

The Sacred Sell: Twenty-First Century Aesthetic Adventures in Beer and Cider Advertising on Australian Television

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Introduction¹

In 2017, Meat and Livestock Australia - the body responsible for promoting the consumption of lamb in Australia - launched a controversial television advertisement. Seated around a table in a suburban Australian backyard, a number of religious figures have gathered for lunch. An actor dressed as Bacchus proposes a toast; after a number of suggestions from figures such as L. Ron Hubbard and Moses, the atheist host suggests they toast “lamb - the meat we can all eat,” and all the deities at the table find themselves in accord. No doubt many religious people would be incensed that personalities from their religion’s history have been co-opted to sell meat. But, after making the main point of the advertisement - that, given the broad range of dietary prescriptions in the religions of the world, lamb has mass appeal - the host also explains that atheism is the fastest growing religious category in Australia according to census data, and announces that she is one. This little quip seems to justify the advertisement’s controversial content and its look; the inference being that once Australians would have expressed deep upset at such a scene, but now religious tensions and concerns have been mollified by the increase of disbelief.

That the characters in the advertisement are drinking, eating, and enjoying each others’ company additionally suggests that getting religious figures to endorse lamb is not a significant problem in a new and ‘religiously relaxed’ Australia. Well, this is almost the case. As the scene plays out, the host takes a mobile call from the Prophet Muhammad. Jesus asks, “...he can’t make an appearance?” The host notes that he was caught up. Given the violence over fictional and comic representations of the

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Prophet from the fatwa placed on Rushdie for publishing *The Satanic Verses* (1989), the *Jyllands Posten* riots in Denmark (2005), and the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris (2015), it is a very crass joke. It is a marker, however, that there are still some religions that would react very badly to the depiction of their leader in such an advertisement. By the Prophet's absence, Islam is marked as a separate case to the bonhomie that is shared amongst the religions represented at the table.

Interestingly, however, it is not the aesthetic content of the advertisement, or the exceptionalism afforded to Islam, that caused concern when it first aired on Australian television. Members of one religion were aghast at the presentation of one of their gods as meat eater. Although Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu deity is seen toasting and eating lamb, he is well known in India as a vegetarian. Hindus were so incensed that the Indian Government was moved to launch a diplomatic protest against the several government agencies involved in the administration of Meat and Livestock Australia.² Despite this diplomatic action, the controversy may have helped propel the message of the advert rather than damage sales of the product. The offense given to the Hindu community in Australia and worldwide was considered worth the mercantile advantage.

Advertising and Religion in the Public Sphere

I raise the example of the "Meat We Can All Eat" Campaign because it draws into sharp focus many of the issues also at play in a range of television-based alcoholic advertisements that appeared a decade earlier using religious themes to sell products. These advertisements also utilised sacred symbols and religious concepts, not only to advertise their products, but also to court controversy for the additional promotion of said products. Central amongst these was the Toohey's Dry "Catapult" advertising campaign of early 2006 (examined below), but other commercials that appeared in the years before and after also fit into the particular aesthetic category I discuss here. This was a category that sought to mark a break in

² Natalie Wolfe, 'Indian Government lodge Official Diplomatic Protest over Lamb Ad with Hindu Lord Ganesh', *News.Com.Au*, 12 September 2017, at <http://www.news.com.au/finance/business/retail/indian-government-lodge-official-diplomatic-protest-over-lamb-ad-with-hindu-god-lord-ganesh/news-story/16137f258ae8519edfedf84ac114e499>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

the usual conventions of beer advertising, and I will examine why this came about, and why it might be that, until the reappearance of the lamb advertisement this year, the category was soon exhausted.

I will argue that the unspoken motivator of these earlier advertisements was, as with the “Meat We Can All Eat” campaign, a shift in the importance of religion in the public sphere. This shift meant that although a certain sector of the population might be moved to complain about the sacrilegious nature of the commercials, these complaints were used as drivers of the products’ renown in an increasingly secular public sphere. The social expectations were such that, rather than a blasphemy being caused (one that might see the product banned by community groups and sales lost), the money put behind these ‘sacred’ sells ended up being well spent. It is the appropriation of sacred symbols that I want to examine in this article, to highlight how its aesthetic content is determined by a tensile game played between advertisers seeking attention for their advertisements, and what is socially acceptable. It is this tension that dictates what aesthetic can be deployed and with what content. Thus I conclude by suggesting that the advertisement of pleasure items such as beer and cider can often present a sound indicator, through the symbols that constitute their aesthetic fabric, of the place of the religious in any intensely consumerist society such as ours.

Methodology

At the end of the twentieth century, Sut Jhally argued that in a late capitalist mindset, advertising becomes vitally religious.

