
***Dead Man Walking: The Murky World of Michael McGurk and Ron Medich*, by Kate McClymont with Vanda Carson. Melbourne: Vintage Australia, 2019. pp. 400, Paperback RRP \$34.99. ISBN: 9780143795247**

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Kate McClymont has followed her expose of the misdeeds of former NSW Member of the Legislative Council Eddie Obeid and his associates (*He Who Must Be Obeid: The Untold Story*, Random House, 2014) with *Dead Man Walking*, an account of the life and crimes of psychopathic stand-over man Michael McGurk and corrupt developer Ron Medich, initially McGurk's employer and finally murderer. McClymont writes vividly and engrossingly about her subjects and their low-life, bottom-feeding hangers-on. She reconstructs intricately the dark, byzantine world of McGurk and Medich's deals-within-deals and get-rich-quick schemes. Legality, decency and morality were non-existent concepts for them.

McClymont also adds fascinating personal details about her role as an investigative journalist pursuing these stories: sieving through the plethora of leads from dubious sources, communicating with underworld figures without being compromised, delicate relations with the police, legal intimidation, death threats. At one stage she staked out Medich's home for hours posing as a dog-walker.

Ron Medich emerges as an egotistical incompetent who made a fortune thanks to good luck and the acuity of his brother Roy. He was an obvious target for hyenas like McGurk. When the two fell out, Ron asked his associate 'Lucky' Gattellari to have him killed. A boxer, restaurateur, vigneron, enforcer, petty criminal, brothel-owner and chronically unsuccessful entrepreneur, 'Lucky' put together a comically inept murder plot. The drug and alcohol addled Haissam Safetli proved to be so incompetent at hiring a hit-man for Gattellari that he was forced to do the job himself. On 3 September 2013 McGurk was shot dead in front of his Cremorne home in the presence of his nine-year-old son.

Police soon uncovered the obvious trail left by the murderers who descended into an orgy of betrayal to save their skins. Medich, Safetli, Gattellari and their accomplices were all convicted for their role in McGurk's murder. Medich was sentenced to a minimum 29 years imprisonment while the others received more lenient treatment for co-operating with the police.

A problem with McClymont's book is that she can't seem to make up her mind about whether she is writing a serious study or a racy bestseller. It has no index and features expressions such as 'pissed off', 'dobbed in', 'shitstorm' and 'half-arsed'. We are melodramatically told throughout the book after some description of an activity McGurk was involved in that he was dead soon after. It works the first time but quickly becomes irritating. The book loses momentum in the final chapters with the over-detailed account of the various legal proceedings against the conspirators.

McClymont would have been better to resist the temptation to recount every last salacious story and evaluate more. She provides no analysis of the culture that allowed a violent criminal like McGurk to prosper or why the justice system was so ineffective in pursuing him. The book is silent on the bigger issue of dealing with the unchecked corruption in sections of the Sydney development industry that created the likes of Ron Medich. *Dead Man Walking* is a worthwhile work but would have been a more significant one if these subjects had been addressed.