more custard.


But is this kind of simplicity about clarity? Or is it dumbing down to the point where sentences have to be as obvious as blunderbusses?

A diet of only ten-cent words can make the brain feel short-changed.

INURED TO SEEING PORKIES

Intriguingly, there does seem to be a neurological connection between writing clearly and thinking clearly. One professor, Isabel Hull in Cornell’s History department assigns *Elements* to her students because of its pithiness. She tells Garvey:

*I receive comments from past students, all of whom without exception praise the improvement in their writing, and consequently in their thinking, from following these principles in my classes.*

All writers know that writing is rewriting. Not just because of the polishing but because the very act of writing seems to unleash thoughts you didn’t know you had.

Not everyone wants clarity of course. Don Watson has pointed out in his best sellers, *Death Sentence* and *Watson’s Dictionary of Weasel Words* that we live in a world of jargon where official statements and company mantras are designed to disguise and bamboozle. We’ve become inured to seeing the porkies told in public by corporations, politicians and bureaucrats explained away as “spin”. Oh, that’s okay then. Clarity may be the very thing that is now disliked on a board, in a wannabe politician, in an office or in a new staff member.

E.B. White once replied to a reader:

*There are very few thoughts or concepts that can’t be put into plain English, provided anyone truly wants to do it. But for everyone who strives for clarity and*
DENYING CHRIS(T) – HITCHED TO THE GLITTERING PRIZES

Anne Henderson

It was after appearing on an ABC Q & A panel with (among others) writer and public intellectual Christopher Hitchens, in 2009, that I actually met him for the first time. He had arrived late for make-up and preliminaries for the show and thus co-panelists had not been introduced to him.

In the Green Room later, after brief introductory exchanges, he asked if I was connected to a Gerard Henderson who had written a column about him the week before. I was caught by this – to my knowledge the GH I worked with had not written a column about Christopher Hitchens in the previous couple of weeks – in fact never that I could recall, in spite of his being one of few supporters of Christopher Hitchens in his decision to back the Coalition of the Willing and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Then came Hitchen's email – on 3 October – in Hitchens style with a subject header “Hitchens here”:

Good to meet you the other night. Running a clarity check on myself - how many Sydney Institutes, I asked myself, can there be? - I found that a Gerard Henderson, claiming to be the head of a Sydney Institute, had indeed pre-attacked my appearance at the Opera House in the SMH of 4 August. You said several times that this couldn't be so, so now I ask in return, how many Gerard Hendersons can there be? There's no edge to my question, I was telling you that I part-agreed with him when you broke in to say that I had the wrong man, and wrong outfit.

Well, not so. In fact there was no column on Hitchens. But in Gerard Henderson’s column for The Sydney Morning Herald on 4 August 2009 the opening two paragraphs had referred to both Hitchens and Sarah Palin and the upcoming Dangerous Ideas conference in Sydney for which Hitchens was opening speaker. The reference (and nothing further) was that Sarah Palin would have been a more relevant invitee to a Dangerous Ideas conference than Christopher Hitchens arguing there is no God. The column was actually on religion and the West, and the Hitchens mention only a teaser for the introduction.

I replied to Hitchens’ email, sorting out the misunderstanding, and ended by offering him a gig at The Sydney Institute on a future visit. I cautioned him, though, that it was not the Institute’s custom to remunerate speakers. He has not replied.

All this says a lot about Christopher Hitchens. He’s engaging, entertaining, well read and intellectually absorbing, well entrenched among a “set” of highly regarded talk circuit fashionables from where he makes a comfortable living. He’s also extremely narcissistic and somewhat inclined to leave out inconvenient facts in the pictures he draws of debates, issues and moments which are all centred on himself.

With this year’s release of Hitch-22 A Memoir, there’s now a compendium of sorts on Christopher Hitchens – his heroes, his friends, his foes, his employers, the famous he has interviewed, dined with (but not slept with), marched with, fallen out with, travelled with (politically and physically) and struggled with. It’s very much an account of Hitchens as public and intellectual figure, in the making and beyond. Of Hitchens the son, husband, lover or father, readers hear little.

As New York Times reviewer Jennifer Senior has commented, for long time Hitchens fans “much of the autobiographical pith of Hitch-22 has appeared elsewhere … and it’s surprising how little of it that Hitchens now adds.”

Omission is Hitchens’ game. It’s his style to give a partial account of anything he’s on to, scripted to suit his polemics, inconvenient facts edited out, all with a passionate certainty, and embroidered with an erudition that often confounds those unaware of his debater’s histrionics. Tactics well learned at Oxford and its debating Union in the 1960s within the Oxbridge, albeit Cambridge, setting of Frederic Raphael’s Glittering Prizes.

AND SO TO TROTSKY

Born in April 1949 (readers are given a list of other historic moments happening on the day of his birth), Hitchens found Karl Marx after his “reactionary”
English boarding school headmaster handed him a copy of the Communist Manifesto. Never a Stalinist, Hitchens soon fell for Leon Trotsky as his lifetime hero. Trotsky’s position as dissident within the revolution suited what Hitchens regards as his consistent anti-totalitarian position in politics.

As part of the Hitchens composite, however, Hitch-22 never reveals the truth about Trotsky and his capacity for organised terror. Robert Service puts it plainly enough in Trotsky A Biography: Trotsky “contrived to hide what he had said and done about Kronstadt [sailors’ mutiny 1921] ... he was the architect of the mutiny’s elimination and when he subsequently started to talk of the need for democracy this became an embarrassment.”

Service makes it clear that Trotskyite worship by international socialists like Hitchens in the 1960s has denied the truth of Trotsky as leader, someone as capable as any Bolshevik, from Lenin to Stalin, of putting down dissent by use of the gulag. At Kronstadt, on Trotsky’s orders, “The leading mutineers were seized,” writes Service, “and sent to labour camps. ... [by 1936] no outstanding literary figure in European or American literature, philosophy or social science was willing to announce adherence to Trotsky’s cause.”

Victor Serge was a Belgian who took part in the Bolshevik uprising. He was purged but eventually released from the USSR gulag. Serge is a hero for Hitchens in his admiration for Trotsky. But Hitchens conveniently disregards that it was Serge who recalled how Trotsky had eliminated the Kronstadt sailors, as well as anarchists and radical socialists in 1921. This, Service records, annoyed Trotsky: “Until Serge’s arrival he had got away with the evasive account in his autobiography. Now he had to answer the question how it was possible to accept him as advocate of a pluralist social system if he had persecuted ordinary sailors who had made exactly this demand in 1921.”

Hitchens’ trust in Trotsky bears parallels with any religious faith. Whatever the inconvenient facts, Hitchens is rusted on. For all his recent shifts to a more conservative position over Iraq and Islamism, he remained a communist. Hitchens’ trust in Trotsky bears parallels with any international socialists like Hitchens in the 1960s has denied the truth of Trotsky as leader, someone as capable as any Bolshevik, from Lenin to Stalin, of putting down dissent by use of the gulag. At Kronstadt, on Trotsky’s orders, “The leading mutineers were seized,” writes Service, “and sent to labour camps. ... [by 1936] no outstanding literary figure in European or American literature, philosophy or social science was willing to announce adherence to Trotsky’s cause.”

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There is a genuine belief in Hitchens that, by recording the wrongs of the evil doers as much as the deeds of heroic resistance movements in various locations, his reporting will make a difference to the plight of many. This in itself is worthy. But his memoirs also offer naïve moments in overestimation of how much can be achieved at the intellectual level. It is a great frustration to many men of letters that their words are not as influential as they think.

This begins early for Hitchens with Vietnam. Although it was not words or arguments that inspired Hitchens and his Oxford mates to silence Labour foreign secretary Michael Stewart in 1970, at a Union debate, by yelling “murderer” at him as he rose to speak and dropping a noose from a gallery which, in the heat of the moment, writes Hitchens, “We could have done almost anything we wanted, including at least roughing up if not lynching the foreign secretary.”

Later, to justify the flagrant denial of speech to the foreign secretary, the students rationalised their actions in the very best of sophistry as coming from “a higher cause and nobler purpose” and believed that “it was even possible, given the huge media fuss generated by our action, that the people of Indochina would get to hear of it and, as a result, take additional heart from the knowledge of our solidarity.”

For Hitchens, the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese was a case of “valiant guerrillas of the Vietcong carrying their fight to the very footsteps of the American Embassy”. He forgets to explain, however, that it was not reports of solidarity from the Oxford Union or poems by Michael Rosen that enabled the Vietcong to achieve their victory. That was made possible by a phalanx of Soviet Union tanks and shipments to the north, throughout the struggle, of Soviet arms.

Likewise, it is Hitchens at his best in his account of how he influenced Paul Wollowitz and Washington’s decisions in the US invasion of Iraq in order to remove Saddam Hussein. Certainly, Hitchens discussed with Wollowitz on several occasions at the US Defense Department the options surrounding any removal of Saddam Hussein and the imposition of democratisation in Iraq. But Hitchens would have been only one of many consulted. Without the pretext, however, of the murderous attack on the World Trade Centre in New York known as “9/11” and Al-Qaida there was little likelihood of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein by the military force of an invading US army.

**OF WOMEN ...**

Connections, colleagues and contacts are the life blood of notable journalistic endeavour. Christopher Hitchens has mastered the journalistic art over decades. *Hitch-22* charts this in detail. The account is revealing.

Hitchens’ circle of friends and colleagues – all top of the range and intellectual in their interests – is essentially blokey. In the best traditions of middle class English boyhood, it begins in the mean spirited cold of boarding school life with its homosexual temptations – “the unstated excuse was that this was what one did until the so-far unattainable girls became available” – and self abuse.

At university, girlfriends are an occasional anonymous reference until Hitchens sets up house with three mates - poet James Fenton, Michael Priest and James Pettifer. At this point he names their four girlfriends, but only to joke that the women’s surnames put together - Comely, Horn, Whipp and Sweet - “would make a sensational brothel-management team”. His all-male boarding school enculturation has not been dented much by the wider world.

Nor is there any great perplexity over the all-male fraternity of the famous Friday lunches, initiated by his great friend Martin Amis. Regular attendees included Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes, Russell Davies, Robert Conquest, James Fenton and Kingsley Amis, among others. Hitchens adds, as if an after thought: “There were no women, or no regular ones, and nothing was ever said, or explicitly resolved, about this fact.”

Perhaps women didn’t count as intellectual associates or perhaps it was simply a reflection of an era when, by and large, females were still largely excluded from Amis and co’s professional associations. As Hitchens recalls: “Between us, we were believed to ‘control’ a lot of the reviewing space in London.”

Hitchens has changed little in his chauvinistic preferences, retaining a paternalistic view that divides his life into a man’s world of intellectual pursuits separate from his domestic and private world. All very Victorian – or, dare one say it, somewhat akin to old fashioned, religious constructs.

Jane Wheatley in the *Good Weekend* (15 May 2010) reported Hitchens as saying: “No woman of mine need ever work. None of them ever have, so it’s just as well: their day job is me and the bambini.” But, strangely, he then asserts his belief that the answer to women’s poverty is their empowerment (those perhaps who can’t marry Hitchens?). He also believes women aren’t funny and that they don’t need to be. All a matter of opinion of course, from a very opinionated critic.

Some of this is, undoubtedly, deliberately provocative in an age of selling books. Become notorious and you gain attention. For every opponent, there is a supporter. Christopher Hitchens is no oppressor of women. In fact, even before migrating to the US, he revelled in finding that American “girls” were more “forward” – “They would come right out with it, and would give direct voice, sometimes in a tone of near-command, to their desires. I don’t think I can even begin sufficiently to express my gratitude,” he writes.
AND THE DEITY

It was as an American citizen that Hitchens connected his Trotskyist atheism to a more fashionable crusade. Having fallen out with so many of his left leaning colleagues over his support for the invasion of Iraq, in 2007, Hitchens produced *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. His views and writing on religious belief have engendered some of his most colourful sneering – gaining plaudits from the same set who sneered at him for backing George W Bush and the invasion of Iraq:

One reason that I have always detested religion is its sly tendency to insinuate the idea that the universe is designed with “you” in mind or, even worse, that there is a divine plan into which one fits whether one knows it or not. This kind of modesty is too arrogant for me.

Ironically, his younger brother Peter Hitchens, also a writer, has gone the other way, becoming an atheist only to return to Christianity in his 30s after spending some years in the secular USSR and other parts of eastern Europe.

Simon Smart, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 28 May 2010, elaborated on Peter Hitchens’ arguments about religious belief, what he referred to as bringing “into the light some important counter-arguments to the New Atheistic claims” of contemporary debate. Among which Christopher Hitchens is a leading voice. Smart suggests that Peter Hitchens, during his time in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, experienced “a culture that has banished God from every area of life”. And found it profoundly wanting.

Peter Hitchens argues that his brother and others who are opposed to religion should recognise “the possible attractions to the intelligent mind of the religious explanation rather than denouncing all religious belief as stupid”. He pinpoints their essential logic as denying the intuitive:

Those who choose to argue in prose, even if it is very good prose, are unlikely to be receptive to a case which is most effectively couched in poetry.

Arguments against religious belief and God from Christopher Hitchens are full of damnation of religious institutions and movements, and monstrous acts committed in the name of religion. Much of this is very sound.

However, Hitchens fails to distinguish between a non material presence or belief (God) and flawed human endeavour in the name of God. In a material world, any manifestation of religious belief will inevitably be accursed with human foibles. What some religious believers have tagged original sin. When Hitchens chronicles the bad and the ugly done by religious organisations in the name of God, he is railing against humanity and its flaws, not God.

But he also forgets the good, treating all believers as the same, and ignores the host of positives from committed faithful over centuries. Those working for little material gain, if any, to provide what the state did not – education, health and comfort, family support, and a haven for outcasts. All this before social service became part of government responsibility. And a work that continues as governments fail in their delivery of services. What’s more, at the end of the first millennia, as illiterate barbarians invaded the educated Roman Empire, it was Christian monasteries that preserved the written word and the history of the West.

For the educated person, a slavish following of any guru – religious or otherwise – is undesirable. Hitchens, however, places too much emphasis on the organisational church in the now very pluralist West. Writing of his former teacher at Oxford, Dr Anthony Kenny, Hitchens recalls Kenny’s excommunication from the Catholic church after leaving the priesthood and marrying. “Many people,” writes Hitchens, “don’t understand the term ‘lapsed Catholic’ entails the sinister implication that only the Church can decide who leaves it and why, and when.”

Kenny, however, was not so disturbed. He went on to a distinguished career at Oxford, continued to enter the sacred space of Catholic churches and became a giant among philosophers. Like many “lapsed” Catholics he was unfazed by his official status within the organisational church. Organisations can always decide their members but membership of a church can be quite unconnected to belief in God and personal spirituality.

IMMORTALITY

For all his reasoning that “God is not”, Hitchens seems to desire immortality. He fears, he admits, being out of the game: “I do not especially like the idea that one day I shall be tapped on the shoulder and informed, not that the party is over but that it is most assuredly going on – and henceforth in my absence.” Newspapers will come out without him. And, only because life is finite is he writing his memoirs in order to keep the record and his voice alive.

But Hitchens has an earthly desire too – “to be vindicated in my own lifetime”. This may well be possible in relation to Islamist terrorism and what the response of the West should be. All of which should ensure a ready platform for Hitch at many more writers festivals and ideas conferences before that fatal tap on the shoulder.

But as to being vindicated in his sophistry around whether God is not great or even not at all, I suspect that God alone knows the answer there.

Anne Henderson is Deputy Director of The Sydney Institute
THE INCREDIBLE HELEN GARNER

Peter Hayes

There seems to be a consensus among literary commentators that Melbourne novelist and journalist Helen Garner distinguishes herself by the rare quality of character she brings to her work. Geordie Williamson in a podcast review of Garner’s most recent novel *The Spare Room*, for example, said that Garner “is an author of such honesty that I think that even fictionalising comes hard to her”.1 Christopher Bantick has written that Garner’s “honesty with herself […] has never wavered throughout her career”,2 and Katherine England, that “Garner’s determination always seems to be to get it right”.3 Brian Matthews attributes to Garner a “commitment to the truth of things as far as is humanly possible”,4 while Gideon Haigh writes that “[i]n a literary community that prizes affected worldliness and cosmopolitanism, Garner and her artless candour hardly seem to fit”.5

Like many of the received opinions concerning her, this broad notion that Garner is an author of impeccable credibility is encouraged by Garner, if it doesn’t in fact originate with her. Garner not only talks about herself a lot, she expresses a great many critical opinions about herself as a writer and helps thereby to set the tone for the admiration that follows. In a 12-page introduction to her collection of journalism *True Stories* Garner says, among other things, that following difficulties in writing fiction she found in journalism a sense of relief, because “instead of feeling an irksome obligation to make things up, in journalism I was not allowed to”.6 The implication is obvious: as a journalist Garner isn’t allowed to make things up, and so as a journalist she doesn’t make things up.

