



Quarterly Essay 47 Political Animal: The Making of Tony Abbott

David Marr

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Tony Abbott is the most successful Opposition leader of the last forty years, but he has never been popular. Now Australians want to know: what kind of man is he, and how would he perform as prime minister?

In this dramatic portrait, David Marr shows that as a young Catholic warrior at university, Abbott was already a brutally effective politician. He later led the way in defeating the republic and, as the self-proclaimed “political love child” of John Howard, rose rapidly in the Liberal Party. His reputation as a head-kicker and hard-liner made him an unlikely leader, but when the time came, his opposition to the emissions trading scheme proved decisive.

Marr shows that Abbott thrives on chaos and conflict. Part fighter and part charmer, he is deeply religious and deeply political. What happens, then, when his values clash with his need to win? This is the great puzzle of his career, but the closer he is to taking power, the more guarded he has become.

“Since witnessing the Hewson catastrophe at first hand, Abbott has worn a mask. He has grown and changed. Life and politics have taught him a great deal. But how this has shaped the fundamental Abbott is carefully obscured. What has been abandoned? What is merely hidden on the road to power? What makes people so uneasy about Abbott is the sense that he is biding his time, that there is a very hard operator somewhere behind that mask, waiting for power.” – David Marr, *Political Animal*

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