



Précis Paper

Author's Corner: Barrister Simon Cleary and The War Artist

Abstract –Professor Katherine Biber talks to barrister and novelist Simon Cleary about how he has created two successful careers and his latest novel, *The War Artist*.

Discussion Includes

- Legal career
- Redfern Legal Centre
- Becoming a writer
- The brigadier and his journey
- Kira and Penelope
- On trauma themes
- Motivation for story
- Process of research
- Finding the contacts
- Practitioners and the arts
- The craft of writing
- Reading

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Author's Corner: Barrister Simon Cleary and *The War Artist*

1. In this edition of BenchTV Katherine Biber (professor) talks to Simon Cleary (barrister) about his second career as a writer of fiction, and his latest novel, *The War Artist*.

Legal career

2. Simon Cleary has been a barrister at the bar in Brisbane for 10 years.

Redfern Legal Centre

3. Simon worked as a solicitor at Redfern Legal Centre in the '90s.

Becoming a writer

4. Simon combines his writing and legal careers, writing on a daily basis.

The brigadier and his journey

5. The story is a homecoming story in a way. But it's not only a war story. The book also looks at other forms of violence on the community.

Kira and Penelope

6. The second trajectory of the book is Kira's story.
7. Penelope's story is the third arc of the novel.

On trauma themes

8. There are two threads of trauma in the book – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and domestic violence.
9. The place of sacrifice as a manifestation of one's love for another human being is one of the questions raised in the book. The story is about the regenerative possibilities of love.
10. Domestic violence was very familiar in Redfern Legal Centre.

Motivation for story

11. The war in Afghanistan has been an extraordinary commitment for Australia. Historically, Simon's own family has experience of PTSD.

12. His legal practice has also seen him work with all sorts of different people over the years, illuminating experiences which a novelist can try and tell.
13. The Brereton Report brings home the cost of military engagement to a community and a culture.

Process of research

14. Research is great fun. The research for the book included hanging out in a tattooing parlour on Friday afternoons for six months.

Finding the contacts

15. How to find the contacts for research? Often cold calling is enough.
16. People with areas of expertise often are very willing to share it.

Practitioners and the arts

17. The habits and disciplines of practising law can help with creative writing. And the practice of law can be creative.
18. There are differences though ,and there are some tensions – how you manage time is one. A lengthy trial takes everything. And there's also something about the law which prizes certainty whereas fiction and poetry aren't so interested in certainty at all – they are interested more in doubt, and areas without easy answers.

The craft of writing

19. Writing as a legal professional versus writing as a novelist – in the latter looking for ways of expressing beauty is something that's important. The craft of writing is about looking to find beauty in a sentence, a paragraph – that's the beauty of language, and the beauty of ideas. There are different objectives in law.

Reading

20. Simon's reading practice as a novelist is slow, to savour it. Legal reading is usually for a specific goal, and often it will be filtered reading. It's much more selective.

BIOGRAPHY

Simon Cleary

Barrister, Level 14 Quay Central, Brisbane, Queensland

Simon practises predominantly in the areas of trade practices, consumer law, financial services, tort law, workers' compensation and administrative law. He appears in both State and Federal Courts and tribunals.

Prior to his call to the Bar, Simon was Australian Deputy Telecommunications Ombudsman, a role he held from 2006 until 2010. His responsibilities in that role included the arbitration of disputes, and the conduct of investigations. Simon has practised as a solicitor in New South Wales (1992-1996) and Queensland (1996-2006), specialising in dispute resolution. He is a graduate of the University of Queensland, where he completed a BA in 1989 and an LLB (Hons) in 1991.

Katherine Biber

Professor, University of Technology Faculty of Law, Sydney

Katherine is a legal scholar, criminologist and historian who joined the Law Faculty in 2008. She researches criminal evidence, documentation and visual culture. Katherine is author of *In Crime's Archive: The Cultural Afterlife of Evidence* (Routledge, 2018) and *Captive Images: Race, Crime, Photography* (Routledge, 2007). She is co-editor of *Evidence and the Archive: Ethics, Aesthetics and Emotion* (Routledge, 2017), *The Lindy Chamberlain Case: Nation, Law, Memory* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009) and *Playing the Man: New Approaches to Masculinity* (Pluto Press, 1999).

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