

# David Marr's *The prince: faith, sex abuse and narrative authority in literary journalism*

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## Abstract

David Marr has worked as a journalist across television, radio, print and online media. Although this impressive body of work is necessarily varied, Marr has said his recent work was governed by three underlying purposes: "Making sense of complex events, turning evidence into narrative, tracking power in Australia" (Eisenhuth & McDonald, 2007, p. 35). This article looks at one of the recurring themes in Marr's work: the role of religion in Australia. It examines the way Marr tracks the complex relationships of religious power by turning evidence into narrative, and the complex strategies that he employs to ensure narrative authority in a complex and controversial area. It focuses on *The prince* (2014), a biographical investigation of Cardinal George Pell and the Catholic Church's sexual abuse crisis. As both a broadcaster and an author, Marr's work is performative and investigative. The paper argues that this strong performative voice in Marr's work is a critical part of its success and an intrinsic part of the way he turns evidence into narrative, and provides a case study for the way narrative authority is exercised in literary journalism.

## Introduction

David Marr is one of Australia's most versatile journalists, having worked across television, radio, print and online media. This includes Walkley Award-winning investigative reporting with the ABC's *4 Corners*, hosting Radio National's *Arts Today* and book-length investigations of key political events such as the Tampa crisis. His journalism is complemented by his critically acclaimed biographies, including the definitive biography of Nobel prize-winning novelist Patrick White, which won *The Age* Book of the Year and a NSW Premier's Literary Award. Until 2012 he was a senior writer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, where he had unusually free rein to write commentary or news on subjects of his choice (Murphy, 2012).

Dennis Altman (2012, p. 13) begins his review of Marr's 2012 collection, *Panic*, with the accolade: "David Marr is not on the list of Australian living treasures but perhaps he should be." While not everyone would agree with that assertion, he is regularly described as an influential

commentator and an important public intellectual, even by those who disagree with him (Rundle, 2012). Altman himself is not uncritical. He goes on to suggest that Marr's conceptual framework around moral panic is, in this instance, "fairly simplistic" and could have been improved through reference to the extensive academic literature on this topic that Marr ignored. He concludes that while "Marr's moral indignation is admirable ... it should be tempered with a more analytic dispassion" (Altman, 2012, p. 13). So why does Altman begin with such fulsome praise?

It is because Altman recognises that the performance of moral indignation might play as significant a role in public life as the exposition of analytic rigour, and this is where he attests to Marr's critical place in Australian intellectual life:

Marr may well be Australia's leading moralist. I use the term not in the sense one might apply to Cardinal Pell or Alan Jones, both of whom conflate morality with defense of the status quo, but in the more radical sense of someone who demands of us a greater level of humanity and holds us to account for our national hypocrisy. (Altman, 2012, p. 13)

Marr's own account of his work, as essentially about the nature of power in Australia, is consistent with this assessment. He told an interviewer that his recent work was governed by three underlying purposes: "Making sense of complex events, turning evidence into narrative, tracking power in Australia" (Eisenhuth & McDonald, 2007, p. 35). He has done this in a variety of ways. For example, in his account of the public furore over internationally acclaimed photographer Bill Henson's controversial 2008 exhibition, Marr (2008) tracked the way Henson's use of naked adolescent models turned into a public panic over art and sexuality and became a site of struggle between different visions of morality and freedom.

One of the most significant ways he tracks power in Australia is through an analysis of its leaders. He has produced influential biographical essays for the Black Inc *Quarterly Essay* series, on former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (Marr, 2010) and then Opposition Leader Tony Abbott (Marr 2012), and most recently on current Opposition Leader Bill Shorten (2015). The Rudd and Abbott essays were news events in their own right. The Rudd essay was published the same month that he was deposed as prime minister: as Peter Craven writes, many believe "the case for Gillard's coup against Rudd is implicit in Marr's portrait of him" (Craven, 2012).

His other biographical essay published as a *Quarterly Essay* is on Catholic Archbishop Cardinal George Pell. It focuses on the prelate's response to the clerical sex-abuse crisis. *The prince: faith, abuse and George Pell* was then produced in an extended book-length version the following year, incorporating further research and recounting Pell's initial appearance before the Federal Government's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This work builds on Marr's longstanding interest in the nexus of religion, sexuality and politics, which he explores in an earlier collection of essays, *The high price of Heaven* (1999).

