

# Harry Curry: Counsel of Choice

By Stuart Littlemore  
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291pp, \$29.99

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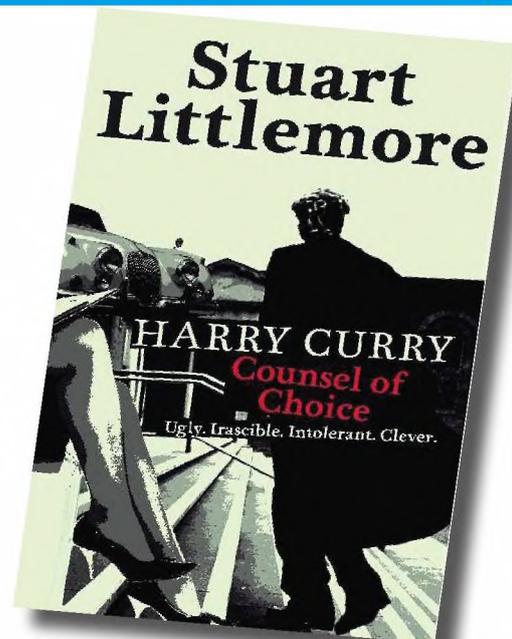
I must admit to being a somewhat avid viewer of the ABC television program *Media Watch*. That's why I am familiar with the television face and persona of Stuart Littlemore, the Sydney lawyer who wrote and presented the program from its inception in 1989 and continued to do so up until 1997. I have never met Mr Littlemore, who was appointed QC in 1992, but do recall seeing his name appear in press reports over the years and, in more recent times if my recall is accurate, in a number of prominent defamation cases. So it was with some anticipation that I decided to search out his first novel, *Harry Curry: Counsel of Choice*, which was published in 2011. I had read of its availability somewhere but had no idea what to expect.

Harry Curry "is a big man, reasonably mature in years, hard-looking, like an old rugby player, and strikingly ugly". A sixteen year veteran of the New South Wales Bar, Harry seems recently to have fallen upon difficult times; he has been ejected from his expensive chambers having failed to pay his rent for eighteen months, and is the subject of demands for unpaid income tax and three uncompleted business activity statements. Worse still, he is about to have his practising certificate suspended for two years on a charge of professional misconduct.

Harry's co-protagonist is one Arabella Engineer, a younger English-educated junior counsel who, finding it tough going to make her mark - "Five years of struggling and pleading guilty in hopeless cases is not much of a career" - is considering an escape to Woolgoolga where "there's a committee looking for

an Indian lawyer to handle all their business affairs". Arabella makes no secret of the fact that she is attracted to Harry. Harry is initially far from comfortable with that: "I'm awkward with women unless I treat them as honorary men. Or as solicitors, which is even worse. I would rather not deal with the matter of sexual competence..." Undeterred, Arabella presses on with a cunning plan for Harry, sans practising certificate, to become "Mizz Engineer's full-time consultant strategist": Harry makes the bullets, Arabella fires them.

Upon that rather unlikely skeleton Littlemore hangs five related short stories which see Harry and Arabella crisscrossing the courts from Canberra to defend a terrorist; Mullumbimby to defend a 'green vegetable matter' case; the Central Criminal Court in Sydney for a murder trial; the Southport Magistrates Court for a rape committal; and travelling south to Bega and Eden on the coast of New South Wales for a bushfire coronial and a stabbing in a pub. Harry, sometimes in his role as "consultant strategist", and sometime as Counsel, brings a whipish mind to "the only thing I'm qualified or able or willing to do - and the only thing I'm interested in doing" but his much referred to 'irascibility' is often tempered by thoughtful insight, compassion and a tendency to self pity. Arabella, sometimes in her role as Counsel advised by Harry, and sometimes as junior Counsel to Harry, suffers from crises of confidence, not much ego and an altogether heartfelt devotion to the man who makes the bullets. Together they champion the cause of ramparting against the



egos of the machine that feeds them.

While all of that might make for a rollicking good read for lawyers, only time will tell if it can attract a wider audience. Much of the feel, the characters and the interaction between them, and indeed, the plot itself, rely upon some insight into the machine that makes it all so. It strikes me as no easy task for a lawyer steeped in the traditions of fact, law and logic, as Mr Littlemore undoubtedly is, to pen a novel that is at once genuine but at the same time appealing as a narrative that can be embraced by a broader audience. Michael Connelly, the American author of the bestselling *The Lincoln Lawyer* amongst many others, comes to mind as one who has certainly breached that divide but Connelly is a journalist, not a lawyer. Then again, I hear you ask: What about John Mortimer QC?

So if you do decide to read this book, and I recommend it, can I suggest that you take off your lawyer's hat before you do so. Indulge yourself - appreciate the intelligent humour, the court room banter and yes, sometimes, the sheer implausibility of it all. Experience the irreverence of an insider's view from the outside.

Oh and by the way, the next collection of Harry and Arabella stories, *Harry Curry: The Murder Book*, is due for release in 2012. I'm looking forward to it because I can't help but think that Mr Littlemore will only get better. ●