That, at least, is the reputation, that with Helen Garner what you see is what you get. I would add: not always and not entirely.

GARNER AND FITZROY HIGH

Garner began her professional life as a schoolteacher in the Victorian Education Department in the 1960s, from which she sprang to public fame when the Department sacked her in 1972 for conducting two wide-ranging discussions of sexual matters with her Form One pupils at Fitzroy High School in Melbourne. Garner wrote an account of these discussions at the time which was published in an underground newspaper and entitled “Why does the women have all the pain, Miss?” Decades later, she published a version of this article in her 1996 collection of journalism *True Stories*. What she failed to mention was that this 1996 version of the article (dated in the book to “1972”) differs significantly from the original.

The changes from 1972 to 1996 appear to be revisions, partly because they make the article less offensive. The original’s “they wanted to know WHY anyone would suck a cock or lick a cunt”, for example, becomes “they want to know why anyone would do such a thing”. The “Greek fathers” who beat Georgia and Rita “for talking to boys in the street” lose their ethnicity in *True Stories*, becoming merely “fathers” there. The class ceases to be told that their toes are pleasurable to suck (for what that’s worth), and the boastful “I haven’t told you half of it, or half of the things they asked me” disappears entirely, with much else. The article appears to have been systematically toned down and made to seem less provocative.

The Garner of *True Stories* also appears to be re-interpreting the children’s behaviour more than 20 years after she witnessed it. Having been told by Garner of “the pleasure of sucking anything”, including “various parts of a lover’s body”, the pupils in *True Stories* “contemplate this earnestly” – an entirely new observation absent from the original. At the corresponding point of the 1972 account, the children “were pretty stunned to find out that sucking was OK”. In the revised *True Stories* Garner isn’t stunning her charges any longer, merely offering them food for earnest thought.

The original opening sentence

*One afternoon last week my form one kids and I were about to launch ourselves dutifully on an assignment about Ancient Greece.*

in *True Stories* becomes

*One afternoon in the spring of 1972, I settled my form-one class of thirteen-year-olds and we launched ourselves dutifully on an assignment about Ancient Greece.*

Garner has chosen to introduce the detail of the children’s ages (nowhere mentioned in the original) and has chosen to say that they were thirteen years old. There is evidence that some were in fact younger.
In March 1973, the Melbourne journalist John Hamilton met Garner and wrote a sympathetic article about her for The Herald, in which he stated the children to have been “aged 11, 12 and 13”.

Five days later the Victorian Minister of Education, Lindsay Thompson, told Parliament that the children “ranged in age from eleven to thirteen years”. Garner herself in 1973 wrote an article for Neos Kosmos in which she twice implied that the children were “12 or 13”.

But if children get to the age of 12 or 13, in a big school where sexual talk (in the form of swearing and insults) is a common thing in day to day life; and if these children don’t understand what [sic] the words they use for swearing also have a simple, honest and real meaning that is not dirty, then they are lucky if someone they like and trust [sic] explains these things to them. If their parents want to give them moral guidance they have probably absorbed a good deal of it by the time they are 12 or 13.

Common experience would tell us there must have been at least some 12 year olds in that class; more to the point, Garner herself in 1973 believed that there were.

In a postscript to the Fitzroy High article in True Stories, Garner tells us how hard it was for her to “republish” it, that is, without saying a word about how she made that struggle easier for herself by not republishing the article, but rewriting it instead.

GARNER AND THE FIRST STONE

Garner has written of her 1972 sacking as the event that “forced [her] to start writing for a living”. In 1977 she achieved a breakthrough of sorts with her very first novel, Monkey Grip, but to my mind it was only in 1995 that her real breakthrough as a writer came, with her first book length work of non-fiction, The First Stone, an account of a sexual harassment case at one of Melbourne University’s residential colleges.

Despite its popular success, The First Stone presents the most obvious stumbling blocks to the conventional view of Garner’s “artless candour” and superior fidelity to fact. To take a minor example, the book has near its start two epigraphs, the second of which reads, “Let the one among you who has done no wrong cast the first stone.” This is placed in quotation marks and attributed to “John 8:7”, but what version of the Bible is it quoted from? It isn’t to be found in the King James, the Geneva Bible, the Revised Version, the Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, the Revised Standard, or even J B Phillips’s translation of the Gospels that Garner refers to elsewhere for other reasons. So where did she get it from?

The book’s other epigraph, from Zoë Heller, is itself a minor misquotation, in which the phrase “the women’s side” should read “the woman’s side”. I wouldn’t bother mentioning this if it were not for the symmetry it provides: there are two epigraphs at the start of The First Stone, and neither is what it seems to be.

Nor, of course, is the book itself. Garner uses fictitious names throughout for its decidedly non-fictional characters, and it soon came out that she had used more than one name – Matthew Ricketson counts nine separate names and identifiers – for a single person, the then college academic Jenna Mead.

No satisfactory defence of this apparent breach of journalistic ethics has ever been made by Garner or anyone else. Garner’s own defence of it was primarily that her publisher’s lawyers “obliged” her to do it, but this is a feeble excuse-making. Lawyers have no power to oblige people to do anything, and “legal advice” isn’t even a defence at law. In any case, it isn’t asking too much of Helen Garner, one might have thought, that she accept responsibility for a book published under her own name.

Garner made two other claims in defending herself over this point: that the multiple names for Jenna Mead were The First Stone’s one and only “tactic”, and that in disguising Mead she “didn’t invent anything”. Both of these damage-control claims, it turns out, are themselves false. There were other tactics. The words “Cassandra Pybus” are falsely put into the Cassandra Pybus character’s mouth, for example, rewriting what that person says as a way of disguising her identity too.

And Garner did invent. At one point while a certain “EO hearing” has still to be concluded, Garner makes a phone call to Dr Mead, referring to her here as “Dr V—”. Thirty pages later, with the “EO settlement” having been reached, she and Dr Mead talk on the phone again, Mead now being referred to as “Mrs Barbara W—”. The references to the EO hearing establish that these conversations took place in the order in which they appear in the book. But Garner says of the earlier one, “this was the last time Dr V— would ever speak to me.” That statement was clearly an invention, then, of precisely the kind that, supposedly coming clean at last, she denies herself to have made.

Garner’s defence of The First Stone was originally delivered as a speech to The Sydney Institute and published in The Sydney Papers. A revised version again appears in True Stories, in which (along with many other changes) the original version’s
Cassandra Pybus has a doom-laden approach to giving maternal advice. The young woman in the beautiful dress is not, she insists, in possession of any power whatsoever, potential or actual, and it is wicked of me to suggest that she might be. For Pybus, only one sort of power is admissible to a discussion of events like these and that is institutional power. This splendid young woman, then, so clever and lovely and full of life, is nothing but a sad victim. These traumatic events, Pybus solemnly assures her, “will blight her life”.30

Some feminists have a doom-laden approach to giving maternal advice. The young woman in the beautiful dress is not, they insist, in possession of any power whatsoever, potential or actual, and it is wicked of me to suggest that she might be. For them, only one sort of power is admissible to a discussion of events like these, and that is institutional power. This splendid young woman, then, so clever and lovely and full of life, is nothing but a sad victim. These traumatic events, they solemnly assure her, “will blight her life”.31

After the trouble she got into for splitting up a real person in The First Stone, Garner here does the same thing again in defending it, even to the extent of attributing a direct quotation from Pybus’s review of the book to unnamed plural “feminists”.32

**EN GARDE AGAINST GARNER: TRUE STORIES AND THE FEEL OF STEEL**

The breakthrough popular success of The First Stone led in turn to two collections of Garner’s journalism being published, True Stories the following year, in 1996, and The Feel of Steel in 2001. Each of these books advanced her reputation as a journalist while providing reasons for thinking it exaggerated.

In The Feel of Steel, Garner writes:

> Once I used to sing along earnestly with John Lennon’s “Imagine”: “nothing to kill or die for”. Then I had my daughter, and realised what wimpy bullshit that fantasy was.33

That didn’t happen. Garner’s daughter was born in September 1969,33 which means that Garner was herself singing “Imagine” at least two years before it was released in September 1971.34 That isn’t getting a date wrong; it undercuts the entire “true story” she is supposedly telling us.

In a speech also published in The Feel of Steel,35 Garner writes:

> Last week I was mooching round a bookshop up in Bondi Junction, opening novels at random. I picked up Thackeray’s Vanity Fair and flipped it open. My eye fell on this: “In the carriage sat a discontented woman in a green mantle.”36

That didn’t happen either. Garner’s eye did not fall on that sentence in Vanity Fair in Bondi Junction or anywhere else, for the simple reason that that sentence does not appear in Vanity Fair at all. What does, is:

> About this time there drove up to an exceedingly snug and well-appointed house in Park Lane, a travelling chariot with a lozenge on the panels, a discontented female in a green veil and crimped curls on the rumble, and a large and confidential man on the box.37

Misquotation is a common enough mistake, but to mangle Thackeray as violently as Garner does and then coolly claim to have read her version of him in Bondi Junction a week earlier is more than a misquotation. Susan Lever tells us that Garner “has always looked hard at the world and struggled to write down what she sees as precisely and as honestly as possible”;38 I’m sceptical of a claim like that when I see her not even bothering to check a basic fact.

In True Stories Garner writes:

> The best part of each day is the long, fast tram ride along the cemetery in Lygon Street at eight o’clock in the morning. The green blinds are down on the east side of the tram, but sun pours through its open doorways, making it a tube of light and air.39

The only green blinds on that sort of tram – I used to travel on exactly the same route myself at the period of that article in the early 1980s – were those that shut the doorways off when they were not in use. The east side of the tram for Garner heading into the city would have been the side on which passengers boarded, so the green blinds could not have been down on that side, or no one would have been able to get on. A single narrow green blind may have been closed on the passenger side of such a tram right in the middle, but that plainly isn’t what Garner meant, and why in any case would she then say “blinds” in the plural? Her detailed and “precise” description of something she reports at first hand doesn’t make sense.

I was long puzzled by a newspaper article by Garner about listening to a woman crying in “the flat opposite” that of her friend, neighbour and regular Scrabble opponent Julie, in which she wrote that she held “a tumbler to the panels of Julie’s front door and...
put my ear to it". That didn’t make sense either: why wouldn’t she have simply opened the door and listened to the ambient sound in the hallway directly, as she had done earlier in the article? You would hear more that way and it would be easier. When *The Feel of Steel* appeared the puzzle was resolved: there the crying woman’s flat was suddenly next door to Julie’s, except that Julie was now called Tina, and Garner now held “a tumbler to the wall” instead of to Julie’s door. That did make sense, but suggested that Garner had been making things up in the earlier version, which (as she herself tells us) she isn’t allowed to do.

*The First Stone*, as we have seen, contained a big secret that emerged only after its publication. And so, it turns out, does *True Stories*. The big secret here is that virtually all of Garner’s “selected non-fiction” has obviously been revised for publication in book form, with the items all dated to (one guesses) their years of first appearance without further elaboration. A note on the book’s copyright page in small type mentions the “different form” in which some of them first appeared, but this is inadequate given the actual extent and nature of the differences.

Matthew Ricketson in a profile piece on Garner at the time of the book’s publication wrote, “With some pieces in *True Stories*, Garner reinstated material that originally had been cut for space reasons.” He doesn’t say how he knows that, and so his source for it was presumably Garner herself. Whoever is to blame, that statement is itself inadequate; it leaves unsaid much more than it says.

I have not traced all of the original articles; Garner’s lack of candour about their precise sources and dates – she provides full citations for only three items out of a possible 29 – obviously doesn’t help one to locate them. But of the 27 originals I have compared with *True Stories*, not one has been reprinted exactly as it first appeared, and the majority show some sign of positive revision, either small, medium or massive. (The two items that have eluded me, incidentally, are those about *Cosmo* and turning 50.) If Garner wanted to revise her own journalism for publication in book form, that was her right, I suppose; but a genuinely upfront and candid author would have told her readers that changes had been made – and where to find the originals.

*Pace* Professor Ricketson, the general tendency of the changes is towards cutting. Those that have been most revised are generally the older pieces, although “At the Morgue” from 1992 has had more than 850 words removed – around 20 per cent of the original. “Five Train Trips” has similarly had hundreds of words taken out, and some of this material was genuinely funny: the cuts are not always for the better. There are innumerable minor changes that could be either restorations or revisions, but of the 27 items I have collated only “Cruising” and “Sad Grove by the Ocean” are appreciably longer in the book than they were originally.

The revisions are themselves often at odds with Garner’s official public image. In “Five Train Trips” she systematically deletes all indications that she travelled as the railways’ guest as part of a PR exercise, with the staff aware of which of their passengers she was. It was an ethically dubious project to start with, but the original at least acknowledged that openly; in *True Stories* Garner suppresses it. And amid the suppressions

**Outside Bendigo is a privately owned “historical whatever” as the VicRail PR man describes it, called Sandhurst Town.**

becomes

**My ticket to Bendigo includes a visit to Sandhurst Town, a privately owned goldfields reconstruction for tourists – what the bus driver calls a “historical whatever”, as he drives me there in my solitary glory.**

The PR man’s remark is in *True Stories* said by a bus driver – another obvious invention to add to the list.

Garner’s alterations of her *True Stories* have gone almost entirely unnoticed. Matthew Ricketson spotted a paragraph added to “The Fate of The First Stone” but apparently no changes to anything else in the book – which still put him ahead of everyone else in print. Anne Manne in *Quadrant* accepted Garner’s postscript to the Fitzroy High piece without question, and praised her on the strength of it for the “honesty” of the supposed decision to republish the article.

Susan Lever in her *Dictionary of Literary Biography* article on Garner shows herself to be unaware of the doctoring; Garner’s claim that she republished the Fitzroy High article has thereby slipped its way into an authoritative-looking work of reference. The Kibble Award judges gave Garner their prize and $20,000 for *True Stories*, describing it as “a quiet monument to her piercing honesty” in a year in which, twelve months after Wanda Koolmatrie and *My Own Sweet Time*, they were on the alert for books and authors that might not be what they seemed – just not alert enough.

With Helen Garner you have to be always on the alert.

**Peter Hayes is a Melbourne writer**
ENDNOTES


7 Unsigned, “Why does the women have all the pain, Miss?”, The Digger (Melbourne), 4–18 November 1972, p 3.

8 Garner, True Stories, p 35.

9 Garner, True Stories, p 33.

10 Garner, True Stories, p 35.

11 “Why does the women have all the pain, Miss?”

12 Garner, True Stories, p 31.


14 Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, 4 April 1973, p 4985.

15 Helen Garner [sic], ‘Helen writes about that lesson …’, Neos Kosmos (Melbourne), 22 March 1973, p 19.

16 Ibid.

17 Garner, True Stories, p 37.

18 Garner, True Stories, p 2.


22 Garner, True Stories, p 178.

23 Ibid.


26 Garner, The First Stone, p 68.


28 For identification of these characters, see Mead, above n 21.


31 Garner, True Stories, p 176.


37 Garner, The Feel of Steel, pp 42–43.


40 Garner, True Stories, p 206.


43 Garner, The Feel of Steel, p 11.

44 Garner, True Stories.


46 This comment refers to “Just look at the bodywork”, The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney), 16 May 1992, pp 45–46. A different version published the same day as “The last remains”, Saturday Extra, The Age (Melbourne), 16 May 1992, pp 1, 4, is longer still by about 100 words, and rearranges some of the material. True Stories follows the Sydney Morning Herald version rather than that of The Age.


51 Ricketson, “Helen Garner’s The First Stone”, p 91.


Kevin Rudd is not the first foreign affairs tragic to rise to the top in the federal ALP. His predecessor Dr H. V. Evatt, who led the federal party from 1951 to 1960, had earlier been a high profile world figure during World War II and had served a term as an early President of the United Nations General Assembly.