Some academic attention has been paid to Marr's work as White's biographer (Brady, 1992; Lawson, 1992). Ricketson (2014) acknowledges his importance as an exponent of narrative journalism by selecting him as one of his six primary informants in an analysis of long-form non-fiction. But in spite of Marr's significant achievements as a journalist, and his continuing influential and often controversial place in Australian public life, no academic analysis of his journalism has been undertaken. This article intends to rectify this omission and analyse one example of Marr's distinct contribution to literary journalism in Australia. It will focus on Marr's *The prince: faith, abuse and George Pell*. This analysis of Marr's work is important in its own right given his significance as a figure in Australian journalism; however, I argue it is important for two other reasons. First, it provides a case study of the way narrative authority is exercised in literary journalism. Second, Marr's work on Pell is an important journalistic account of the Catholic sexual abuse scandal.

## Narrative authority in literary journalism

The importance of long-form literary or narrative journalism in Australia has been increasingly recognised. Australia's premier journalism awards, the Walkley Awards, now include a prize for book-length journalism, and journalistic works make strong showings in state literary awards and independent awards such as the John Button Prize for public policy writing. Ricketson (2010) notes the influence of *Quarterly Essays* like Marr's and marks the resurgence of the essay as an important journalistic form in Australia.

Marr's statement that he is driven by "making sense of complex events, turning evidence into narrative; [and] tracking power in Australia" (Eisenhuth & McDonald, 2007, p. 35), places him firmly in the tradition of New Journalism (Wolfe, 1973) and its contemporary traditions. Building on Wolfe's definition of this genre, which focuses on form – using narrative techniques usually the preserve of fiction writers to tell true stories – others like Robert Boynton (2005) and Norman Sims (1984; 1990) have described how today's generation of literary journalists go beyond a concern with form and additionally focus on social impact and psychological and symbolic resonance.

Drawing on this research, and his own analysis and interviews, Ricketson (2014, pp. 20-22) has suggested that there are six essential characteristics of book-length literary journalism. These works are characterised by: concern with actual events and people living in the real world and the issues of the day; extensive research; taking a narrative approach; a range of authorial voices; exploring the underlying meaning of an event or issue; and broad social impact. Navigating the various definitional debates – literary journalism versus narrative journalism versus creative non-fiction – Ricketson opts for the directness of the moniker "true stories", while acknowledging the term "carries many meanings and is open to misinterpretation" (2014, p. 18). But it is the truth-value of the genre that continues to be problematised in both a series of high-profile scandals (Miller, 2015) and by the making explicit of literary journalism's day-to-day epistemological practices, as has been recently explored by a number of scholars (Borich, 2013; Lehman, 2013; Morton, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; Ricketson, 2014, pp. 116-128). Morton (2014) suggests there may be an epistemological quandary at the heart of literary journalism's twin commitments to accuracy and the production of narrative meaning:

The latter can be particularly controversial, given that a factually verifiable story can produce a number of different meanings, depending on the arrangement of facts, let alone the use of narrative techniques such as motifs, vivid imagery, intertextuality and rhetorical questioning. (Morton, 2014a, p. 77)

She further suggests that "practitioners may conceivably have agendas that drive its intended meaning and associated truth-claims" (Morton, 2014a, p. 77), given what Ricketson calls the genre's orientation towards "social impact", and what other authors (Whitt, 2007; Berning, 2011) more explicitly call its commitment to social justice and social progress.

The solution to these ethical and epistemological problems is often described as transparency (Hellmueller, Vos & Poepsel, 2013; Morton, 2014b; Joseph, 2015), which includes both the effective use of paratextual referencing and the explicit positioning of the narrator. But sourcing and narrative position are only part of the problem and provide only part of the solution.

Barbie Zelizer maintains that journalistic work can be "characterized as an entanglement of narrative, authority, and rhetorical legitimation" and that all journalists "adapt news events to an underlying narrative structure" (1990, pp. 367, 366), which is a key part of how they authorise their role within society:

While all professional groups are constituted by formalized bodies of knowledge, much of journalists' professional authority lies not in what they know but in what

they do with their knowledge ... particularly in cases where legitimation is effected through rhetoric, concrete decisions about practical problems displace knowledge altogether. What journalists do in covering a given story – who they interview or how they tell the tale – thus becomes as important as the degree of knowledge they possess. (Zelizer, 1990, p. 367)

The question of narrative authority has been at the heart of literary journalism ever since Tom Wolfe (1973, p. 47) argued that the “third person point of view”, which balanced the voice of the author and those of their characters, was a critical element of the genre. David Eason (1984) went on to draw a critical distinction between two types of literary journalism: “ethnographic realism”, which took a traditional reportorial, observational perspective; and “cultural phenomenology,” which adopted a more subjective approach:

Ethnographic realism reflects faith in the capability of traditional models of interpretation and expression, particularly the story form, to reveal the real ... the process of reporting ... is treated as a natural process. Cultural phenomenology calls attention to reporting as a way of joining together writer and reader in the creation of reality. Narrative techniques call attention to storytelling as a cultural practice for making a common world. (Eason, 1984, p. 53)

