



Sidney Nolan, *The encounter* 1946 (detail), enamel on composition board, 90.4 x 121.2 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift of Sunday Reed 1977

The Passions of International Law

Melbourne Law School Symposium

**Thursday 13, Friday
14 and Saturday 15
September 2012**

**Convenor:
Gerry Simpson**

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International law speaks in at least two registers. In the first, a technocratic or solemn tone predominates. This is the common language of law: designed to induce an atmosphere of authority. Most of international law (in courts, in books, in journals) is conducted in this language. The second is a language of passion. Sometimes this has a religious or quasi-religious inflection or inspiration e.g. in the call to eradicate evil, or in the rhetorics of repentance or penance and so on. But there are secularized versions of this. Some have a psychoanalytic bearing (reconciliation, catharsis), others are charged with a commemorative imperative ("never forget", "remember the victims"). And then there are languages of love (Hartley Shawcross's powerful invocation, at Nuremberg, of the love between a father and child just before they are killed in an Aktion on the Eastern Front) and hate (characterizations of defendants or suspects as "criminally insane monsters" (Pol Pot prosecutors at the early Vietnamese trials)) or, in a more literary vein, "odious schlumps" (Joseph Heller on Henry Kissinger).

The idea behind this symposium is to get people to talk about or around, what the Eichmann judges worried were, the "discordant notes" of international law and criminal justice. These might be called the "passions of international law" although some of them are tonalities or voices or grammars. In any event, the presiding thought is, as usual, to get beyond the familiar ways of talking and thinking about the things with which we are familiar. To put this in less obscure terms, a group of scholars have been invited to speak to one word that they think of as being associated with this second register. There will be papers on *succour*, *vanity* and *regret* and on *mourning*, *repentance* and *grace*. There might be papers on *pity* or *humiliation* or *sorrow* (and so on).

Professor Hilary Charlesworth (ANU) will present a public lecture on *Passion/Dispassion* and the keynote address on *Extimate* will be given by Dr Maria Aristodemou (Birkbeck).

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