Doc Evatt, notoriously, was a disastrous and unstable leader - the great Labor split of the 1950s occurred on his watch - but what is less known is that his career in the Labor Party was in difficulties even before he became federal ALP leader in 1951.

These difficulties arose from his failure to reconcile the competing demands of global diplomacy and domestic politics.

**JOHN QUINANE DOCUMENTS BERT EVATT**

A cache of previously unexamined documents in the National Library of Australia sheds new light on this facet of Evatt’s career. This material was compiled by a local party stalwart in Sydney (Mr Joe Quinane, of Meriel Street, Sans Souci) in an attempt to document what can go wrong when an ambitious politician concentrates on international statesmanship and ignores local political developments.

Before morphing into an international statesman, Evatt first had to win and hold a seat in the Australian parliament. Evatt’s entry into Australian electoral politics made headlines. On the eve of the wartime federal election of 1940 he stood down as a High Court judge in order to run as an ALP candidate. At a time of sacrifice and crisis, the nation needed dynamic leadership and he was willing to offer it on a 24/7 basis.

Various seats were named as possible choices when Dr Evatt made his announcement and different Labor factions vied for his services.

After some initial uncertainty Evatt endorsed federal ALP leader John Curtin and spurned a Communist-led breakaway Labor faction in New South Wales. Evatt then nominated for the seat of Barton, centred on the municipality of Hurstville. Buoyed by a wave of enthusiasm, he won it with a swing of 14 per cent.

The Curtin Labor government came to office in 1941 and Evatt was made Attorney General and External Affairs Minister. (He was confirmed in these two positions when Ben Chifley succeeded Curtin as Prime Minister in 1945). He was a senior minister from the word go.

But there was a downside to Evatt’s importance as a minister who worked round the clock on cabinet and departmental business. He did not have much time left over to tend to developments in his Sydney electorate. Suburban disaffection soon surfaced as a result.

Dissent in the seat of Barton was led by Joe Quinane, a local ALP member who was the unpaid secretary of the Barton Federal Electorate Council, the main ALP organising body in the seat.

Devotees of ALP factionalism owe a lot to Quinane because he religiously kept party correspondence and other items of interest bearing on his dealings with Evatt. Happily, they ended up in the National Library.

Quinane was a bit of a fixer. On learning in 1940 that Justice Evatt wanted a federal seat, he approached the existing preselected Labor candidate for Barton (Bill Large) and suggested to him that if a seat in the Senate could be lined up he should stand aside and let Evatt contest Barton. Large was duly given a winnable spot on Labor’s Senate ticket, thus clearing the way for Evatt to enter the House of Representatives.

Quinane came to rue his intervention on behalf of Evatt. It was, he discovered, no fun having him as his local member. As External Affairs Minister, Evatt was often away on missions in foreign parts. When in Australia, grave matters of state and urgent ministerial duties kept him confined to his office in Parliament House in Canberra.

Indeed, in wartime, the seat of Barton had a virtual absentee member. Evatt’s contacts with his constituents were minimal. The enthusiasm of 1940 ebbed away. Evatt had little time to deal with local correspondence and often failed to attend ALP meetings organised by Quinane.

Quinane’s displeasure increased in 1942 when Evatt defied the Barton Federal Electorate Council after it instructed him to oppose the Curtin Government’s proposal to send conscripts to the South West Pacific theatre.
On the eve of the Federal Electorate Council vote, Evatt paid Quinane a rare visit and offered to secure an officer’s commission for his son Fred. Quinane, who knew that this offer was an inducement to get him to drop his opposition to conscription, was not impressed. Indeed Evatt’s behaviour was a completely inappropriate intervention by a senior cabinet member in wartime.

As the war dragged on, Quinane became ever more convinced that Evatt was out of touch with grassroots Labor opinion. In 1944 Labor Party members in Barton, motivated by old-style anti-banker sentiment, called on Evatt to oppose the Bretton Woods international financial agreement.

Once again Evatt ignored the views of the Barton FEC. His focus was fixed on the creation of a new post-war world order and its grand accompanying institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank, and he was not going to be distracted by lesser concerns.

Eventually Quinane warned Evatt that he was likely to face a preselection challenge because of his non-attendance at electorate council meetings and his flouting of its recommendations on key issues.

In 1946, an election year, Quinane drew up a list of strategic government appointments, which, he considered, were designed to buy off possible preselection challengers in Barton.

The list included the Victoria Cross winner Lieutenant Roden Cuter (the future Governor of New South Wales). Cutler, Quinane honestly believed, was given a diplomatic post in New Zealand by Evatt in order to spirit him away from a possible preselection race.

Dissent ratcheted up each election year. In the lead up to the 1949 federal election, the New South Wales ALP had to choose its list of parliamentary candidates.

Quinane feared that Labor would lose Barton if Evatt, weighed down by his glory as a world statesman, stood again. Quinane took the plunge and announced that he was standing against Evatt in the preselection ballot in Barton.

On the eve of the vote Quinane circulated a list of complaints against Evatt. He cited Evatt’s failure to visit local party branches and criticised his handling as Attorney General of the Chifley government’s attempt to nationalise the private banks. He reeled off examples of unresolved conflict and tension in such trouble spots as Palestine, China, Indonesia and Berlin in a bid to deflate Evatt’s reputation as a United Nations peacemaker.

Typically, Evatt almost missed the Barton preselection ballot. After serving as United Nations President he returned by sea (Evatt was notoriously extremely fearful of flying) and only just arrived home in Sydney in time for the vote.

In the event, Evatt won the ballot easily, by 196 votes to 33. There was no way that such a senior Labor figure would be rolled.

But the mere fact that Evatt had to deal with a contested preselection at all despite being a senior minister was embarrassing for the ALP.

The Liberals, hoping to capitalise on the internal disaffection with Evatt in Barton, nominated a celebrity candidate (war heroine Nancy Wake) to contest the seat in the 1949 election. The Chifley government lost the election and Wake slashed Evatt’s majority but nonetheless he was re-elected.

Quinane, interestingly, was not impressed by Nancy Wake. He considered that Evatt was so disengaged from Barton that Wake should have won. By failing to conduct a forceful enough campaign, Wake, Quinane felt, wasted a splendid opportunity.

Evatt became federal ALP leader in 1951 and was never again threatened by a contested preselection in Barton. The Quinane family, however, was not done with the Doc.

BERT EVATT’S LAPSED ALP MEMBERSHIP

Joe Quinane’s son Fred (mentioned earlier) followed his father into the Labor Party. He joined the federal public service and moved to Canberra where he became secretary of the local ALP branch. He also enrolled in The Movement, the anti-communist organisation run by B.A. (Bob) Santamaria, who was later to be a mentor of current federal Opposition leader, Tony Abbott.

In 1954 Evatt condemned Santamaria, whose help he had previously enlisted, thereby precipitating the great Labor split of the Cold War era. Fred Quinane remained in the ALP despite the denunciation of Santamaria but this did not mean that he either liked or respected Evatt.

In 1955 Fred Quinane was involved in an attempt to depose Evatt and replace him with the deputy ALP leader Arthur Calwell. (All this is documented in further unpublished ALP material held in the National Library).
Evatt, because he was based in Parliament House and estranged from the ALP in his own electorate, had got into the habit of renewing his annual party membership with the Canberra ALP branch. In 1955 he forgot to renew his membership. An attempt to remove him from the party leadership was launched once Quinane, as local party secretary, cheerfully confirmed that Evatt had let his membership of the ALP lapse.

Evatt’s opponents insisted that he could no longer hold any position in the ALP up to and including the parliamentary leadership because his membership had lapsed. His supporters demanded that this technicality be overlooked.

The dispute went all the way up to the ALP national executive where Evatt was confirmed as leader only after ALP numbers man, Pat Kennelly, twisted a few arms.

This aborted coup helped to persuade Labor’s powerbrokers that Evatt, who was showing clear signs of mental instability, could no longer be left exposed to the irritating incidents of insurgency that had become a hallmark of the Quinane axis linking Barton and Canberra.

In 1958, party insiders shifted Evatt to the ultra-safe Labor seat of Hunter. He was able to spend his declining days as Labor leader “secure” in the knowledge that at last he was spared the grassroots disaffection associated with Joe Quinane and his like-minded son Fred.

A clear message emerges from the various Quinane documents available in the National Library. They show that Evatt’s federal career was imperilled long before he precipitated the great split of the mid-1950s.

From as early as 1942 Evatt had to cope with an ever-rising tide of disaffection in his own seat of Barton. His base, untended there, eroded dangerously.

Evatt discovered to his cost that kudos gained at international conferences is of little consequence - and indeed may be counter-productive - if a political leader becomes disengaged from issues and concerns on the home front. This is an abiding political truth, as pertinent for Kevin Rudd as it once was for Dr Evatt.

Ross Fitzgerald and Stephen Holt are the co-authors of Alan ("The Red Fox") Reid (UNSW Press) An abridged version of this article first appeared in The Canberra Times

SO GREEK: CONFESSIONS OF A CONSERVATIVE LEFTIE
By Niki Savva
Scribe Publications Pty. Ltd., pb, 2010
rrp $35
ISBN 9 781921 640 278

Niki Savva provides a lively insider’s account of the Canberra Press Gallery and of the Howard Government in So Greek: Confessions of a Conservative Leftie. It is an informative and entertaining book. So Greek is a revealing account of how political correspondents and politicians play the political game. So Greek is so frank. Although there are moments when Niki Savva appears to draw the line. Overall, however, Niki Savva no doubt writes too frankly for some of her former colleagues, a number of whom she names. But she does not exempt herself from critical judgments.

Essentially, there are three stories within the book. One is the story of a migrant family from a village in Cyprus living in Melbourne. Greek at home and Australian at work, Savva declares. Which of the two is more predominant? So fused are the two identities, that Savva is unable to discern if one is more important than the other. Then there is the period working as a member of the Canberra Press Gallery. And, finally, Savva writes about the nine years she spent working for Peter Costello and John Howard.

Niki Savva’s family life includes happy times as well as personal tragedies. The story of Christina Savva, Niki’s sister, is especially moving. Christina struggled with thalassemia major and later cancer before her life ended at a relatively young age. The strain associated with the final year of Christina’s life explains Niki Savva’s departure from the Press Gallery.

In her journalistic career, Niki Savva was political correspondent for The Australian and served as head of the Canberra bureau for both the Herald-Sun (Melbourne) and the Melbourne Age.

While Savva’s left-wing political sympathies fitted comfortably with the Press Gallery’s dominant culture, the nine years she worked first as Peter Costello’s media adviser and then in the Cabinet Policy Unit attached to the office of John Howard amounted to an interesting challenge.
When Niki Savva arrived in Canberra in 1974, Gough Whitlam was prime minister. Many journalists viewed Whitlam in heroic terms. Overwhelmingly, journalists were Labor supporters. This political orientation holds true today, although a few have switched to the Greens.

Double-standards apply. There is less concern today, Savva asserts, with getting a story right than in the past. Many political journalists see the Liberals as "just plain demonic". Meanwhile, if Labor incompetence is revealed, well, they were well-meaning after all. And when Labor breaks promises, it’s justified in the national interest, isn’t it?

### PRESS GALLERY’S LEFT-WING BIAS

Niki Savva argues that the gallery’s left-wing bias, if anything, has strengthened over time. Any benefit of doubt invariably applies to politicians on the left. Zero tolerance applies to the imperfections of conservative politicians. Power-plays among Gallery members “are just as intense and just as deadly as any in the backrooms of the major parties”.

Politicians ignore Gallery members at their peril. Off-the-record conversations? No such thing! Even with a friendly journalist. At some stage in the future, it will all be revealed. Remember Peter Costello’s off-the-record discussion with three journalists, later aired on the 7.30 Report. “When it comes to scheming and lying, plain old hypocrisy, and dishonesty, journalists – apart from a few honourable exceptions – win hands down.” That is, Savva adds, if you call that winning. Savva fesses up too. She lied often as a journalist. Not as a press secretary, however.

Savva reveals her journalistic modus operandi usually began with a charm offensive. But she would shift the switch to intimidation mode on encountering an unsatisfactory response. “I learned,” she writes “to slice and dice anyone who deliberately fed out misleading information, or who spoke to others and not me.”

Politicians refusing to cooperate received the treatment. Niki Savva never phoned them again. There would be no further mention of their name in future articles. Unless they did something wrong, of course. Niki Savva admits she rang key players at such a late stage that they were unable to stop publication of an unwelcome story. This also denied them the chance of claiming they had not been consulted.

Relationships between politicians and political writers are “symbiotic, parasitic, narcissistic and toxic”. Each group uses the other. Labor politicians outdo Liberals in ruthlessness. They are skilled at running blacklists. Liberal politicians shine at backstabbing each other. It is necessary for conservative politicians to pitch beyond the Gallery.

This, of course, is precisely what John Howard did for much of his time as prime minister. He used talk-back radio and by-passed the Gallery. Pretence by political journalists that Mark Latham was fit to be prime minister, Niki Savva argues, revealed “how desperate some sections of the media had become by 2004 to get rid of Howard and the coalition.”

### A MOVE TO THE DARK SIDE

Savva from a Gallery perspective crossed over to the “dark side” when she joined Peter Costello’s staff. Such a move is not easily understood or forgiven among Gallery journalists. But it’s fine for Labor people to move from political office to the media.

Go outside the group, Savva says, and expect a lonely workplace. Niki Savva struggled with Peter Costello’s tentative nature. He had integrity but self-pity surfaced all too easily. His fear of failure and sensitivity frustrated her. He was reluctant to strike to achieve his leadership ambition. Then again, he lacked the numbers. But he could have gone to the backbench.

When Peter Costello should have challenged John Howard, he backed off. When he did fight, he chose the wrong way to do so. His response to the Ian McLachlan story – that John Howard had promised to step down within two terms of becoming prime minister – sealed Costello’s fate.

Niki Savva reveals that her boss asked her for a screed outlining why he wanted to be prime minister. This followed a question from Jeanne Pratt to Peter Costello to that effect. Publishing this information conveys the impression that Peter Costello was unsure ultimately as to why he wanted the job.

Niki Savva reveals that her boss asked her for a screed outlining why he wanted to be prime minister. This followed a question from Jeanne Pratt to Peter Costello to that effect. Publishing this information conveys the impression that Peter Costello was unsure ultimately as to why he wanted the job.
Nothing is off the record, it seems. Not even when employed as a press secretary, Nikki Savva explores the uneasy relationship that existed between Peter Costello and John Howard. Peter Costello withheld information about tax cuts in the budget from John Howard until the last moment.

Peter Costello and John Howard just couldn’t connect meaningfully on the vital matter of leadership transition. John Howard resented attempts to force him to decide about his future. He was adamant about making important decisions at a time of his choosing. Being unable to manage a suitable leadership transition had profound consequences. All of this came with a high price – for the party and the two individuals.

Niki Savva discusses her time working for John Howard – the politician she says was toughest on when in journalism – and how judgement and luck deserted him as the 2007 federal election approached.

The book’s final pages include critical coverage of Kevin Rudd during the 2007 election campaign managing to present himself as a younger version of John Howard. So Greek is an enjoyable and easy book to read. It is an important book given its insights into the ways Canberra’s political correspondents go about presenting political personalities and issues to the rest of us.

**ALAN “THE RED FOX” REID: PRESSMAN PAR EXCELLENCE**

*By Ross Fitzgerald and Stephen Holt*

New South (University of New South Wales Press Ltd), hb, 2010

rrp $49.95

ISBN 978 1 74223 132 7

Alan Reid, widely regarded a few decades ago as the doyen of Canberra-based political journalists was a political operator as much as a political reporter. He was both chronicler and participant.

Arguably, Alan Reid was the most influential political journalist in Australia from the 1930s to the mid-1980s. Yet he reported on the political activities of others, but never his own. His reports did not recognise or reveal how he had influenced these stories.

**ALAN REID’S DOUBLE ROLE**

This double role was not obvious to the general public. Alan Reid was fascinated with exercising political power and influence away from the public view. A parliamentary career was not enticing to him. He derived energy and excitement as a Machiavellian figure. Aspiring to the role of the “prince” was not part of his personal agenda.