Roberts and Giles (2014) have recently suggested that although these two types of literary journalism, first pointed to by Eason, might be placed along a scale from romantic subjectivism to objective rationalism, even the apparently objective third-person accounts of the ethnographic realists sit midway along this spectrum rather than at the objective/rational far end:

Ambiguity, imagination, and creativity are an essential and unavoidable part of the narrative process, and do not necessarily diminish the reliability, validity, and objectivity of the story. Instead, by actively drawing attention to these subjective processes, literary journalism reveals that narrative is always a matter of rhetoric and always subjective because the writer is required to select and interpret in order to tell the story, irrespective of how “objective” it appears. (Roberts & Giles, 2014, p. 102)

They go on to argue that a simple objective/subjective distinction does not “adequately account for the gradations of difference, sometimes subtle, and sometimes occurring simultaneously in a single text. Nor does [it] adequately acknowledge that the subjective approach may be used within a realist narrative, and is, indeed, an inevitable component of all narrative” (Roberts & Giles, 2014, p. 102).

I argue in this article that there is a range of narrative practices which *tend toward objective realism* and stage distance between the narrator and the story, and/or between the reader and the story. There are also a range of practices which *tend towards subjective representation* and stage intimacy between the narrator and the story, and/or between the reader and the story. It is through the careful combination of these moves toward representational distance and towards representational intimacy that narrative authority is established.

Most literary journalism includes both tendencies, and each of the major components of literary journalism operates along this spectrum: it is not only about the positioning or explicitness of the narrator’s self-disclosure as the “I” of the story. The following table (Table 1) takes an adapted version of Ricketson’s definitional characteristics of book-length literary journalism and suggests how these elements might be mapped along a spectrum from objective/distancing to subjective/intimacy. Ricketson’s original typology (2014, pp. 20-22) has six elements. I have extended this to seven, splitting his first element in two and making a distinction between actual events/people and their relationship to issues of the day. Ricketson is primarily concerned with distinguishing book-length journalism from daily or magazine journalism and therefore concentrates on

characteristics of the text. Because my concern here is with the production of narrative authority through the performance of the author in the text, I have shifted emphasis to highlight what each of these elements means for the production of authorial or narrative postures. These elements, as presented here, represent an indicative typology and each element could include a range of other representational practices that might also create distance and/or intimacy.

**Table 1:** The narrative spectrum of literary journalism

Elements of literary journalism	Objective/Distance	Subjective/Intimacy
<i>Discovery posture</i> Relationship to actual events and people living in the real world	Unknown to the author: an outsider investigative focus	Previously known to or connected with the author: an insider focus
<i>Contemporary pull</i> Relationship to issues of the day	Primarily historic	Primarily contemporary
<i>Research standpoint</i> Relationship to extensive research	Desk research which marshals evidence from a variety of original and secondary sources	Immersion which builds the story through embedded observation
<i>Narrative performance</i> Relationship to narrative approach	Third-person approach which may be a traditional omniscient voice or one which creates a distinct personality through a narratorial voice	First person which acknowledges the author's involvement in the story and sometimes focuses on a metacognitive reflection on the process of storytelling
<i>Array of voices</i> Relationship to range of authorial voices	Large range of official and unofficial voices which build an argument and a series of points of view	Character-based stories in which strongly developed key characters stand in for the array of voices.
<i>Sense-making stance</i> Relationship to exploring the underlying meaning of an event or issue	Implicit connections are drawn	Meaning is made personal and explicit
<i>Change advocacy</i> Relationship to broad social impact	Implicit argument about social change	Change is advocated

So, for example, while all literary journalism is about actual people and events, the positioning of those people and/or events in relationship to the author exists along a spectrum, stretching from completely unrelated to the author to documentation of those loosely or closely connected to the author. In Truman Capote's case, for example, *In cold blood* (1966) was sparked by a newspaper article about an unknown group of people in an unknown town. However, Capote was in part drawn to the story because of his southern heritage, and over time he grew close to a number of protagonists. So his work would sit towards the objective/distancing end of the spectrum for this element. But most of his reporting was researched by immersion<sup>1</sup> in the community rather than desk-work or trial transcripts, so with respect to this element his work sits at the subjective/intimate end of the spectrum.

