Madonna King. *Catalyst: The Power of the Media and the Public to Make Change.* UQP.


Victims of crime have gained a much higher profile recently, and, according to Brisbane journalist Madonna King, that has come about through the efforts of ‘ordinary people’. She presents the stories of eleven such people and their campaigns to make the law conform more closely to their notions of fair play.

King makes a gesture towards even-handedness: ‘This book does not set out to pass or fail the quality of legislation and its impact.’ However, the language she uses is straight from the populist press, and all her instincts are to side with the victims. Occasionally she makes a misguided attempt to see the world through the criminal’s eyes. Rapist Robert Fardon, for example, is said to find going back to prison ‘like returning home, to a place where he knew how to behave, even how to survive.’ How can King possibly presume this?

The central theme of this book is the way victims of crime or those who identify with them can, if their message is suitable, recruit the popular media to convince populist politicians to introduce new laws. The civil libertarians get short shrift, and the long tradition of principles like the presumption of innocence until proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt, is discounted in favour of emotional appeals to feelings hardly more elevated than basic revenge.