Leadership challenges and Machiavellian plots were Alan Reid’s kind of politics. Reid’s passion for politics centred on conflicts and personalities. Clashes and crises in the corridors of power intrigued him. Providing advice to politicians in private carried a special attraction for him. Influencing political outcomes privately while writing political stories to shape public perceptions gave him immense satisfaction.

Called the Red Fox because of his hair colour and cunning nature, Alan Reid yearned to write novels and plays. Strong characters woven into political narratives enthralled him. Alan Reid did write three books on Australian politics. But his attempts to write plays and novels basically failed. Prospective publishers feared costly defamation actions that could surface given that some of Reid’s characters bore remarkable resemblances to contemporary political figures.

Ross Fitzgerald and Stephen Holt examine this complex man in *Alan “The Red Fox” Reid: Pressman Par Excellence*. The authors argue that it is necessary to examine Alan Reid’s contribution – his methods, motives and influence – in any assessment of Australia’s political history during the period from World War II up until the 1980s.

Alan Reid entered journalism during the 1930s. His hero during the Great Depression years had been Jack Lang. In those days, Reid had a left-wing political orientation and socialist sympathies. During the Second World War, Reid was admitted to a small group that received confidential briefings on the war’s progress by Prime Minister John Curtin.

Subsequently, he developed a close relationship with Prime Minister Ben Chifley. Chifley remained a hero to Alan Reid throughout his life. Indeed, he continued to support Chifley’s vision, even Chifley’s move to nationalise the banks.

The arrival of Prime Minister Robert Menzies in 1949 disrupted Reid’s privileged access to the powerful for a time. Initially, Menzies didn’t like or trust Reid.

In 1954, Alan Reid went to work for Frank Packer. Employment by the Packer family led to Reid’s tabloid career in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, writing for *The Bulletin* and appearances on television station Channel 9.

**THE RED FOX AND THE LABOR SPLIT**

The mid-fifties Labor split is instructive for what it reveals about Alan Reid in his characteristically dual roles as chronicler and operator. On 5 October 1954, “Doc” Evatt, who was Labor’s federal parliamentary leader, launched his savage attack and denunciation of a group of “disloyal” Labor people located mainly in Victoria.

Although Evatt did not use the name in his statement, B A Santamaria was the intended target. Evatt had decided to play the sectarian card. He calculated (incorrectly) that in attacking Santamaria and Catholic Action, he stood to gain two Protestant votes for every Catholic vote lost.
Evatt launched his alleged discovery of a Catholic plot in the ALP, despite the fact that he had been consulting and collaborating with Santamaria for some time. The result was a spiteful and damaging Labor split. The party lurched to the extreme left. It would be 1972 before it would be returned to the government benches in Canberra.

Just two weeks prior to Evatt’s statement, Alan Reid had written about Bob Santamaria in the Sydney Sun (on the 21 September). In effect, this prepared the way for Evatt’s statement. Alan Reid – at heart a novelist and playwright – began to portray Santamaria as an outside manipulator and religious schemer.

Robert Murray revealed in The Split: Australian Labor in the Fifties (Cheshire, 1970) that Alan Reid had assisted Evatt in drafting his statement delivered on the 5 October 1954 (Gerard Henderson referred to Alan Reid assisting Evatt with the drafting of the statement that helped to trigger the mid-1950s Labor split in the 14 August 2009 edition of “Media Watch Dog”).

Reid had sought to assist the strategy of party federal secretary Pat Kennelly, an important source for Alan Reid’s articles on the ALP. No word of Reid’s involvement in the “Split” appeared in his articles.

Reid had helped Evatt to start “a sectarian firestorm that could not be controlled.” And had helped to hand control of the ALP – Australia’s alternative government – into the hands of the extreme. Although Santamaria and Reid were to develop a workable relationship later on – and despite the split’s consequences which Reid came to regret – he continued to view his 1954 exposure of Santamaria as his proudest scoop.

From the time he went to work for Frank Packer, Reid began to develop important contacts on the conservative side of politics. He was unhappy with the extreme left’s grip on the Labor Party. This contributed to convergence of views developing between Alan Reid and his employer.

MOVING TO THE LIBERAL PARTY

Reid left the ALP in 1957. He maintained contact with several ALP parliamentarians but he was out of step with the party’s dominant power base. Menzies abandoned his former reservations about the journalist. Reid advised Robert Menzies and later Harold Holt on election strategies. Alan Reid also supported William McMahon during the difficult days McMahon was prime minister, at Packer’s instigation. His unflattering portrayals of John Gorton and Gough Whitlam helped to promote leadership challenges against both men. Bill Hayden viewed Alan Reid as a Packer “hatchet-man”. Paul Keating dismissed Reid as an “infamous Labor hater”.

Probably, Alan Reid is remembered best for the “36 faceless men” episode. A Special ALP federal conference – comprising 36 delegates, including one female delegate – occurred in March 1963. The Conference’s purpose was to decide ALP policy towards an American naval communications base planned for North West Cape (Exmouth Gulf). Canberra’s Hotel Kingston was the venue for this important meeting.

Inside the hotel, the mainly left-wing delegates were debating the policy outcome that would bind Calwell and Whitlam. Arthur Calwell, then federal Labor Parliamentary leader and his deputy, Gough Whitlam, were awaiting the outcome. Remarkably, Calwell and Whitlam stood outside the Kingston Hotel late at night under a lamplight anxiously awaiting the decision of Conference. Here were Australia’s alternative prime minister and his deputy “on the outside” of Labor’s decision-making processes.

What could better illustrate where real power resided, Reid thought, than photographs of the two elected parliamentary leaders waiting to receive their instructions? Alan Reid seized on the photo opportunity. He arranged with a friend to take photographs of the scene. Ross Fitzgerald and Stephen Holt reveal in Alan “The Red Fox” Reid the identity of Reid’s photographic contact and the circumstances under which it came about. These photographs damaged the ALP’s prospects decisively at the federal election that year and cast a stain on the ALP’s image that survived until the late 1960s.

As time passed, Reid’s sympathies were less and less aligned with trends in the Labor Party. He had no time for the “middle-class trendies” moving into positions of party influence. The trend towards permissive politics appalled him. He did not believe that politics should be about homosexuality and
abortion. Party voices in Victoria likening marriage to low-paid prostitution didn’t appeal either.

Reid was concerned that the influence of Dr “Nugget” Coombs on Aboriginal Land Rights might lead to a two-nation mentality. He was suspicious of multiculturalism. He feared the possibility that bureaucrats and “professional migrants” might prop up ethnic enclaves.

Alan Reid encouraged the career of Bob Hawke, seeking to portray Hawke in an electorally appealing manner. When Hawke became prime minister, Reid regarded him as the first down-to-earth federal Labor leader since Ben Chifley. However, he opposed deregulation and continued to view tariff protection sympathetically.

JOURNALISM AS ACTIVISM

Owing to ill-health, Alan Reid retired in 1985 and died in September 1987. Fitzgerald and Holt argue that Alan Reid represented the supreme embodiment of the relationship between politicians and journalists where each needs the other and each seeks to use the other. Alan Reid thrived in such interactions. But this is where journalists run serious professional risks. They may become too close to events. They may shape stories to suit a particular politician’s agenda. They run the risk of gravely misrepresenting stories. In the 1950s Labor split, for example, Alan Reid served the agenda of Pat Kennelly as well as the political interests of Doc Evatt in publicising the then unknown Santamaria in an unattractive light two weeks prior to Evatt’s offensive.

Reid also had direct input into Evatt’s press statement. Then, he reported the 5 October statement as if none of the above was relevant. As the authors point out, Alan Reid played “a faceless man” role himself. Fitzgerald and Holt draw a parallel between Alan Reid and Wilfred Burchett. Both men participated in stories they wrote about and failed to acknowledge their participation. Protecting his sources outweighed Alan Reid’s concerns about biased reporting. Alan Reid was informed and involved but only the former was evident to his readers. He reported on the political activities of others but never on his own political activities.

Laurie Oakes comments in the book’s Foreword that “Reid combined the best and some of the worst aspects of political journalism.” Although the book’s subtitle is “pressman par excellence”, the authors deplore the characteristic approach of Alan Reid whereby he combined participation in politics with publishing reports that were the work of an apparent observer. This, they believe, was unprofessional and unacceptable.

**John McConnell is the author of several senior textbooks**
Republican Bobby Jindal’s in Louisiana, demonstrate just how welcoming a society the US is.

But for Obama to become president in little more than two years after he started to consider running is an almost unimaginable achievement, demonstrating the genius of American society for rewarding talent. While the US is cruel to the incompetent, while it punishes failure and barely tolerates people who struggle in life, the great republic adores talent and will always give the ambitious and energetic, regardless of race and religion, gender or ethnicity, a go. The US does not level down, but it allows, encourages, expects, the ambitious to climb up.

Barack Obama is the American dream personified, proof the promise of the Declaration of Independence, that all are created equal, applies to all, or at least to the game and the gifted. That the republic renewed itself with his election during an economic crisis defined the endless potential of its institutions and the boundless energy of its political culture.

For all but the most adamant of optimists the rise of Barack Obama is remarkable, almost too good to be true.

BEYOND THE WEST WING

It certainly was beyond what the authors of popular culture’s paean to American politics, The West Wing dared describe. In the last series of this, perhaps the greatest political novel ever, the Democratic Party renews itself as the leadership passes from New England patrician Jed Bartlett to Hispanic Matt Santos.

The Obama and Santos narratives are spookily similar. Both men start as obscure federal representatives. Both are encouraged to run by masters of the political game who recognise that their candidate combines rare political skills and remarkable policy ability. Both believe that running for the presidency is a duty.

Both Obama and Santos come from nowhere at the start of the primaries to overcome insiders. Both campaign as change agents, outsiders who are not wise in Washington’s ways. Both rely on smart spouses. Both candidates hate pork barrelling and they both have health care plans. They both beat more powerful people in the primaries and go on to defeat enormously well respected Republican moderates in the general election. Most important, they are both decent men, respectful of others, whose success comes from their strength of character.

Perhaps the Washington veterans who advised the series’ writers picked Obama as the coming man, (certainly Santos’s chief of staff Josh Lyman is said to be modelled on Rahm Emanuel, the Democrat who runs President Obama’s office).

Perhaps it is entirely accidental that Obama’s campaign had so many of the attributes the West Wingers dreamed up for their ideal candidate. With one difference, the fictional president was Hispanic; the real one is part negro. In 2005, when the story of Santos winning his fictional election was made, it seems a black president was just too unlikely, even on television.

Where Matt Santos was a symbol of the way outstanding leaders can change America, Barack Obama is the substance. At least he is for the authors of these books, which all present Obama as a superior politician and human being.

Whatever happens in the next six years it seems certain that Obama will stay a saint for the Liberal left and will stamp his political character on public life for a generation.

OBAMA AND LINCOLN

That this is possible is largely due to the way, and when, he came to office. Obama is no Democrat veteran who won the presidency after a lifetime climbing the greasy pole. Working as a community organiser and serving in the Illinois state senate did not require him to do all that many doubtful deals, associate with the unsavoury and participate in the pork barrelling that is the inescapable lot of machine politicians. In terms of the taint of politics he is probably the cleanest of clean skins since Abraham Lincoln came from nowhere to win the 1860 election.

It is easy to overdo the comparison. Obama was the undisputed people’s choice where Lincoln became
president with just under 40 per cent of the popular vote in a four-way race.

But, while the circumstances are different, there are similarities with the way the two candidates came to power claiming to be outsiders, unsullied by the errors of the Washington establishment that had got the country into the mess they inherited.

Like Lincoln, Obama offered promise, but little else, in uncertain times. Like Lincoln, Obama had neither the experience nor allies expected of a serious candidate when he announced he was running. Like Lincoln he had a reputation as an orator but no known head for the electoral arithmetic winning his party's nomination required. And like Lincoln he faced a field of insiders, rich in experience and endorsements.

Most important, in the way they entered office, both men demonstrated a self-confidence, sense of purpose and determination that impressed those around them.

In Obama's case he won office because he was able to place his personality before the electors, independent of the media.

Certainly the times suited Obama. Once nominated, a drover's dog would have beaten any heir to George W Bush as the American economy collapsed. But Obama won with more than half the popular vote, 10 million more than McCain. A generation-high turnout of 60 per cent of the electorate demonstrated the depth of his support among the American people.

This was more than a vote against the Republican Party - it was an endorsement of an individual.

And the enduring message of all these books is that Barack Obama became president because he was a grown-up, a self-aware individual who demonstrated sufficient maturity for people to trust him. Certainly demonstrating he had the strength of character to do the job in an environment as complex and brutal as that of a presidential race took an enormously talented and well-resourced campaign.

But the common theme in all these books is that without a top quality candidate all the political smarts and money in the world would not have won the election.

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HEILEMANN AND HALPERIN – AN INSIDER’S VIEW

The most fascinating of these insider takes on the campaign is the one that will have the shortest shelf life and deservedly so. Heilemann and Halperin's excoriating analyses of individuals and events, their scathing statements on individuals' ethics are all
unsourced. They explain that the 300 interviews with 200 people, which are the basis of the book, were all undertaken on deep background, that this was the only way of “eliciting the candor (sic) on which a book of this sort depends”. And they ask us to take it on trust that their knowledge of people and events and the way many individuals told them the same story ensured that they nailed the narrative of the campaign.

Perhaps. But it does not take any special cynicism to wonder whether the authors coloured-in parts of their complex political portrait for which the substance of their interviews did not provide all the detail needed to make an incontrovertible case. Even with the strongest commitment to the truth there may have been times that they decided that while they had only gossip as to who was kissed they would tell the story anyway, that the balance of probabilities made what they assumed happened more likely than not.

Nor does it take an especially obdurate attitude to human nature to be suspicious of what people will say when there is no risk of anybody challenging their version of events. And it does not take an obsessive approach to the substance of a story to suggest that multiple sources just present the established version of an event in different words.

**GAME CHANGE – AND SCORE SETTING**

There is also some score settling in *Game Change*. Hillary Clinton’s chief strategist, Mark Penn, is presented as a fool and a thug who knew a lot less about the primary process than he thought he did, (admittedly Penn does not emerge well in any of the other books). This is gossip as the first draft of history.

But while it must be considered cautiously it does serve a useful purpose, putting the people and their peccadilloes at the centre of the story. *Game Change* explains why candidates acted as they did in very human terms. Where the cultural studies writers will interpret the election in terms of ethnicity and gender, and the historians will set it in an institutional context, Heilemann and Halperin write about anger that shapes most decisions people make, however they rationalise them.

*Game Change* reads like notes for a TV script, setting up characters in terms of their personalities rather than policies, and letting their actions in ordinary matters - how they treat their staff, respond to setbacks, present them as they are. Except that no *West Wing* script would have dared characterise candidates as Edwards and Clinton, McCain and Palin appear here.

Without the February 2010 revelations about Edward’s behaviour towards his wife and mistress, and the way he bullied a staffer into claiming responsibility for fathering his child, it would have been hard to take the book’s description of his behaviour seriously. But in admitting the substance of the charges, Edwards went a long way to making *Game Change* less a soap opera than an alarming explanation of how politics is show business for appalling people.

Edward’s narcissism made him unfit for public office at any level and the fact that he was ever a semi-serious contender for the Democrat nomination demonstrates an ability to delude too many people too much of the time which pessimists will find alarming, (optimists will argue that his small primary success says a great deal about the way the Democrat faithful are entirely unrepresentative of the electorate). That Edwards kept conning himself into thinking he could still run on Obama’s ticket long after his own behaviour ruined his campaign demonstrated why he was never a serious contender.

John McCain does not emerge anywhere near as badly, which is not saying much. While he is no liar and possesses all the self-discipline Edwards lacked, McCain’s moodiness and disorganisation derailed his campaign, which never amounted to anything impressive.

McCain also suffered from a disconnect between his self-image and the way he was perceived in politics. He was not interested in economics in an election shaped first by a recession and then a financial panic and he liked to present as an outsider in Washington, when he was, as Heilemann and Halperin report, “Bob Dole all over again”.

And, his running mate, Sarah Palin comes across as ambitious as she was ignorant – and in the way she did not know anything about twentieth century history she was exceedingly uninformed. That McCain was prepared to put this utterly inexperienced woman a heartbeat from the oval office in itself demonstrates he did not understand the size and significance of the presidency.