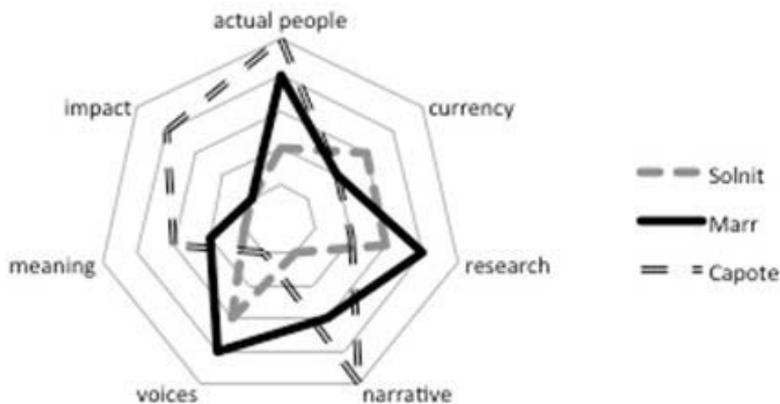
On the other hand, in her account of the Nevada Desert anti-nuclear protests, *Savage dreams* (1999), Rebecca Solnit is deeply connected to the people and events she reports on, as her brother is the lead protest organiser and she is a participant observer (O'Donnell, 2015). She would therefore sit at the subjective/intimate end of the spectrum for this first element. Her research is through immersion in the event, but this is matched by deep historic and background research, which is explicitly introduced into the text; so she would sit in the middle of the spectrum for the second element.

Looking at the narrative construction of literary journalism through this lens allows us to map how narrative authority is produced in a range of ways and is a result of the adoption of a number of both objective and subjective strategies. Sometimes it is through the appeal of closeness; at

other times it is through distancing. Sometimes these various practices create tensions and contradictions; at other times they harmoniously create a compelling narrative.

Figure 1 maps Capote’s *In cold blood*, Solnit’s *Savage dreams* and David Marr’s *The prince* using this framework. The charting is based on my close reading of these texts and is offered here as a way of visualising their comparative shape. A work that was entirely constructed at the objective end of the spectrum would map around the outer edges of the radar chart, while one that was completely at the subjective end would map around the innermost heptagon. While Capote’s work – written purely in a third-person omniscient narrative style – maps towards the outer edges and Solnit’s personally-styled kaleidoscopic account maps towards the inside, it is clear that they share some objective/distancing elements and some subjective/intimate elements. Marr’s work maps differently again – at times close to the pattern set by Solnit, and at other times closer to that set by Capote. This type of analysis allows us to see the way different works of literary journalism take different shapes and position themselves, not simply through single strategies, but instead through a sophisticated combination of strategies. Although each element can be traced in each work of literary journalism, particular aspects of this dynamic are more or less important to the production of narrative authority in any given work. I explore the implications of this further in my analysis of Marr in following sections. But before I do this, I will look briefly at the media coverage of the Catholic clerical abuse scandal as background to Marr’s work.

**Figure 1:** Rebecca Solnit’s *Savage dreams*, David Marr’s *The prince* & Truman Capote’s *In cold blood* mapped onto an Objective/Distancing – Subjective/Intimacy spectrum



## Sexual abuse, the Catholic Church and the media

In spite of the crucial role the media has played in bringing to light the actions of clerical paedophiles and the actions the Catholic hierarchy took to hide this abuse, there has been little academic analysis of the media coverage of these events.<sup>2</sup> One exception is a report by the Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Program (2010), which tracked a six-week period of US coverage in 2010 and compared it with a historic worldwide English language corpus. They noted that reporting of the sexual abuse crisis peaked in 2002 with the *Boston Globe*’s coverage of abuse in the Boston Archdiocese and again in 2010 when coverage focused, in both the US and Europe, on Pope Benedict’s role in the crisis: “No other developments in the scandal during the intervening eight years even came close to generating [the same] level of coverage” (Pew Research Centre, 2010).

This relates to its other key finding that the media tends to focus its coverage of scandals on individuals rather than institutions, and this is largely true of coverage of the Catholic Church sexual abuse scandal. The 2002 peak was focused on Boston figures such as Archbishop Bernard

Law and paedophile priest John Geoghan; and the 2010 coverage focused strongly on the figure of Pope Benedict and his role in Germany and the Vatican prior to becoming Pope.

One other significant study of media reporting is Donnelly and Inglis's (2009) study of Irish media, which highlights the intersecting cultural fields of church, state and media through a Bourdieusian lens. They conclude that complex changes to the relative power of the church within contemporary secular societies was both affected by the ongoing crisis and affected the media's propensity and ability to cover the crisis:

There had been a real, but rarely acknowledged ring around the Church, which made the religious field sacred and which prevented profane intrusions from outside institutions and organisations. The decline in the symbolic domination of the Church meant that, although it was no longer able to control media content, it was able to prevent negative reporting and investigations into its affairs. We have argued that once the sacred ring preventing any intrusion was broken and the media began to report on sex scandals, that there was a major shift in the balance of power between the two institutions. (Donnelly & Inglis, 2009, p. 15)

In *The prince*, Marr approaches the abuse scandal through the polarising figure of Pell, and in this sense follows the daily journalism on the scandal by focusing on an individual. But the book-length form also allows Marr to situate this as a political event and as a striking institutional failure. He uses the figure of Pell to track the nexus of politics, power and religion and highlight some of the wider elements referred to by Donnelly and Inglis (2009).

