

do so, despite the common feeling that domestic governments are beholden to global market forces.

However, Keating's discussion of market outcomes can be overly blithe. He is offhand about concerns as to who loses out from the reform process, and tends to state idealised outcomes as fact. He writes, for example, that human services recipients now have more choice of service provider and have the right to go elsewhere if not satisfied. I wonder if that rings true for clients of Centrelink, community housing and childcare services in certain suburbs. And when faced with, for instance, disproportionately increased telephone line rental charges, I am reluctant to agree that competition among government business enterprises has necessarily increased responsiveness to price signals and consumer needs. Keating is willing to dismiss problems with the contracting out of government work as 'inexperience'. At what point do the various examples of geographical inequities in access to services and collapsed public-private infrastructure partnerships cease to be a learning experience and become policy failures?

A strong feature of the book is its illumination of the thinking behind such a significant period of reform. As an insider and practitioner, Keating provides an interesting discussion of the actual motivations behind government action. He also considers the social impacts of marketisation, providing a good example of 'third way' thinking — while the benefits of marketisation should be harnessed, any adverse social effects can be headed off through fostering social capital. Government's role properly includes programs that encourage education and training, communal activity, and capacity-building and decision-making at the local level. In fact, in one of the book's few statements strongly critical of current government policy, Keating describes as 'morally repugnant' any employment policy that forces job-seekers to go through the motions of searching for non-existent jobs without the opportunity to retrain to meet the requirements of the new economy.

Most interestingly, Keating highlights the other constraints that limit government

activity perhaps more than does adherence to market principles. In particular, community aversion to higher tax rates has been a deadening influence on more active state intervention pretty much since Federation, echoed now by a political aversion to increased public debt levels. This is something to think about as we wonder about government's response to the future challenges of environmental degradation and ageing infrastructure and population.

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## NOVELS AS CRIMINOLOGY OVER TIME

Ed McBain is an American crime writer most noted for his 87th Precinct novels. His works were first published in 1956 and deal with crime in a fictional city called Isola. The author did his research with New York cops.

His books are in the process of being reissued and represent a time capsule of police procedure and society generally, with undertones of racial tension as it affects policing (think 2005 Sydney) and changes in social attitudes about drugs, women, homosexuals, informers and corruption.

I have now collected every 87th Precinct novel published by scouring second-hand book shops, going to online book search places and buying the newly reissued original works. My project is to examine them over time.

The first five were *Cop Hater*, *The Mugger*, *The Pusher*, *The Con Man* and *Killer's Choice*.

A unifying theme of all the books is the existence of the main plot along with several sub-plots. Cops come and go, they are often killed off after a few stories but the 'hero' who survives and unites the stories is Steve Carella. Steve was to die in *The Pusher* but was saved by McBain's agent. McBain wanted no heroes, he lost the argument.

Consider two factors in the early novels: both the cops and the crims are often linked by their experience in World War II. It serves as a point of rapport and enables them to locate their suspicions and their

motives in a common way. Certainly even now military experience is more highly significant in US affairs than it is in Australia. Consider the chasms existing here.

The police also have a procedure called 'the line-up' where two detectives from each Precinct gather at a parade of all those recently arrested, where they are publicly questioned about their crime and their history by the Chief of Detectives. It is meant to tell the assembled 'bulls' who is up to what in the city. This procedure dies off in later novels for very good reason. The novels are also set prior to the Miranda and Escobido decisions of the US Supreme Court.

If you get a chance to get some of the early works have a read and try to imagine yourself as a lawyer in the 1950s.

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## MR BIG

The true story of Lennie McPherson and his life of crime

Tony Reeves; Allen & Unwin 2005; \$24.95; softcover.

Tony Reeves, a journalist, has walked the mean streets but Lennie McPherson was no doubt a person who was himself mean [Thanks Ray].

Reeves paints a picture of a small time thug who pulled himself by his bootstraps further down to be an insignificant thug. Bypassed by the US mafia, when it diversified to Australia, he represented a typical Australian nobody who saw himself on the world stage, much like many of our politicians.

A wonderful read, especially the bits about the ease with which police and politicians could be enlisted to do McPherson's bidding, without a second thought as to why. McPherson is documented in the book as a regular police informer, which begs the question why was he accorded reverential status by the cops, irrespective of how such valuable such folk might be. Do they still behave this way?

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