But it is Hillary Clinton who appears especially unpleasant in *Game Change*. The real race of 2008 was the Democrat primary rather than the general election. It was one that Clinton thought was hers by right and that Obama was an upset who had no business getting in the way of her nomination.

There is much about Clinton’s arrogance and ambition and her tin ear for human relationships (she demoted loyalist Patti Solis Doyle by email and then tried to reinstate her when the decision proved unpopular) that readers of Carl Bernstein’s *A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton* and Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta jnr, *Her Way: The Hopes and Ambitions of Hillary Rodham Clinton* will find familiar.
But what is new is the way she under-performed in the primaries. For all her determination and hard work she did not know how to extend her appeal beyond older women and unionists and there were not enough of them to win either the nomination or general election.

Clinton was beaten by a man who was not so much a better politician as a harder working individual who was more sensitive to the needs of those around him than she was and who, while focused on winning, recognised the world did not revolve around him. Clinton commanded obedience, Obama generated loyalty.

The core message in *Game Change* is Obama won because he had more stamina and self-discipline, because he understood what the voters wanted and how to pitch his message to them. Above all, he possessed and projected the qualities of a leader. After beating Clinton by running a smarter and more mature campaign built on his ability to change the country, the general election was over a month before people went to the polls when Obama demonstrated he was far readier than McCain to deal with the global financial crisis.

As Heilemann and Halperin put it:

**In a time of turmoil, Obama demonstrated a capacity to withstand pressure and keep his balance. The crisis atmosphere created a setting in which his intellect, self-possession and unflappability were seen as leaderly qualities and not as aloofness, arrogance, or bloodlessness, as they had sometimes been seen in the past. In the Obama campaign’s focus groups, doubts about his readiness began to fall away – while at the same time, voters described McCain as unsteady, impulsive, and reckless. This view was shared by Democrats and Republicans alike, by those watching the crisis from afar and those with a front-row seat.**

Obama beat Clinton and McCain because he was a better balanced individual than they were – and the electors understood it.

**RICHARD WOLFFE ON WHY OBAMA WON**

Obama’s all-round impressiveness is also the foundation of Richard Wolffe’s *Renegade*. This is a perfectly serviceable campaign history that covers all the issues and provides insights, albeit sometimes not much short of adoring ones, into the way Obama conducted himself from the Iowa caucuses to the inauguration.

But there is little here that does not appear in the other books and Wolffe is not across either the campaign mechanics or the politics of personality that make the other titles so absorbing.

Certainly readers who are really, really, interested in Obama will welcome some of the previously obscure information in the book. Wolffe provides an explanation of Obama’s 2000 primary loss against Congressman Bobby Rush – a case of too much ambition, too little self-awareness and no organisation. And the description of Obama being broke and barred from the Democrat Convention floor that year demonstrates the scope of his achievement in becoming president in less than a decade.

There are also occasional anecdotes that take the gloss off the image of his campaign team as invincibly united and all but incapable of unforced errors. Wolffe reports Obama suspecting strategist David Axelrod’s agenda in an argument over the stump speech. He mentions a “less honest” campaign mailing, which played into Clinton’s hands. And he suggests Obama could be full of himself, “sometimes it was hard to know where the Zen move ended and the complacency began.”

There is also a stronger analysis of Obama’s attitude to race than in the other books. This is particularly useful in showing how Obama defused the issue of ethnicity in the same way Kennedy neutralised questions of candidates’ religions nearly half a century before. And there is a discussion of the way Obama works, using basketball as a metaphor for his personal style and political approach, which may well work for anybody interested in the game.

But for all the arguments about Obama’s appeal, Wolffe’s most important point is why he won. For all the effort to brand Obama as a change agent, independent of the Washington establishment, it was the economy that won the general election. Wolffe describes how Obama’s team knew this in May 2008 and campaigned accordingly.

This does not diminish the book’s presentation of Obama as a remarkable individual who ran a remarkable campaign. However it does demonstrate that this was a conventional election, which was going to be decided by the economy even before the global financial crisis began to bite.

That Obama presented as a potentially better economic manager had as much to do with McCain’s inability to connect with the electorate as the Democrat’s credibility. Neither of which were all that impressive, as Wolffe acknowledges, “the economic debate amounted to neither straight talk nor change we could believe in. The only question was which caricature would lose the day.”
DAVID PLOUFFE AND OBAMA'S AUDACITY

For anybody interested in Obama as a bloke, Wolffe's is the one book to read. But for readers fascinated with campaigning as combat by other means it is no replacement for Game Change or for David Plouffe's war memoir. Plouffe, who with Axelrod ran Obama's campaign, makes an attempt at dealing with the issues as if they mattered but his real interest in writing The Audacity to Win is in explaining how the pair made Obama president.

This is a fascinating book for anybody interested in how an American campaign works, perhaps the best insider's explanation of the electoral process since Chris Hegedus and D J Pennebaker's 1994 film of Bill Clinton's win in the 1992 presidential election, The War Room.

Inevitably the book's war-diary approach ensures there are limitations. There are examples of what look like score settling. Plouffe describes seeing then candidate Bill Richardson of New Mexico "severely under the weather". He also explains at length how Obama's foreign policy advisor broke under the strain, doing nothing for that gentleman's career options. He questions Mark Penn's integrity and competence and his praise for Clinton's behaviour, especially when she finally accepted defeat, comes after extensive evidence showing she was not fit to be the Democrat candidate.

There is also some unimpressive spinning as Plouffe tries to explain why Obama broke his commitment not to accept public funds for the general election, with all the restrictions on raising money this involved, after private donations exceeded anything the campaign had originally thought was possible:

I felt we had a searing obligation to win this race – not just for Barack or on behalf of the staff, but from an absolute belief that we could not afford another four years of George Bush's domestic and foreign policies.

Above all, there is also a sense of selling in the book. Plouffe never pitches for business but he certainly shows why candidates in elections yet to occur need to know what he can do for them – which is a great deal. While Plouffe is careful not to blow his own trumpet too loudly - the campaign he describes was extraordinary, transforming politicizing in ways that are not yet completely understood.

Plouffe and his team used the web to take politics out of the mass media age and beyond the control of party machines. The Obama campaign raised hundreds of millions of dollars in donations, mainly from some small donors not party front organisations and with wealthy supporters only dominating early in the primaries. And Plouffe did not rely on Democrat bosses to get the votes out.

The most important aspect of this book is the description of the way Plouffe and his team combined online information and networking with grassroots campaigning to build a support base which made it possible to talk to voters, or at least supporters, quickly, cheaply and utterly independent of anybody else. Plouffe writes:

Our e-mail list had reached 13 million people. We had essentially created our own television network, only better, because we communicated directly with no filter to what would amount to about 20 per cent of the total number of votes we needed to win.

This popular insurgency will be familiar to students of American politics. As the progressive movement (often made up of nominal Republicans) sought to break the power of the big city machines and the corporate oligopolies that held sway in state legislatures at the start of the twentieth century, so Obama motivated independents and disenchanted Democrats 100 years later. While old guard conservatives now claim Obama is a captive of the public sector unions and the activist-left of the party, this is re-writing history. The bitterest battle in the 2008 campaign was between Obama's insurgents and the unions and party operators who backed Clinton.

But what was definitely new was the sophistication of the Obama campaign in building their candidate as a brand. Certainly this has gone on since Andrew Jackson became president and Joe McGinniss' study of Nixon's 1972 election The Selling of the President
demonstrated the first successful campaign that was as much about marketing as politics. Nor could anyone ever accuse Plouffe of understating his abilities. Even so, the descriptions of the way Obama was promoted are spectacular. The book concludes with a summary of the campaign strategy that says pretty much everything anybody needs to know about running a campaign – keep your message clear and consistent and ensure target voters hear it through multiple media.

While people fascinated by the craft of campaigning, “a marathon at a sprint pace”, will find Plouffe’s de-brief engrossing anybody who dislikes the way elections in the US resemble an interminable product launch will find it alarming. Certainly there is more than a touch of West Wing, where the sheer complexity of campaigning is reduced to show biz simplicities, about the book. For all his arguments that the campaign succeeded because it connected with ordinary people Plouffe describes a world where people had to work incredibly hard to use all the resources, spend all the money at the campaign’s disposal and where the impact of the recession and global financial crisis on people’s lives only intruded as electioneering opportunities.

However, in the end it all came down to Obama. Perhaps inevitably Plouffe gets carried away with his boss’s abilities, calling him “a chess player in a town full of checkers players” and ignoring the way the problems every president faces are a great leveller. But the substance of the book is that the campaign and its messages were modelled on the man, that if Obama was not the individual he was none of it would have worked:

We were a healthy organisation, warts and all. There have been plenty of organisations that thrive, for a time at least, under leaders who yell and scream and fly off the handle and are propelled forward by a culture of intimidation and even fear. But I believe that, ultimately, organisations are collections of human beings. They will perform best and make their greatest achievements when there is clarity, calmness, conviction, and collegiality throughout the ranks.

And, as these three books all demonstrate, this can only come from the top.

**CAMPAIGNING FOR A PRESIDENT**

The transcript of the seminar involving Democrat and Republic campaign managers published as *Campaign for President* also demonstrates the superiority of the Obama team. To an extent this is an unavoidable case of brilliance being conferred retrospectively.

It would be hard to argue after the election that Obama won despite his opponents running better campaigns. But David Plouffe’s comments (before he published *Audacity to Win*) demonstrate just how far ahead of all their opponents Obama’s team was.

From recruiting precinct captains to allocating hundreds of millions in media money, the Obama campaign was better organised than all its competitors. And in relying on the candidate’s identity, rather than trying to tailor his persona to the politics of each separate primary, they built a brand while the competition was struggling for slogans to generate attention.

That all the lesser campaigns could never create strong identities and clear messages for their candidates is very clear in this book. All the managers, especially the Republicans, focus on how they tried to pitch their politician across enough market segments to make them viable. They all failed, basically because the electorate wants to vote for an individual whose character they understand, not somebody who only offers a collection of sound bites and focus group approved aphorisms.

Sheryl Cohen, an advisor to Democrat also-ran Christopher Dodd, spelt out the challenge of creating an identity in the primaries in exclusively marketing terms:

*When you are a new cereal trying to introduce against better shelf space and they have better marketing and funds to do that, and the best salespeople want to go and...*
work for Kelloggs and Post, you have challenges. You were reduced to what I call the taste testings in the supermarket, which was retail politics on the ground. So for candidates who didn’t have the press coverage or the money or the organisation, you still took your shot. I would criticise ourselves. At the end of the day, our product wasn’t marketed different enough and better enough to say, “I’m going to change from looking here at this brand and I’m going to go over there.”

This is exactly what the Obama campaign did not do. From the start, when he was certainly not a front-runner (which Obama never really was until well into the primaries, when the competition caught on too late to Plouffe’s plan to win delegates in states where his candidate did not come out on top of the voting tally) Obama stuck to the script about who he was and what he wanted to do.

Certainly his “change” mantra was a brand position, but it was much more credible than the other candidates who sought to avoid issues and tell targeted voters what they wanted to hear.

While Obama was not above adjusting what he said to suit the state or circumstances and he spent enormous amounts of money on old-fashioned media advertising his medium became the message. Obama validated his claim to be a change agent, separate from the Washington establishment by using the oldest and newest machines. He had tribes of foot soldiers door-knocking and clans of pointy-heads working on online fundraising and messages.

Plouffe discusses this strategy in detail and in the process demonstrates just how far in front Obama’s campaign always was.

It did not have much to do with policy but a great deal to do with the way elections are won. There is an old adage that military amateurs discuss strategy while professionals are obsessed with logistics. This book will fascinate the political professionals.

NOT MUCH INTEREST DOWN UNDER

But it did not especially interest Australia’s literary editors, nor for that matter, did any of the others. Perhaps they decided anybody interested would plug into the extensive coverage of the books in the US media.

Or perhaps it is because that even with the endless coverage of the 2008 campaign the US is still a foreign country where they do politics differently, so differently that it is too much trouble to be bothered understanding all the detail.

Whatever the reason, coverage of campaign books was sparse, with only Game Change attracting attention, and this more than likely due to the interest generated by extracts in The Australian.

Writing in the Courier Mail (16 January) Denis Atkins described it as “a racy behind-the-scenes expose of sexual infidelity, campaign infighting, candidate mind-snaps and a never-ending parade of delusion and deceit that is US presidential politics”, or life in any office for that matter.

Josh Rosner (Canberra Times, 13 February) compared it unfavourably (a judgement which is all but mandatory in serious reviews of books on presidential campaigns) to Theodore White’s first Making of the President. Overall, however, he liked it:

\[\text{Despite its many flaws, it assumes for example certain knowledge of the US system of caucuses and primaries that the authors make no effort to explain, it is compulsive reading; at least, when it moves away from the gossip and focuses on the candidates, their political strategies, their triumphs and their failures. At its very best, I couldn't put it down.}\]

But ultimately he decided it failed the seriousness test:

\[\text{Heilemann and Halperin did a fine job of entertaining me. But I can't say by the end of the book that I felt any better off for the experience. A year into Obama's presidency, much of it seems prurient. It's entertaining, but if Theodore H. White is the benchmark, Race of a Lifetime is hardly enlightening.}\]

Michael Fullilove took it more seriously, suggesting the lack of criticism of its revelations in the US vouched for the authors’ use of hundreds of background interviews. And while he describes it as a book for “political junkies not policy wonks” he concluded that it is “a valuable piece of history - and tremendous fun” (Sydney Morning Herald, 13 February).

But will Game Change, and all the other books which conclude that Obama is a superior politician be confirmed? Well into his first term, with attention focused on the mid-term elections to come in November, rather than an election long-gone, many are arguing Obama’s potential was over-estimated.

Perhaps they have a point. Jimmy Carter never recovered from a bad start and Bill Clinton was humiliated by the first midterms he faced. But then again Lincoln was written off in his first 18 months.

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CORRESPONDENCE
PETE STEEDMAN ON JOHN MCLAREN’S HOPELESS BIOGRAPHY – AND ON HIMSELF

The article in The Sydney Institute Quarterly Issue 36 titled “Memoir Without Empathy – John McLaren on Vincent Buckley” was written by Gerard Henderson. Henderson documented the numerous historical errors in this poorly written book – which was subsidised to the value of about $100 a copy by the Australian taxpayer through grants from the Australian Research Council.

Neither Dr McLaren nor his publisher Australian Scholarly Publishing contacted the SIQ with a claim that any statements in Henderson’s article were inaccurate. No surprise really – since the scholarship and production were so poor that even a photo in the book confused Vincent Buckley’s second wife with the first daughter from his first marriage.

There is only a brief mention of Pete Steedman – who was the mature aged editor of the Melbourne University student newspaper Farrago in 1967. However, Steedman, has written a long letter – which has been printed in full here, since The Sydney Institute believes in debate and discussion. The only cuts which have been made are for legal reasons.

Sir/Madam

It was recently brought to my attention that I had featured in a review of a book by John McLaren in your August publication. While I have not read the book, I feel it is only right that I make some comment as to the substance of the review as it seems to perpetuate a series of falsehoods that those who don't seem to like me, including Santa's little helpers, have been peddling for over 40 years.

For the record. Firstly Gerry Henderson was not involved in the outrageous libels perpetrated by the so called “concerned parents, teachers and others interested in education”. This was a front for three aging cold war warriors, Ray Evans, later head kicker for Hugh Morgan and instigator of right-wing fronts such as the H R Nichols Society; Bob Browning, exposed a decade later in The Bulletin as working for ASIO and on his death described as a “security consultant”, and Kelvin Devine a member of the RAAF…

The ALP Club at the university had been split between the ideologies of Jim Jupp and Frank Knopfelmacher, the latter winning the battle. The club was mainly comprised of right-wing Catholics who had an obsession with the rise, as they saw it, of international communism and they perceived the coming struggle in Biblical terms. By using the ALP name they were able to propagate philosophies that had no credence within the Labor Party and with the Democratic Labor Party, were able to create doubt in the public’s mind as to the bona fides of the ALP. The DLP Club was at least honest and represented the dictums of Bob Santamaria and was consistent in their policies and ideology. Gerry Henderson was the President of the DLP Club.