## ***The prince***

Marr begins *The prince* with an image of George Pell confronting the press the day after then Prime Minister Julia Gillard had announced a Royal Commission into institutional sex abuse in Australia. The first paragraph is worth quoting in its entirety because it is an exemplar of Marr's method throughout:

The cardinal was floundering. "I don't think we should be scapegoated. We'll answer for what we've done ... what we've done. We're not trying to defend the indefensible. But let's ...." He paused. "Right across the board ... let's see." By turns he was weary and defiant. He complained. He wandered off into the far reaches of history. Once mentioned the victims were all but forgotten. Journalists crowded into a plain room in the grey tower of Polding House could not believe what they were seeing. This man had been a bishop for twenty-five years, a cardinal for ten, and a big figure in Rome since the time of John Paul II. He had faced tough press conferences before, but the day after Julia Gillard announced a royal commission into the institutional abuse of children George Pell was falling apart. (p. 5)<sup>3</sup>

The next paragraph begins with the simple declarative statement: "He had suffered a mighty defeat". The simplicity and poise of the sentence is classic Marr. "Mighty" is a favorite word that Marr uses several times – it has an old-fashioned pomp that suits both his subject and Marr's declarative style. He uses it again at the end of the essay when describing the enthroned Pell surrounded by incense in the cathedral: "this is as it is meant to be: a mighty sight". In each case Marr, with the careful choice of this word, acknowledges both the force and ambiguity of Pell's grasp on power. After noting this "mighty defeat", Marr goes on to narrate how for the previous 20 years, politicians had "backed the Catholic Church", resisting calls for action in the face of increasingly disturbing revelations of abuse. Now the situation had changed.

In these opening paragraphs the three elements Marr himself underlines as crucial to his work are clearly on display: sense-making in the face of complex events, producing evidence-based

narrative and mapping power. Marr as narrator is also clearly on display through the creation of a distinctive voice and the increasingly obvious prosecutorial position. In opening the book with the anecdote of a media conference, where Pell had to submit to government intervention in a way he had resisted for years, Marr signals that many of the issues of power tracked in this work are a three-way tussle between the church, the Government and the media.

Many of the trademark signs of Marr's writing are also on display. The paragraph builds its authority through its rhythms, tense and use of language, and through its referencing of context. One of Marr's consistent strategies is the use of quick, short sentences. The cumulative effect of this is to present the narrative as a series of simple facts. This is the way it was. This is how it happened. This strategy also builds towards the effect of the longer sentence which ends the paragraph and is marked by a sudden shift signaled by the word "but". This is the way it had been *but* now things were changing. This narrative style indicates the performative authority that Marr asserts throughout the book and is indicative of the type of "moralist" approach mentioned by Altman (2012).

Marr builds narrative authority through these techniques but also through his apparent position as eyewitness. His use of the continuous past suggests something happening in narrative time, as does his quoting Pell directly (and his taking no account for the Cardinal's stumbles and repetitions). But he does not simply rely on his own authority; he links himself to a wider cohort of journalists who also witnessed Pell's performance. This in-text linkage is confirmed in his paratextual acknowledgment section, which notes both particular and general indebtedness to "colleagues who were reporting Pell for many years before I tried to come to grips with him" (p. 190). Although his technique is assertive and his short sentences suggest the unambiguous logic of facts, the rhythms create a performativity in the narrative voice and indicate that Marr is actually interested in teasing out not just what happened, but what this means. As he states two paragraphs later:

How understandings taken for granted for so long begin to break down is all but impossible to track. A few cracks appear, a floor sags, and then one day the whole house collapses. (p. 6)

Marr's work seeks to track those impossible shifts, to look for moments – stories – like the media conference where the cracks suddenly begin to become visible.

In this first section we clearly see Marr's research standpoint: although in the opening paragraph he positions himself in the room with Pell, he makes it clear by his reference to the cohort of journalists and the detailed historic analysis that follows that his is a detailed example of documentary research. One of Marr's great skills as a writer, and one of the essential ways he produces narrative authority, is to create a compelling dynamic between intriguing pen portraits of people and anecdotes which bring the subject alive; but then to flesh out the implications of that moment with detailed historic research and the burden of fact.

## **Negotiating outside and inside**

Marr does this from the outside looking in: this is Marr's discovery posture. Pell declined to be interviewed for either edition of the essay (Marr, 2014, p. 189). However, Marr is not personally or professionally new to entertaining the complexities of faith, religion and power in Australia. He has written about his own religious journey in the final section of his earlier book of essays on religion and sexuality, *High price of Heaven* (2000). Here Marr related his engagement as a young man with high church Anglicanism. In an interview with the ABC's religion reporter, Andrew West, following the publication of the Pell essay, Marr makes explicit his own *discovery posture* as he set out to complete this analysis of Pell.

Obviously I'm not a Catholic, I'm a gay man, I'm not a believer, although for a time I was a very enthusiastic Anglican with high church proclivities, but I'm not so anymore. I think the church's pursuit of people like me is demeaning and ludicrous but this is a much more serious issue and I don't think that it breaks along simple political lines. (West, 2013)

Pell's only public engagement with the essay is in a short one-paragraph rejoinder published in the responses section of the following edition of *Quarterly Essay*:

A predictable and selective rehash of old material. G. K. Chesterton said: "A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; a bad novel tells us the truth about its author". Marr has no idea what motivates a believing Christian. (Pell, 2013, p. 70)

In this statement Pell seems to be arguing that Marr cannot be expected to understand anything about the hero of his story because he is approaching it from the perspective of an outsider – a non-believer.

It is true that Marr makes little comment on Pell's spirituality. When he does so, it is a comment made in passing; for example, to note that as a student the future Cardinal showed his religious devotion by praying the rosary in the bus on the way to football games. But Marr blames the lightness of any interiority in his portrait of Pell's beliefs on the man himself:

I have read so many of his sermons in preparing this essay. Few are memorable. Those he preached on the deaths of his parents stick in my mind for being so impersonal. Pell has led an extraordinary life and pursued big ambitions. Yet when he speaks there is little of himself there. He pitches his arguments low. Spiritual insight is sparse. Often the task is to remind the faithful where the lines are drawn. (p. 183)

However, it is not true that Marr ignores motivation. Marr's commitment to evidenced-based narrative entails a strong focus on actions, but his commitment to sense-making matches this with an analytical interpretation of motivation. He traces Pell's essential belief system to his early inspiration by B. A. Santamaria, who led the anti-communist movement in Australia. The archetypal Cold War warrior, Santamaria instilled in his Catholic followers a heightened sense of the battle between good and evil being played out on the national and international geopolitical stage. Marr quotes Pell's accolade to his mentor in which he recalls first hearing Santamaria speak:

He often appealed to history. We felt we too belonged to the forces of good fighting the new faces of evil as saints and heroes had done for thousands of years ... Some of us never completely lost this conviction. (p. 20)

Marr argues that when the forces of communism no longer loomed large, Santamaria, Pell and others like them transferred their focus to the bogey of "secular liberalism". Within the church, the tussle was between the primacy of obedience to authority and the primacy of individual conscience. In tracing this lineage of Pell's belief system, Marr sets up his narrative of a particular type of "believing Christian". This type of believer is focused on rules and authority and the exercise of political power that extends the reach of the church's institutional influence. It is Marr's stance – his distance – as an outsider that enables him to construct that story.

Responding to the original essay in the following edition of *Quarterly Essay*, Julia Gillard's former advisor Michael Cooney – who describes himself as a "Christian Brothers' boy" whose father and grandfather were also Christian Brothers' boys – highlights Marr's role as an outsider as being critical to his success: "Marr doesn't know the church, he's surprised by it ... precisely because he doesn't know the church he shows us things we couldn't see ourselves" (Cooney, 2013, p. 77).

As noted above, the Pew 2010 analysis of media coverage of the Catholic abuse crisis pointed to the focus on individual protagonists. The recurring twin narratives of the crisis revolve around individual predatory priest/victim narratives and high-profile church leader cover-up narratives. Marr shifts these narratives in a subtle but significant way. Marr's title indicates his interpretive frame. *The prince* unmistakably connotes a Machiavellian view of power where to achieve the necessary ends of consolidating control, ambiguous choices have to be made. By telling Pell's career story as a church power broker and interweaving the stories of priest abusers, victims and cover-ups around this central personalised skeleton, Marr can tell a very broad story of personal and institutional power. This allows Marr to show that the motivations of a believing Christian aren't in fact always or necessarily religious.

## **Power without empathy**

Pell has often been his own worst enemy, with absurd public statements such as “homosexuality is a much greater health hazard than smoking” (p. 87), or his graceless and often aggressive response to victims. Marr outlines one extended example of this during a parish meeting following the years of abuse by Father Kevin O'Donnell at the Melbourne parish of Oakleigh. Here Pell distinguishes himself by rebuking a distressed father justifiably angry over the rape of his daughter, saying: “I don't find your tone at all helpful ... I don't need to be hectored by you to feel sympathy” (p. 107).