As to being a “left-wing propaganda outlet”, I can only refer the writer to the analysis of Farrago content done by the ALP Club that totally destroyed this argument. It is also worthy to note here that when I took over Farrago it had a declining circulation and hundreds of copies were still lying around when the latest edition hit the campus. Under my editorship the circulation went up by the thousands and all were picked up within two days. This does not happen if you have a propaganda rag or are not ensuring that all the students, their societies and sporting associations do not [sic] get a fair go. I know this upsets some people but I was voted the best student editor in Australasia for three years – two with Lot's Wife and for my year with Farrago and you do not get that from your contemporaries with differing political views for running a propaganda sheet.

As for the accusation that I did not print material from my political opponents, I challenge you to find one, yes one example, because I was always very careful about that to avoid the criticisms such as the one in your paper.

It is interesting that within a month or two of arriving at University of Melbourne that there was a concerted campaign to stitch me up. Those who couldn't get me at Monash had obviously decided to move the battleground and hence these unprecedented attacks.

It was Knopfelmacher who was going to get [Vice-Chancellor] George Paton to remove me. That of course was after he stated, as reported in The Nation at the time, that “the gas chamber is too good for you Steedman. You are filth and vermin. You should be exterminated”. This, I suggest, is typical of the intellectual level of the attacks on me, as was the
attack in *Plain Talk*, the mouthpiece of the ALP Club, that stated “if you wish to get Colonel Serorg’s name on the Vietnam death list and help to pay for the bullets that killed his comrades, give to the Steedman [fund]”. Nice. What about “you can help the Viet Cong kill Major Pat Phola and the civil workers he protects by contributing to the Steedman [fund]”. As a PS they note: “If you are a particularly sensitive little flower and only want to go as far as having dialogue with mass murderers we suggest you contact Dr Max Charlesworth of the Melbourne University Philosophy department”.

Since it was the ALP Club who invented the lie of my “fund” this seems to come under the “big lie” category. They build on their own story that has no basis in reality. How do you handle such lies? At the time I had also been told by the security services that they were going to do me for treason (see 30 year release of Cabinet documents 1998) and I also had military intelligence trying to set me up (see *Lawyers, Gems and Money* by Paul Conroy). This was all a bit much for a lad from Brunswick who had never met a University student until he became one and who also came from a long military background and whose future had been Duntroon and Army service. I was a street fighter, not an intellectual.

A couple of other comments. Before the “Aid to the NLF” became a cause for the ALP Club, the following motion had been passed at the SRC on July 26, 1967: “That the SRC disassociates itself from the actions of the Melbourne University Labor Club in sending aid to the National Liberation Front. Moved Pete Steedman, seconded Geoff Hjorth.”

At this stage of the “debate”, there were Engineering and Medical students, raging around the university wearing swastikas. This was the environment being created by the ALP Club and their supporters.

The ALP Club was disassociated from the Clubs and Societies Union for massive irregularities including having no meetings and a bodgie membership list. Doug Kirsner of the Labor Club established a Liberal Country Party Club in the same spirit that the ALP Club was to Labor. Ian Reynard [sic] and Alan Stockdale did not like that! [The reference is to Ian Renyard].

I urged a vote for Gerry Henderson as the SRC elections approached in 1968 on the grounds that “it would be an excellent opportunity [for him] to learn what he is talking about”. So you see gentlemen, my political career seems to have been defined by my enemies. I have had to put up with a lot of shit for over 40 years, concocted by people who were working for the security services and no doubt had an incentive to go over the top.

I will finally leave you with the physical side of this “academic” dispute. There was the time a hundred or so engineering students surrounded me and were planning harm and public humiliation. Quick thinking and going for the throat of the biggest one saved that day. The time, one late night that I told Paddy O’Brien after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, “well that f---s up your theory of monolithic communism”, to be king hit off my chair.

Or the time that Dinny (as he became known) O’Hearn invited me to a party... ostensibly for a “peace talk” and I was jumped from behind..., kicked to the floor, dragged up and arms held by Paddy O’Brien and continually belted..., until a priest intervened. Frank Knopfelmacher, Vincent Buckley and a host of other luminaries, didn’t move.

Life sure was fun back then.

Pete Steedman

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**EDITOR’S COMMENT**

*The Sydney Institute Quarterly* is pleased that, finally, Pete Steedman has got all these (undocumented) assertions out of his system. Here’s hoping he continues to enjoy his retirement in Hurstbridge.

For Gerard Henderson’s view of Pete/Peter Steedman see *Media Watch Dog* Issues 47 and 56. The *SIQ* notes that Pete Steedman has confirmed that Gerard Henderson had nothing to do with any attempt to have Mr Steedman dismissed as *Farrago* editor and from the University. It was this howler – which Dr McLaren refused to correct – which interested the *SIQ* in his hopeless biography in the first place.
VALE JAMES GRIFFIN
18 OCTOBER
1929 - 9 MAY
2010

Jim Griffin addressed The Sydney Institute on two occasions – on Bougainville (May 1995) and on the Catholic businessman John Wren (March 2004).

The Sydney Institute Quarterly publishes two interpretations of Jim Griffin’s life. The first is by Gerard Henderson – who was taught history by Griffin at Xavier College, Melbourne, in the first half of the 1960s and who remained in contact with him until his death. The second is by Paul Ormonde, one of Griffin’s close friends and political allies. A shorter version of Ormonde’s obituary was printed in The Age on 24 June 2010.

JAMES GRIFFIN AND XAVIER COLLEGE - BY GERARD HENDERSON

Jim Griffin was a great teacher, a fine academic who was focused on practicalities and a gifted polemicist. He was also somewhat insecure – a fact which became increasingly evident as he grew older – and quite a hater with a long (and occasionally flawed) memory.

In 2008, Griffin published a monograph titled In Illo Tempore: A Memoir of Xavier College which contained the following note: “The book is not available for sale to the public”. In Illo Tempore was commissioned by Chris McCabe (when he was principal of Xavier College) and financially supported by the Eldon Hogan Trust. The Eldon Hogan Trust is associated with Xavier College and honours the memory of Eldon Hogan (1920-1995) who was attached to the school for many years and organised the Xavier College Cadets – on an unpaid basis – from 1950 until 1963. Hogan, a man of considerable inherited wealth, was a controversial figure at Xavier. He had talent but was immature and lacked the authority to handle teenagers. By the early 1960s, Eldon Hogan had become an embarrassment on the school campus and he was pressured to leave by the Jesuits. Yet, since Griffin liked Hogan, Hogan is treated kindly in Griffin’s memoir.

Copies of Griffin’s last finalised work are already circulating – and it would be naïve for Xavier College, or the Eldon Hogan Trust, to assume that this book will not find its way to those who are interested in the story.

Does this matter? Well – yes and no. It’s valuable to learn of Griffin’s reminiscences about the school at which he taught for most of the years between 1952 and 1968 (except for the time he spent in Italy in 1955 and 1956) and to learn of his assessments of the Jesuits with whom he dealt, fellow lay teachers and some students.

However, due to the apparent secrecy surrounding this project, In Illo Tempore was not adequately edited or fact-checked. The responsibility of this does not rest with the author – after all, he was nearly eighty years old when the manuscript was completed and he relied substantially on memory.

In Illo Tempore contains some valuable insights and some sharp character assessments. Yet it is, on occasions, both inaccurate and unfair. The problem is that Griffin used the opportunity to reflect on Xavier College in the 1950s and 1960s to continue old battles and settle old scores – while singing his own praises as a teacher at length.

Since the time frame is almost half a century ago, it is obvious that some of the author’s targets cannot defend themselves. In time, Griffin’s contentious history may become established history – if only because In Illo Tempore was not
subjected to the usual practice of critical review and there will be no one alive with different memories and rival interpretations.

In Australian Rules Football parlance, it is as if Griffin was given a free kick at the goal square after the match was over and the other team had headed for the dressing room. Those responsible for the publication of this book should make it possible for the manuscript to be corrected and, where necessary, to be criticised.

Readers of In Illo Tempore might get the impression that the teaching at Xavier College was somewhat perfunctory until Jim Griffin, supported by Fr Tom O’Donovan S.J., came along and turned the educational ship of state around. This is self-serving and unfair.

As Griffin himself acknowledged, the prominent scientist John Funder, who studied at Xavier in the 1950s, maintains that he received a fine education in the maths/science stream. My experience, in the humanities stream in the late 1950s and early 1960s, is identical. Like most schools – government and private – Xavier College had its problems and its faults before, during and after the Griffin era. It’s just that the place was not as dark as In Illo Tempore records.

It so happens that Griffin is most critical of Jesuits whom he did not particularly like – Fr Edmond Morris S.J. (1910-1971), Fr Jim Hawkins S.J. (1916-2004), Fr. Frank Wallace S.J. (1914-1993) and Fr. Ian Dillon S.J. for example. I found them fine men and good teachers.

Griffin is critical of the advice which Fr. Hawkins, when in senior positions, gave to Xavier College teachers in the 1960s – namely: “Be firm, be fair and be aloof”. In view of the sexual crimes committed by some male priests, brothers and lay staff at some all-male Catholic schools, Fr Hawkins’ advice was timely, appropriate and inherently wise.

Then there is the matter of politics. Griffin was an impartial teacher in the 1960s and did not discriminate against those who disagreed with him. However, he attempted to disguise his political leanings by presenting himself as almost apolitical. For some of his students, myself included, this was what would now be called spin.

As became known some years later, Jim Griffin was a card-carrying member of the Catholic Worker group – which supported the ALP after the Labor Split of the mid-1950s and which opposed both Daniel Mannix, the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne (who died in late 1963), the anti-communist activist B.A. (Bob) Santamaria and his National Civil Council (NCC) organisation, formerly known as The Movement along with the Democratic Labor Party.

There is more than a hint in In Illo Tempore that the Jesuits at Xavier College lined-up with Mannix, the DLP, Santamaria and the NCC and engaged in “anti-communist hysteria”. There is no evidence for this assertion and none is cited by Griffin. In fact, in my experience, the Jesuits at Xavier did not talk much about Australian national politics to students. Moreover, there is no evidence that teachers or students who opposed the Mannix/Santamaria position were in any sense discriminated against. Quite the contrary.

Jim Griffin is a case in point. For some 15 years, Xavier College employed Griffin as a senior teacher – despite the fact that he had not completed a university degree at the time and had no formal educational qualifications. This was the correct decision – and demonstrates that pieces of paper do not necessarily make a good teacher.

Xavier College also provided Jim and Helga Griffin and their children with substantially subsidised housing near the school. Even so, Griffin looked back on his Xavier College days with a degree of (unexplained) resentment.

The lay staff at Xavier College four decades and more ago had differing allegiances. There was a group who were supportive of Mannix, Santamaria and the DLP. And there were a group who were supporters of the Catholic Worker and the ALP. One of the problems with In Illo Tempore is that Griffin assesses his contemporary colleagues according to their political views.

One lay teacher – who was forced out of Xavier when Fr. Wallace S.J. complained that the pass rate in matriculation economics, where he taught, was too low – is praised. In my view, he was a poor teacher. But Griffin is scathing about another lay teacher – also, in my view, a poor teacher. The difference? One was a political ally of Griffin. The other was a DLP voter who...
married the widow of Bert Cremean, an early political ally of Santamaria. There are many such instances in the book.

_In Illo Tempore_ traduces the reputation of Fr. Bill Smith S.J. (1917-2000) – who, in fact, had little connection with Xavier College. Fr Smith married Jim Griffin and Helga Girschik in Rome and helped Griffin to obtain his position at Xavier. Griffin's objection to Fr Smith is essentially that he was one of Santamaria's political allies. Here is an example of the author using a book, ostensibly on Xavier College, to bag a Jesuit who had virtually no relationship with the school in order to score a political point.

Griffin also used his memoir to theorise about the reason why a former student (who is not named but identifiable to his contemporaries) committed suicide at university. Without any evidence, Griffin casts judgment on the young man's schooling and theorises about his sexuality. This comment should never have been published.

Also, _In Illo Tempore_ provides space for one of Griffin's mates to reveal that he was unfairly deprived of being dux of the school in, wait for it, 1943 due to the actions of a Jesuit who died in 1989. Gosh. Griffin recalls that the young man who was dux in 1943 had a disastrous marriage. Really.

If Xavier College had been as supportive of Mannix and Santamaria, as Griffin remembered late in his life, it is unlikely that he would have been so favoured during his time on the staff. And it is impossible to imagine that Xavier College would have employed so many Catholic Worker activists. Indeed, in the 1960s, it seems that a significant percentage of the Catholic Worker editorial committee was on the Xavier College payroll.

Jim Griffin was a life-long contrarian. Some of his liveliest work involves his polemical critiques of such Catholics as Daniel Mannix and Bob Santamaria and such leftists a Frank Hardy, Manning Clark and Stuart Macintyre. There is a place for polemics in historical critique and Griffin filled this role with distinction.

However, _The Australian Dictionary of Biography_ erred when it commissioned Griffin to write Daniel Mannix's _ABD_ entry. He lacked the disinterest for such a task. Commissioning James Griffin to write about Archbishop Mannix would be like asking Bob Santamaria to write about Cardinal Norman Gilroy, the one-time pro-ALP Catholic Archbishop of Sydney.

Griffin was an antagonist with respect to Mannix – just as Santamaria was an antagonist with respect to Gilroy. It is a matter of record that the _ADB_ did not commission Santamaria to write about Gilroy for posterity.

Griffin died without completing a promised biography of Mannix. He had agreed to speak about this book at The Sydney Institute. Alas, this will not take place but it is hoped that the manuscript finds a publisher – and that, unlike _In Illo Tempore_, it is subjected to a proper and professional editing, fact-checking and reviewing process.

Jim Griffin was always a controversialist – with a tribal attitude to his friends and sometimes an unfair disdain for those with whom he disagreed. I liked and respected Jim. But I also recognised that, like the rest of us mere mortals, he had been affected by The Fall. _requiescat in pace._

**JAMES GRIFFIN – SCHOLAR, TEACHER, TENOR, POLEMICIST AND RACONTEUR – BY PAUL ORMONDE**

When Jim Griffin died of cancer last month aged 80 he had been anxiously trying to finish his last major work - a biography of the late Archbishop Daniel Mannix. He had written more than 100,000 words, all but the last chapter. A month before, he telephoned me from his home in Canberra: “Mate, I’ve run out of energy. Can you come up and help me put it together. Do you mind being my amanuensis?” He loved words like amanuensis, partly one must guess for display but also for nuance and to reflect his love for the richness of English.

I then spent four days with him and his wife, Helga, taking notes of what he wanted to say. He felt passionately that the many biographies of Mannix were under-researched and too deferential – most of them hagiographic, he would say – and that the public record of this most famous and revered of Melbourne’s Roman Catholic archbishops (in office from 1917 to his death in 1963) should take greater note of his human blemishes, while also acknowledging his
ecclesiastical achievements, charisma, and the widespread admiration in which he was held by Victoria’s Catholic community.

Griffin had written 8000 words on Mannix for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* in which he drew attention to uncomfortable aspects of the archbishop’s past which he felt had been avoided or downplayed by earlier biographers – for example that Mannix’s younger brother had abandoned Catholicism and become an outspoken atheist. “I would have thought,” Griffin said, “that this should have shed some light on family nurture.” When Catholic critics objected that Griffin’s *ADB* entry had tried to cut the archbishop down to size, Griffin responded: “Well, if it’s the correct size, what’s the problem?”

Griffin was born in Warrnambool, the son of a Gallipoli and Somme veteran who had died prematurely when Jim was less than a year old. At Jim’s wish, he was buried with his father in Warrnambool Cemetery after his funeral service in St Christopher’s Cathedral, Canberra.

Jim and his brother Dan were reared by their mother Annie and her parents. She took a job at the Warrnambool Knitting Mills. When the family moved to Melbourne in the mid-1930s, Jim attended a parish school in St Kilda and later De La Salle College, Malvern. He proved to be an outstanding if unusually confident and assertive student. He went right through school and university on scholarships.

At Melbourne University he studied the subjects which remained the passions of his life – history and English, along with singing. He had a fine lyric tenor voice – and a remarkable repertoire of classics and popular songs - which he was happy, indeed keen, to display along with his learning, wit and storytelling which enriched the family’s social occasions for more than half a century.

Jim married Helga Girschik in 1956 at St Peter’s Basilica in Rome where Jim had a clerical post in the immigration section of the Australian Legation. Having had an early period as a teacher at Xavier College, the position was offered to him again on his return from Italy. In the following 11 years he developed a reputation as an inspirational teacher. The present Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart, and the former Deputy Prime Minister, Tim Fischer, were among his pupils.

In 1968 he accepted an invitation from the Professor of History at the fledgling University of Papua New Guinea, Ken Inglis, to take a history post. Between then and his ultimate retirement, Griffin spent 15 years in PNG during two periods, becoming a mentor to local students, many of whom became national leaders. His writings pioneered the unpopular warnings of imminent civil unrest in Bougainville, the copper-rich island which he visited more than 30 times before the crisis. He became Professor of Extension Studies at the University of PNG in 1980, establishing in Bougainville UPNG’s first of several regional Studies Centres. Later he was Professor of History. In 1991 the university appointed him Emeritus Professor.

As head of the Department of General Studies at the Townsville College of Advanced Education in 1976-79, Griffin also involved himself in indigenous rights issues as well as initiating a Diploma of Performing Arts. Having also been intermittently a senior research fellow in Pacific History at the ANU, in 1991-94 he became a principal analyst, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, in the Office of National Assessments, the intelligence body within the Prime Minister’s Department.

In his retirement Griffin wrote a biography of John Wren with the purpose of correcting the impression created by Frank Hardy’s novel *Power Without Glory* that the criminal character of John West was a true representation of John Wren, as was widely believed. Griffin found Wren not guilty with the exception that, in his early twenties, he had run an illegal totalisator. Griffin had previously written the entry on Wren in the *ADB*.

Jim is survived by his wife Helga, their six children Justin, Gerald, Denis, Anthea, Cathleen and Gabrielle (the first, James, died after birth) and seven grandchildren Julian, Laura, Patrick, Priscilla, Uriel, Sam and Giovanna.

*Journalist and author, Paul Ormonde, is a friend and was a working colleague with James Griffin on the Catholic Worker for many years.*
The inaugural issue of Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch was published in April 1988 – over a year before the first edition of the ABC TV Media Watch program went to air. Since November 1997 “Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch” has been published as part of The Sydney Institute Quarterly. In 2009 Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch Dog commenced publication as a weekly e-newsletter – it appears on The Sydney Institute’s website each Friday.

THE LEFTIST INNER-CITY SANDAL WEARERS VERSUS THE PEOPLE

There is only one thing that we really know about the future. And that is that we know nothing about the future. That’s why all prophets are false prophets – even though they invariably get a run in the media.

ROBERT MANNE, JUDITH BRETT AND BRIAN COSTAR GIVE THE CRYSTAL BALL A GO BUT MISJUDGE VOTERS

Robert Manne’s By-Election Fantasy

In so far as elections go, there is only one scientific, or near-scientific, basis on which to make a prediction. Namely, opinion polls. Yet some academic commentators, in the absence of polling, take to looking into crystal balls, examining tea leaves or whatever in their rush to make predictions – which are really only a form of wish fulfilment – about what electors really think.

In late 2009 it was commonly predicted that the Coalition would lose at least 20 seats in the forthcoming Federal election. Then the Liberal Party changed leaders – when Tony Abbott replaced Malcolm Turnbull – on 1 December 2009. This happened to be virtually on the eve of the by-elections for Liberal held seats of Bradfield in Sydney (vacated by Brendan Nelson) and Higgins in Melbourne (vacated by Peter Costello) – which were held on Saturday 5 December 2009.

In the absence of polling, some academic commentators soon stepped up to make predictions about the results in Bradfield and Higgins – after consulting crystal balls, examining tea leaves and so on.

Writing in The Australian on Friday 4 December 2009, Robert Manne not only predicted a victory for his friend – the Canberra based Greens candidate Clive Hamilton – but also “the destruction of the Liberal Party” soon after 5 December 2009. The La Trobe University politics professor referred to Tony Abbott as the leader of the Liberal Party’s “troglodyte-denialist wing” and referred to Abbott as the “troglodyte-in-chief”. It seems that such language is acceptable at La Trobe University. Manne admitted that some of his views were “fantasy” – but he did not make it clear what was fantasy and what was not. Here is Manne in full flight on Friday 4 December 2009:

Sometimes, in the life of Australian politics, by-elections show us our future. The Bass by-election of 1975 made it clear that the Whitlam government was finished. The Canberra by-election of 1995 made it no less clear that the arrival of a Howard government was imminent. On Saturday there are by-elections in affluent inner-city Melbourne and Sydney, Higgins and Bradfield. If these by-elections reveal a major shift of political sentiment towards the Greens, they may turn out to be no less significant than Bass and Canberra.

The more intriguing by-election is in Higgins, where Clive Hamilton (a friend of mine) is standing for the Greens. Hamilton is the former director of the left-wing think tank the Australia Institute. He is the author of several landmark books: Affluenza on the contemporary Western addiction to conspicuous consumption; The Freedom Paradox on the moral vacuum at the heart of Western libertarianism; and Scorcher on “the dirty politics of climate change”. He is a member of an endangered species in Australia, a public intellectual....

Like many of us, Hamilton is overwhelmed by the danger humanity faces as we drift, eyes wide open, towards environmental catastrophe. His next book is called Requiem for a Species. It argues that it may already be too late to avoid climate change disaster. Yet despite his pessimism, when he was invited by the Greens to stand in Higgins, he accepted. Given what is now at stake, how in conscience could he not? Although he is by no means a natural politician, there are two main reasons why Hamilton may poll well in Higgins...

This was mere wish fulfillment. Manne should have understood that. Hamilton was too left-wing for a seat
like Higgins. Moreover, he was a resident of Canberra who was a fly-in/fly-out candidate, scoring a large carbon footprint in the process. Manne’s theory that Hamilton might win Higgins was nothing but bizarre. In any event, on the basis of this hope, Manne went on to theorise – or, rather, fantasise – about the future of Australian politics after a Greens victory in Higgins:

Let us imagine, then, if only for the sake of argument, that Hamilton does indeed poll well in tomorrow’s by-election. What might transpire as a result? The media will immediately have a new theme: the rise of the Greens. This itself will greatly strengthen their appeal. Soon after the by-elections, a double dissolution election is likely to be held. If so, the Coalition will be routed. Not only are they hopelessly divided over climate change. Very many Australians will not vote for a Catholic party leader whose religious convictions fashion his politics. As a consequence of the Coalition’s collapse, the Greens will almost certainly hold the balance of power in the new Senate.

Manne’s comments on Tony Abbott’s Catholicism are odd since in the early 1990s Manne worked with the Catholic political activist B.A. Santamaria with a view to establishing a new political party in Australia.

From here, Manne’s fantasies continued. The Greens victory in Higgins would lead Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to negotiate with the Greens on climate change. This would result in Australia investing heavily in alternative energy industries and gradually phasing out coal production. Manne concluded:

Through these actions, Australia may become a leader and not a delinquent in the struggle to combat climate change. Our actions may have a benign domino effect. The better angels of the Australian character, dormant for so long during the Howard years, may finally awake from their slumber.

This fantasy, of course, will not come to pass in detail. But if the Greens can achieve a breakthrough in the by-elections being held on Saturday, and if something even approximating to my fantasy about the consequences of such a breakthrough does indeed take place, the few days that separated the destruction of the Liberal Party from the opening of the Copenhagen conference [on 7 December 2009] might come to be seen as a turning point in the moral history of this country and as the moment when the politics of climate change in Australia could no longer reasonably be described as dirty.

If such an essay had been handed in by a student in a first year Australian politics course at La Trobe University, it would have failed. Or, at the very least, a re-write would have been requested to remove prophecies and fantasies. It seems that a different standard applies for Professor Manne.

**Judith Brett Predicts The Demise Of The Liberal Party**

It’s much the same with Judith Brett. On Saturday 5 December 2009 Dr Brett, another La Trobe University politics professor, wrote an article in *The Age*. Unlike Manne, she did not make a specific prediction about the Bradfield and Higgins by-elections. But she did maintain that the Liberal Party had seriously damaged its electoral prospects by electing Tony Abbott as leader over rival contenders Malcolm Turnbull and Joe Hockey. She described this as a “profligate squandering of talent” and concluded her article with a prediction that the Liberal Party, under Abbott, would end up as little more than a protest movement in the outer suburbs. As will be documented later, the likes of Brett do not much like suburban types. This is Dr Brett’s conclusion:

Facing a prime minister [Kevin Rudd] with none of Labor’s traditional suspicions of big business, the Liberals risk becoming a down-market protest party of angry old men in the outer suburbs. Achieving responsible and effective policy responses to climate change is a massive political challenge, which will only be met if the interests of the planet are put ahead of those of the party. The temptations to run scare campaigns are enormous. Does anyone seriously think Abbott will be able to resist?

**Professor Costar Also Gets It Wrong**

On the morning of the by-elections, Brian Costar, Professor of Politics at Swinburne University, predicted that Kelly O’Dwyer, the Liberal Party candidate in Higgins, would be forced to preferences, following a strong performance by the Greens.

**AN ACADEMIC MISJUDGMENT OF LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC VOTERS**

In fact, Professor Manne, Professor Brett and Professor Costar were all hopelessly wrong. The Liberal Party retained Bradfield and Higgins – receiving a swing in its favour in both seats. Moreover, Kelly O’Dwyer was not forced to preferences in Higgins. Here was a case where three Melbourne-based politics professors had failed to have a feeling for what was happening in the Melbourne seat of Higgins – and were also wrong about the Sydney seat of Bradfield. Also, contrary to Brett’s prophecy, soon after the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change – which was a disaster – Kevin Rudd put Labor’s proposed emissions trading scheme in abeyance. In other words, in Brett’s terminology, Rudd put the interest of Labor ahead of those of “the planet”. How could the likes of Manne, Brett and Costar get it so wrong? Well, one of the answers lies in the fact that, in both Bradfield and Higgins, the Liberal Party did best in the lower-socio economic areas. In other words, this was another example of well educated professional types...
having little understanding of the attitudes of the less educated who do not have tenured positions or taxpayer subsidised superannuation. The misjudgments of both Robert Manne and Judith Brett were influenced by the fact that they became barrackers for a cause. Manne has a catastrophist position on climate change and Brett believes that she knows best how to save the planet. Both professors falsely assumed that their views on environment policy were compatible with a majority of voters in Bradfield and Higgins. The evidence suggests that the less well off in both electorates were more concerned about power prices on family budgets than on “planet saving” as proposed by tenured academics.

Professors Manne, Brett and Costar have worked as tenured academics for decades – paid each month per courtesy of the taxpayer. If someone has never worked in the private sector or had to worry about retaining employment, it is easy to misjudge what people in the suburbs and regional centres are on about.

THE SNEERING OF THE RADICAL MIDDLE CLASS

Margaret Simons Gets Shocked At Fountain Gate – With A Little Help From Julianne Schultz

There is also evidence that some commentators, who are prominent in the media, look down on the less educated Australians who live in the suburbs and regional areas of Australia.

In 2005 the Griffith Review – edited by academic, and now ABC board member, Julianne Schultz – published a collection of essays titled People Like Us (Griffith Review, Winter 2005). In her introduction – titled “Colliding worlds of people unlike us” – Dr Schultz defined the term “people like us” as comprising “that group of educated, informed, articulate and socially-liberal people”. Then there are the “people unlike us” who, presumably, she regards as poorly educated, uninformed, inarticulate and just not nice on social issues. How elitist can you get?

Julianne Schultz also maintained that “most of us surround ourselves with like-minded people”. Hence Griffith Review’s decision to send Margaret Simons “on a journey to try to discover the difference between life in inner-city Melbourne and its sprawling suburbs, between Lygon Street and Fountain Gate”.

It turned out that Margaret Simons’ journey from Carlton to Fountain Gate was, well, embarrassing. The problem was that Schultz did not realise how condescending the original idea and its execution was. Schultz lives in inner city Edgecliff in Sydney. And Simons, who lives in trendy inner-city Flemington in Melbourne, has no self-understanding of her snobbishness towards less educated Australians.

Simons made the decision to visit Fountain Gate shopping centre in much the same way as someone would visit an undeveloped foreign land. Her initial trip took place following a decision to stop off in Narre Warren on her way back from the Dandenongs – in search of the answer to the question: “What was the difference between the people who choose to live here and ourselves?”

Readers of the Griffith Review would have received an idea of what Margaret Simons would find on her journey from the Dandenongs when she wrote:

There wasn’t much sign of giant factories as we drove in. What were recently paddocks are now housing estates filled with little blocks and big houses. We passed a street, caught sight of the name, and laughed. Ernest Wanke Road. We speculated about whether Mr Wanke had really wanted a road named after him and whether the residents were grateful.

Ms Simons’ snobbish message was clear. Only wankers would live in big houses on little blocks in Ernest Wanke Road. Laugh? – She just couldn’t resist the temptation.

So it came as no surprise to learn that Margaret Simons and her partner were culturally shocked by what they discovered at Fountain Gate. As Simons put it:

We seemed to be among the oldest people in the mall and one of very few couples without children tagging along. We were surrounded by bleached hair, artfully ruffled and stressed jeans and tracksuits. We stood out, partly because of our age, partly because of our dress. Both of us were wearing hemp. My partner also wore a silk shirt. But there was also, I thought, something indefinable that marked us apart. The looks on our faces, the way we carried ourselves and, of course, the way we were peering about. The couples sitting in the coffee shop spoke quickly, in brief sentences. The accents were broader than those in inner-city coffee shops. I searched for a word to describe the faces around us. Was it “closed”?

But by now I was feeling ridiculous. I was searching for things I would never seek to find in any other shopping centre, at any other time. I was making silly generalisations. I was trying too hard. I said: “I think it’s clear that I should live in Ernest Wanke Road [in Narre Warren].” And we left. Just 45 minutes later we were in Lygon Street, Carlton, where two bookshops face each other across a road almost entirely devoted to conspicuous refinement and good taste.

So there you have it. Carlton is all about conspicuous refinement and good taste. And Fountain Gate is about anything other than conspicuous refinement and good taste. Rather, it is about men and women with children, dressed in tracksuits, with broad accents and replete with “closed” faces.

So what had brought about such a traumatic experience for Margaret Simons at Fountain Gate? Simons found out from the newsagent that its biggest selling magazines are Girlfriend and Dolly. Also, the tabloid Herald Sun “was the only newspaper people bought in numbers”. The Age sold on Saturday – but only because it “carried car and real estate advertisements”. And the best seller at the bookshop
was Dan Brown’s Da Vinci Code. How shocking. Here is a place in the suburbs where women read Girlfriend in preference to Robert Manne’s The Monthly, where men buy The Age for the motor section rather than to read Michael Leunig’s sandal-wearing leftist rants and where people support Dan Brown rather than Margaret Drabble. How bad can you get?

Back in Carlton, however, Margaret Simons reported that at the Readings bookshop “the top novel was The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini and, in non-fiction, the best seller was the latest in the Australian Quarterly Essay series – a piece by Raimond Gaita about trust and lies in politics”. How good can it get?

Margaret Simons then reflected on the difference between Carlton and that strange land at Fountain Gate.

What were the differences between here and Fountain Gate? The scale of Lygon Street is small. People like Readings because it is small – because it is not Borders – and precisely because it caters to minority taste. Watching the people in the cafes, it was immediately clear where the term “chattering classes” had come from. People were gathered here for the purposes of conversation. The dress was more various. There were stressed jeans and bleached hair here as well, but also elegant grey bobs and understated handmade jewellery and big mohawks and lots of black clothing.

Soon after, in the essay, Simons revealed that she felt that she agreed with a friend – “over latte in the central city” – that “we are morally superior”. She later reflected that “the university-educated are less likely to be firmly committed to Australia”. This led her to recall “all the conversations among my friends, in the wake of successive Howard Government victories, about the attractions of New Zealand”.

This was a reference to the claim by quite a few inner-city leftist luvvies looking down with contempt on people who were depicted as poorly dressed, tobacco addicted, overweight, near-illiterates: “installations”. Around me everyone was wearing handmade jewellery and big mohawks and lots of black clothing.