Anecdotes like these pepper the narrative and paint a less than flattering portrait of the Cardinal. But it is the cumulative weight of incident after incident that is most damning. The reviewer for *The Sydney Morning Herald* wrote of Marr's *Quarterly Essay*: “Has a more devastating portrait of a ‘respectable’, living non-politician, Australian public figure ever been published?” (Windsor, 2013). This quote is now proudly emblazoned on the back of the new extended edition. What makes the portrait devastating is not any particular piece of new evidence but the narrative pattern that emerges as Marr lays out Pell's consistent placing of the church, its priests and its finances and reputation above the needs and right of victims.

Marr's critics by and large do not accuse him of getting facts wrong; they merely accuse him of righteous indignation. The title of Gerard Henderson's (2013) commentary *A lot of smoke but no smoking gun* sums up the tenor of this critique that Marr has merely regurgitated stories already rehearsed and overlaid it with rhetorical indignation of “a small l-liberal point of view” (West, 2013). But indeed the pattern is the point. Describing his work, sifting through the endless detail of government reports and other documents when reporting *Dark victory* (Marr & Wilkinson 2004), Marr talks about turning the mundane into a powerful story:

If you bring all these sticks and old boxes together, these branches and rubble and some old newspapers, you can put it all together in a heap and if you know how to build a fire with narrative it will ignite like a bonfire. (in Ricketson, 2014, p. 141)

Both the tone and the narrative construction – Marr's rhetorical conceits, if you like – allow this fire to ignite. The narrative pattern, with its overarching story arc, is something that can only emerge in this context. Therefore in bringing together already published material, this material becomes new by dint of its association with other stories. This is one of the key contributions of long-form narrative and one of the reasons why it is a critical complement to daily news journalism in exploring complex social issues.

Henderson (2013) is quick to point out in Pell's defence that, while Archbishop of Melbourne, the churchman was one of the first in the world to establish a victim compensation scheme. But what Marr actually shows in his extended narrative of the scheme over time is that this scheme was designed to save the church money by keeping victims out of court. This narrative only emerges through a careful mapping together of a number of disparate testimonies and shows

the power of sustained long-form analysis, which transforms an apparent fact into a meaningful event.

Pell has on a number of occasions relied on his ability to simply deny the accounts of victims who have come forward to accuse him of ignoring them – or, in the case of David Ridsdale, trying to buy their silence (Marr, 2014, pp. 61-63) – and Marr is able to lay these out over a chronological account of Pell’s public life. These troubling accusations are placed within a narrative of Pell’s career. The structure that Marr gives the book is indicated by the chapter titles: Priest, Bishop, Archbishop, Cardinal, Prefect.

This overarching narrative is of a remarkably gifted “big” man with natural leadership potential, but one who was often seen from an early stage to be harsh or a bully. His career was fast-tracked by powerful patrons in the church, first in Australia and then in Rome. He is politically connected and politically powerful. Pell is correct that what emerges is not a portrait of “a believing Christian” but one of a career Church bureaucrat who primarily acted to save the Church money rather than fairly or compassionately deal with its victims. This is what makes the portrait “devastating” (Windsor, 2013).

### **Sense-making through story**

Marr has noted that the two critical elements of good narrative journalism are detailed evidence and skilful storytelling:

Storytelling is crucial. It is how we make sense of the world. Facts don’t mean much to any of us until we make them into a convincing story. The raw material of journalism has to be accurate, but the journalist’s work isn’t done until the story rings true. (Eisenhuth & McDonald, 2007, p. 35)

An effective story requires the rich detail of evidence. In this same interview, Marr talks about his love of detail, not only found through his own observation, but also discovered by mining court and inquiry transcripts. This is especially important because these transcripts provide details “compelled from witnesses and tested by lawyers before they even reach us” (Eisenhuth & McDonald, 2007, p. 35).

It is in the liminal areas where detail meets evidence and evidence meets storytelling and storytelling meets sense-making that we can discern the production of narrative authority in literary journalism. Marr’s sense-making posture is explicit, and we get a distinct sense of his voice in the story. Throughout *The prince* both this commitment to storytelling and this commitment to the gathering of rich detail are evident. The extended edition includes a 20-page section of acknowledgments and notes showing Marr’s diversity of sources. These include his own interviews with key informants, the coverage of Pell by major media organisations, Pell’s testimony to various inquiries, the prelate’s own writings, the work of academics who have investigated Catholicism and the sex abuse crisis, the work of the Cardinal’s first biographer Tess Livingstone, and accounts written by victims. So in this instance Marr has largely adopted a desk-based research standpoint that accumulates a set of testimonies around the central character. Marr is an engaging writer and his brief pen pictures of key moments are rich, but this is not a novelistic character-based story. It is a narrative argument in which Marr has assembled a brief of evidence with his array of voices, rather than a more intimate set of relational characters.

But Marr does not stand apart from his narrative. Both his sense-making and advocacy for change are explicit, and are buttressed by both his gathering and his narrative performance of evidence. As I have already shown, he writes with a compelling performative voice and, although he largely allows the power of the cumulative narrative to speak for itself, he doesn’t shy from personal interpretations. This is especially true in the final section, where Marr moves to a first-

person narrative watching Pell's final Sydney Mass before the Cardinal heads to Rome to take up his new Vatican position. He listens to Pell's sermon about the faults of pagan Rome and the virtues of celibacy:

What hymns of praise this man has sung to the virtues of not having sex. A life without sex is sacred, an offering to Christ. No sex proves our first love is God not one another. No sex leaves the heart undivided. No sex releases energy and spirit for service. No sex saved civilization. Monks brought Europe out of the dark ages by not having sex. (pp. 183-184)

Marr then reflects that it is "the celibate church that gave paedophiles authority, prestige, an endless supply of children and a wall of lies to hide behind" (p. 183). Finally Marr allows himself the most speculative tone he adopts in the essay:

As I read the man, listen to him and watch him in action I wonder how much of the strange ordinariness of George Pell began fifty years ago when a robust schoolboy decided as an act of heroic piety to kill sex in himself. The gamble priests take is that they may live their whole life without learning the workings of a human heart. Their world is the church. Pell is one of these, a company man: of uncertain empathy. (p. 187)

This is Marr at his most performative and provocative. As he himself notes in his rejoinder to responses in the following issue of *Quarterly Essay*, both his general assertions about celibacy and his specific assertions about Pell's celibacy were the most questioned parts of the essay. He admits he should have referenced the basis of some of his more striking assertions. In the original *Quarterly Essay* he writes:

Most priests are part of a sexual underworld: gay, straight and at times criminal. The church has always understood that priests are human and the vow of celibacy is almost impossible to honour. The deal was that their failings would be forgiven so long as the sanctifying fiction of celibacy was maintained. Paedophilia was forgiven for a long, long time. Marriage never was. The celibate church gave paedophiles a safe haven and children. (Marr, 2013a, p. 87)

Although clearly written in a provocative way, Marr can easily back up his assertions with reference to well-documented surveys of Catholic priests whose celibacy adherence rates fall well below 50 per cent. He can also point to other authorities who have speculated on the mediating role of celibacy in creating situational paedophilia. In the second edition, Marr has obviously decided that even though he may be able to justify this, its provocation obscures his argument and he has deleted that first statement about most priests being part of a sexual underworld.

However, he stands by and does not alter his comments on Pell. He admits his assertions that celibacy had damaged Pell are his own, and that this is a claim for which he cannot provide strict evidence.

The claim perturbed some who loved the essay and some who loathed it. I can't prove it was battling sex that left Pell so impersonal, so bleak. He is my subject not my patient. But let me say once more that however unnatural – frankly weird – dedication to celibacy is, I don't think it inevitably destroys everyone. Some survive intact. I put Pell among the damaged. (Marr, 2013b, p. 104)

Marr has a different kind of narrative authority for making his statements about Pell's celibacy. Marr claims this authority purely from his performance as narrator: as the "eye" and the "I" of the story. Pell is his subject. His authority to speculate arises from the evidence of his role as narrator/researcher deeply immersed in the story, and not specifically from evidence relating to the speculation. This narrative authority arises out of the dynamic that Marr creates, beginning

with his discovery posture as outsider, his research standpoint as gatherer of evidence and his narrative performance of sense-making and advocacy for change. As Altman reminds us, he is a “moralist”: “someone who demands of us a greater level of humanity and holds us to account for our national hypocrisy” (2012, p.13). However, the narrative authority of any piece of literary journalism cannot lie with the exciting pitch of outrage alone, it must rest with the story as a whole: the way that its rhythms, its tone, its details, its dance between subjective and objective elements and its patterns of evidencing come together. As Marr says, “... the journalist’s work isn’t done until the story rings true”.

## Notes

1. Initially Capote spent only a month in Holcomb and then returned for the trial. This is not the full immersion of some authors, including Mark Kramer (1983), who spent a year with two surgeons for his book *Invasive procedures*. However, engagement with and observation of the community was Capote’s primary form of reporting rather than desk-based use of court or media reports. He therefore sits towards the “immersion” end of this scale.
2. There has been significant scholarly research on the nature and causes of sexual abuse within the church, notably the work of John Jay College (Terry, 2008), but few explicit studies of media coverage of the scandal. The only significant study of Australian media coverage has been in the context of a broader study of coverage of child maltreatment (Lonne & Parton, 2014)
3. All page references are to the extended second edition unless otherwise stated.

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