Margaret Simons went on to reflect about issues that divide the inner-city tertiary educated “us”, from the outer-suburban less-educated “them”. According to Simons, these differences:

...could be summed up as those of patriotism, national identity, immigration including asylum seekers, and attitudes to our history, including the past and present treatment of Aborigines... It seems to me that these issues are to do with notions of nationhood and fairness. They are to do with notions of us and them - who we are, who belongs, who does not and who is deserving of our help and compassion.

And so it came to pass that Simons thought that Fountain Gate was so different it was worth another visit. How condescending can you get? But it gets worse. Here is Simons describing her decision – on her second trip – to accost shoppers at Fountain Gate and ask them questions, as if they were some kind of freaks:

I wandered the Fountain Gate shopping centre and accosted strangers. I announced myself as a journalist and asked questions like: “Have you heard of the culture wars?” and “Do you think there is a big divide between the inner suburbs and the rest of Australia?” and “What do you think of inner-city educated people?” Many people walked away without reply. Others shrugged, refused to engage. Most were friendly, and blank on the topic. Some were stereotypically hostile. “I want my children to go to university,” one said, “but I don’t want them becoming like them.” He meant “elite”.

How confronting. And how insensitive. Yet neither Simon nor Schultz understood just how embarrassing these trips to Narre Warren were. Here was an educated inner-city leftist luvvie looking down with contempt on people who were depicted as poorly dressed, tobacco addicted, overweight, near-illiterates:

In the chemist shop across the way, there was a big display for Nicorette patches and another for slimming products. In the bookshop, Paul Jennings’s book on encouraging your child to read was given pride of place, accompanied by The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and its predictable sequel, The 8th Habit.

After a reflection that all of “us” – as well as all of “them” – are into self-improvement and that we are are all social-climbers, Simons hit the road out of Fountain Gate bound for people like her in inner-city Melbourne:

I left Fountain Gate, hit the Monash Freeway and just 45 minutes later was in the inner suburbs. There were no huge shopping facades, no giant plasma screens, no stirring lyrics. In the cafe where I stopped for lunch there was gentle music playing - clearly “ethnic”, and nothing I had ever heard before. Its attractiveness relied on it being exotic.

On the wall were posters inviting me to attend concerts, plays, “experiences” and “installations”. Around me everyone was reading or talking. I couldn’t spot the message here. I couldn’t see the belief, the underlying narrative, in this suburb. I was at home, inside the goldfish bowl, and therefore invisible to myself. I wondered how we would look to a resident of Holt [the Federal electorate which includes Narre Warren], fish
out of water, walking by. Probably my face would have seemed unreadable. Closed.

Margaret Simons’ “Ties that bind” essay was not intended as a put-down of the less-educated suburban dwellers by a member of the inner-city, leftist inclined type who confesses to a certain moral superiority. It just turned out that way – because Simons was honest about her beliefs and Schultz was too close to Simons’ world view to form a critical assessment of the intellectual snobbery in the presentation. Indeed Schultz made the conscious decision to place Simons’ essay first in her collection People Like Us.

There is only one piece of self-awareness in Margaret Simons’ essay. Towards the end of her article, she reported on her remorse during her second visit to Fountain Gate when it finally dawned on her that the good people of Narre Warren do not care much about inner-city educated classes:

**After a while, I caught a glimpse of how I and my kind appear, viewed from Fountain Gate. Mostly, I don’t think the people of Fountain Gate think about us much at all. This is perhaps the most important lesson. That most of Australian life is not about us.**

This is a perceptive comment. It is the fact that so many people in the suburbs and the regions do not think much about inner-city leftists like Margaret Simons that sparks the latter’s contempt for suburban and regional Australia. At times this contempt is white-hot, as the following examples illustrate.

### CATHERINE DEVENY MOCKS THE SUBURBS

Stand-up comedian Catherine Deveny is a real hit among the Melbourne leftist set. She was a columnist with *The Age* – until she was recently sacked by editor Paul Ramadge for insensitive comments theorising about the statutory rape of a young female. These days Ms Deveny appears regularly on the ABC – which gave her quite a few guest presenter “gigs” when she was an Age columnist.

On 6 August 2008, Ms Deveny revealed her contempt for the “them” in the suburbs. Writing from her abode in inner-city Brunswick, Catherine Deveny declared:

**I can’t tell you how often I seriously wish I were living in some outer suburb content with signed and framed football jumpers on the wall, no book shelves and a coffee table covered with remote controls, happy to read romance novels over my Cup-a-Soup. At least I’d have some peace.**

Not long after, Catherine Deveny reflected on her experiences visiting the Chadstone Shopping Centre in suburban Melbourne. It turned out that her contempt at what she saw virtually matched the experience of Margaret Simons at Fountain Gate. This is what Deveny wrote in *The Age* on 13 November 2009:

**Chadstone is the largest shrine to Mammon in Australia. So I went to find out whether**

the population of Australia (the amount of people who visit each year) could be wrong. They are. Or I am. You choose.

Chadstone is a metastasised tumour of offensive proportions that’s easy to find. You simply follow the line of dead-eyed wage slaves attracted to this cynical, hermetically sealed weatherless biosphere by the promise a new phone will fix their punctured soul and homewares and jumbo caramel magachinos will fill their gaping cavern of disappointment.

Catherine Deveny went on to sneer at the wearers of “cheap clothes” and those who eat “processed food” along with “fat people” and “old folk on scooters”:

**Why buy a doughnut when you can buy a doughnut maker? Water when you can buy a water filtration unit? Or a pie when you can buy a pie maker? Easy to clean, easy to store and 20 per cent off! Why buy clothes when you could purchase a garment to enhance your “lifestyle experience”? Most people had more than 10 loyalty cards in their wallets. Loyalty card sluts. The food is obscene. Its abundance and pointless variety communicate a lack of intrinsic value. As if it were not grown and prepared by humans. Just processed. As I passed the giant cookies and monstrous muffins, The Pancake Parlour looked lamer than usual. But there was an honesty in its lameness I respected. If anyone can illuminate me to the point of Pretzel World I’d forever be in their debt.**

No one looks happy. Everyone looks anaesthetised. A day spent at Chadstone made me understand why they call these shopping centres complexes. Complex as in a psychological problem that’s difficult to analyse, understand or solve.

So, according to Deveny, those who live in the suburbs do not read suitable literature or dress properly, are overweight and live unhappy lives. Prior to writing this column, Ms Deveny had never been to Chadstone. She had, however, been to Northland in lower socio-economic Preston. She wrote that Northland shoppers were overweight smokers who possessed neither shoes nor teeth. *(The Age*, 13 October 2009). Funny eh?

### JON FAINE BAGS HOME BUYERS IN INDUSTRIALISED ALTONA

ABC Metropolitan Radio 774 presenter Jon Faine is another trendy leftist who does not have much time for his fellow Melburnians who live in lower socio-economic, or what used to be called working-class, areas.

Altona was a working class suburb on Port Phillip Bay which remains in the lower socio-economic group of suburbs. In short, it does not exude the cultural refinement of a Carlton or a Flemington or a
Brunswick. In early 2010 there was a by-election in the safe Labor State seat of Altona. Here is a transcript (taken from Crikey of 12 February 2010) of a discussion between Jon Faine and Labor candidate Jill Hennessy.

Jill Hennessy: Jon, there’s a reason that people are moving in droves to part of the western suburbs, it’s because it’s a terrific place to live.


Hennessy: Well, we have great –

Faine (interrupting): It’s industrial, it gets the fumes from the industrial zones wafting across it. It’s not a very attractive area and never has been and never will be.

Hennessy: Oh well, Jon. I don’t know what parts of the Altona electorate you’ve been down to look at. But there’s the gorgeous Bay along Altona, there’s fabulous wetlands.

Faine (interrupting): They’ve spoiled it. It’s the worst part of the Bay.

Hennessy: There’s…fabulous vibrant communities throughout the entirety of the electorate.

Faine: It’s cheap real estate. That’s the only reason people look to it. Come on.

Hennessy: Well Jon, people are entitled to access affordable housing. And as this community grows it is absolutely essential we continue to invest in community infrastructure to ensure that the west is a livable part of Melbourne. Melbourne has again been identified as the world’s third most livable city.

Faine: Most of the area you represent – there are some houses that sell for a lot of money with water views – but the rest of it is cheap real estate for people who are getting a foothold in the “own your own home” market.

Which raises the issue. What’s wrong with lower socio-economic groups getting a foothold in the home ownership market in industrialised suburbs? Moreover, it is the taxes which are raised from businesses and employees in industrial zones that help pay the salaries – and subsidise the superannuation – of well-off public service professionals like Jon Faine working at the taxpayer funded ABC.

JILL SINGER’S “NO-BOGANS-IN-THE-CABINET” CALL

The left’s contempt for the less educated is so great that some inner-city luvvies maintain that they should not influence election outcomes or hold ministerial positions in government.

This is what the Herald Sun house leftist Jill Singer wrote on 11 February 2010:

What is it about Australia that makes our politicians feel the need to bring on the bogan? Are we really so threatened by qualities such as poise, dignity and sophistication and overt intelligence?... Not that Australia is alone in this. Consider Sarah Palin, who has indicated that she is considering running for US president in 2012 but says she is “never going to pretend she knows more than the next person”.

The notion that political leaders don’t need to be learned and exceptional people is beyond terrifying. Ordinariness has become a great political virtue, according to the likes of National Party Senator Barnaby Joyce who recently described himself and his fellow senators thus: “I am an accountant, Fiona is a farmer, Wacka owned a hardware machinery shop, Bossie was a manufacturer’s agent and Nigel was a fisherman.”

There is nothing wrong with being an accountant, farmer or fisherman – but these are insufficient credentials to, say, run a nation’s finances, which is what Joyce aspires to do.

It seems that Jill Singer does not understand just how elitist, and undemocratic, she is. According to Ms Singer, accountants, farmers or fisherman are not qualified to hold the position of treasurer or finance minister in an Australian government.

This overlooks the fact that some of Australia’s most effective economic ministers – namely, Arthur Fadden in the Menzies Coalition Government and Paul Keating in the Hawke Labor Government – had no formal qualifications whatsoever. Singer also seems unaware of Australia’s most disastrous economic minister – Dr Jim Cairns in the Whitlam Labor Government in the early 1970s. Cairns had a Ph.D in economic history from the University of Melbourne and was the author of several books which he wrote himself.

JUDITH BRETT’S WARNING ABOUT “THE IGNORANT”

Judith Brett goes well beyond Jill Singer. While Singer maintains that only the highly educated should inherit ministerial positions, Dr Brett has actually queried whether the views of less educated types should be heard at all.

In her chapter in Robert Manne’s edited collection titled The Howard Years, Professor Brett complained that less educated Australians, who listen to commercial radio, have more influence than the educated men and women of the Parliamentary Press Gallery in Canberra:

The more adversarial and probing format of the press conference is being replaced by the chummy exchanges of talkback radio. Both public-opinion polling and talkback radio sideline informed, concerned public opinion. Opinion polling brings the one vote-one value democracy of the ballot box into the determination of any issue on
which the Howard government chooses to consult it. The opinions of the ignorant or uninvolved are given equal weight to those of the passionate and knowledgeable.

How shocking is this? Passionate and knowledgeable La Trobe University professors like Judith Brett and Robert Manne are not given more weight in the Australian political process than what she terms “the ignorant or uninvolved”. As with People Like Us, it is revealing that Judith Brett would proclaim her intellectual elitism and it is revealing that Robert Manne would have agreed to publish so elitist and so undemocratic a message. Like Schultz, Manne’s self-awareness does not extend to understanding his own condescension.

GEORFFREY BARKER BAGS THE BOGANS

Geoffrey Barker, the Australian Financial Review leftist columnist and long-standing journalist, believes that the electorate is the problem – and that Australians are bogans. Well, all Australians who do not happen to agree with Geoffrey Barker, that is. Writing in the AFR on 22 February 2010, Barker commented:

Judging by recent Nielsen and News polls, Abbott’s combative populism, with its emphasis on resentment, fear and injustice, is attracting support to the Coalition despite its questionable (and shifting) policies on key issues, including economic management, climate change, health care and industrial relations. Abbott’s reputation of catchy slogans such as “direct action”, “great big new tax”, “broken promises” and “trust the people” are strikingly similar to the slogans under which the populist right-wing Tea Party movement in the US is attacking the Obama administration.

As a country that slavishly mimics overseas (especially US) political styles, Tea Party tactics might influence Abbott’s campaign. The Tea Party and the Coalition are ideological soulmates. If so, we will have entered the age of bogan politics for a bogan nation: vulgar, simplistic and focused on aggression, and extremist and alarmist claims. It will be politics to appeal to a dumbed-down electorate, attracted to tattoos and leaders who wear Speedos and fluorescent Lycra cycling outfits.

Barker concluded his piece by referring to “self-absorbed bogan voters” who “neither understand nor care” about key issues.

Once again, it’s interesting to reflect that Geoffrey Barker – and his editor at the Australian Financial Review – believe that it is quite appropriate to dismiss people with whom you disagree as bogan, vulgar, simplistic and aggressive types who like tattoos. In any event, what are the issues which “self-absorbed bogan voters” should really understand and care about? Nicolaus Copernicus, it seems.

Nicolaus who? Good question. In a truly bizarre AFR column on 31 May 2010, Geoffrey Barker evoked the scientific discoveries of the Polish Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543). Barker related how the Catholic Church in Poland, during Copernicus’ time, had rejected his view that the earth revolved around the sun but had come to accept that his theory was correct sometime after his death.

Somehow or other, Barker found a relationship between the Catholic Church’s relationship with Copernicus in Poland circa 1530 and Tony Abbott’s opposition to the Rudd Labor Government’s Resource Super Profits Tax in Australia circa 2010. How about that? This is what the self-declared anti-bogan Geoffrey Barker had to say:

Australia’s great post-budget economic policy debate, including the government’s proposed resource rent tax, is not unlike the debate that faced astronomy in the 16th century following the Copernican revolution.

The market-forced equilibrium theory that has underpinned neo-liberal economics since Adam Smith derived it in the 18th century from Newton’s cosmology doubtless serves well enough to explain and analyse events in normal conditions, as did the pre-Copernican Ptolemaic model of the universe...

The invisible hand of neo-liberal economics holds no magic wand. Its explanatory and predictive power is as limited as Ptolemaic cosmology. But its defenders cling to the theory like 16th century astronomers, claiming that all faults are in the world (“market failure”) and not in their theory.

Go on. He sure did. Geoffrey Barker did not spare the Rudd Government or the Opposition from his 17th Century based critique. But he was more critical of the Coalition. Barker described it as a “fallacy” to maintain that mining activity could be in part a function of tax rates. Barker’s view was rejected by Julia Gillard, shortly after becoming prime minister, when she significantly scaled back the expected tax take from the (revamped) resource rent tax.

Geoffrey Barker concluded his column with an attack on Tony Abbott and his colleagues:

The Opposition has cast itself in the role of the medieval Polish church, blindly supporting miners in defence of the status quo. It is prepared to bury reform in an unmarked grave, but the grave is unlikely to stay closed for 467 years. World events are challenging economic theory, but as Copernicus challenged our picture of the heavens. Such events are not heresy; they are crises that lead to superior science.

Now here’s a question. Who would you prefer to listen to? A man in speedos or lycra – who may even have a tattoo or two – who speaks in a direct manner? Or Geoffrey Barker – who writes such pretentious verbal sludge? “Media Watch’s” response is “Go bogans” and “Bury Barker in an unmarked grave”.

Source: The Sydney Institute Quarterly – Issue 37, July 2010
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DATE: Thursday 5 August 2010 **Bookings from 22 July only**
VENUE: Clayton Utz Seminar Room, Level 30, 1 O’Connell Street, Sydney
TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm

SPEAKER: DAVID MARR (Journalist & Commentator; Author, Power Trip: The Political Journey of Kevin Rudd [Quarterly Essay 38, 2010]) & NICHOLAS STUART (Columnist Canberra Times; Author, Rudd’s Way [2010])

TOPIC: The Rudd Prime Ministership
DATE: Tuesday 10 August 2010 **Bookings from 27 July only**
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SPEAKER: PAUL CLEARY (Senior writer, The Australian & author, The Men Who Came out of The Ground)

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DATE: Tuesday 17 August 2010 **Bookings from 2 August only**
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TOPIC: Who’s Afraid of Radiation?
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TOPIC: Lazarus Rising: The Howard Memoirs
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