In advertising, the commodity world interacts with the human world at the most fundamental of levels: it performs magical feats of transformation and bewitchment, brings instant happiness and gratification, captures the forces of nature, and holds within itself the essence of important social relationships (in fact, it substitutes for those relations). What is noteworthy about such scenes is not that they are concerned with the role of objects in the social lives of people. Such a relationship is one of the defining features of what it means to be human; the relationship between people and things is a universal one.³

³ Sut Jhally, ‘Advertising as Religion: The Dialectic of Technology and Magic’, *Advertising & Society Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2000 [1989]), at <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/2938>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

My thesis does not wholly disagree with this proposition as regards the role of advertising as a mythic binding agent between peoples and things in such a consumerist society as Australia. It plays with narratives and myths to sell the products we rely upon, and does so almost as a “voice” of not only what is socially acceptable, but this voice also deploys common concepts and ideas that are deemed comprehensible to society as a totality. Tricia Sheffield, developing Jhally’s overall premise, argues that there are three aspects of advertising that have inherent religious qualities. One might call her first category “national” or at least “congregational,” where an advertisement becomes a “divine mediator” between consumer and product consumed. Consuming both the marketing and the product forms a church, in the way that Durkheim might speak of such a social instrument. The product and its advertising paraphernalia then become “totemic” - again, in the Durkheimian sense of this concept.⁴ Collective understanding then enshrines the product in a common world of comprehension.⁵ Sheffield suggests that a transubstantiation of sorts takes place where consumption of the product represents a connection by the individual to both the brand and the image associated with the brand. Finally she suggests that there is an ultimate concern inherently linked to advertising, because the self and its identity is built, in part, by the brand, its image, and consumption of the product.⁶

Again, this remains valid in many respects, but my intention here is to see by what other means does the religious significance of advertising manifest and is content as important as function in this assessment. To do this I have chosen, principally, to investigate recent alcohol advertising made for television using an aesthetic approach. By this I mean what is the ‘look’ and atmosphere of the content of these advertisements.⁷ Moreover, how do they contribute to a developing sense of sacrality over time, and as they do so, do they become more aware of their mediating and transformational potential? I hope to demonstrate that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, beer advertising in Australia becomes increasingly

⁴ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2008).

⁵ Tricia Sheffield, *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 3.

⁶ Sheffield, *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising*, p. 4.

⁷ Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments - Surrounding Objects* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), p. 20ff.

aware of this sacral connection, not only in the vision of how advertising may be used, but also in the actual content of the commercials. There is almost a ‘coming-into-consciousness’ of the sacral role of the advertisement, and it is this development that I will investigate.

Free-to-air television advertisements must conform to strict standards of community expectation in Australia; a standards bureau exists to censor advertising and to receive actionable complaints from the public.⁸ Television advertisements also tend to refer back to an industry-established canon that copywriters, directors, and advertising executives know well. When it comes to beer advertising, one clear example of this are the extremely high-cost, high production commercials produced for the Guinness brand. These advertisements quickly become canonical, and do much to set the standards of what beer advertising should be. One point of clarity then, in examining the cultural conditioning behind the aesthetics of a particular group of advertisements is that the advertising industry is particularly self-referential. When it comes to tracing aesthetic developments, it is much easier to highlight influence and the development of certain tropes as I do here with the rise of the sacral aesthetic in recent advertising. Anne M. Cronin emphasizes this self-referentiality. In fact, she sees advertising as a form of ongoing mediation not only between producer and market, but between other forms of advertising mediation.⁹ When research is tightly focused on a particular group of consumables - like beer and cider - the lines of self-referential development can be even more clearly identified.

The Old Language: Beer as Reward for Physical Labour

The prevailing trope in much beer advertising throughout the twentieth century was based on a simple message; hard work or sporting exertion should be rewarded with beer. This is certainly the thematic in a range of much-seen public house advertisements decorating the outside walls of many Sydney drinking holes. The theme of beer-as-reward manifests often in television adverts such as the (British) Carling’s Black Label “The Dam Busters” campaign (WCRS/SABMiller, 1990) and the (New Zealand)

⁸ *Advertising Standards Bureau* (2017), at <https://adstandards.com.au>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

⁹ Anne M. Cronin, ‘Regimes of Mediation: Advertising Practitioners as Cultural Intermediaries?’, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2004), pp. 349–50.

Dominion Bitter “Patron Saints of Beer Drinkers” Campaign (Generator Bates and Silverscreen, 2002).¹⁰ Both of these examples use religious and/or a sacred national mythos to sell their product, but they do not fit the paradigm I wish to discuss below. Rather, they are best categorized using the beer-as-reward trope.

The first example, made for Carling Brewery recreates the atmosphere of the 1955 British war film *The Dam Busters* (which itself is based on the events of the Royal Air Force’s Operation Chastise of 1943). In this comical reimagining of the campaign against the dams of the Ruhr Valley, the bouncing bombs launched by the British are caught by a German sentry *as though* he were a goalkeeper in a soccer match. Seeing this, one of the British airmen declares “...I bet he drinks Carling Black Label.” In the second example, “The Patron Saints of Beer Drinkers,” takes place in a bustling nineteenth century New Zealand bar. A machine half resembling a television, allows three national heroes (a pioneer, an ANZAC soldier, and a rugby player) to review the recent actions of three drinkers to see if they have done enough to deserve a beer. An ingenious and dedicated truck driver and a hard-playing rugby fullback are allowed their beers, but the office worker who has been hiding in the toilet for the most of the day has his glass fall apart the moment he brings it to his lips, in a kind of monotheistic/Buddhist mash-up of beer karma. These examples are important for showing us how the next generation of advertisements deviate from the norm.

Carlton Draught’s “Big Ad”

The first aesthetic divergence from the beer-as-reward trope is one of the most remarkable manifestations of surrealism in recent television advertising, the “I Like to Watch” campaign for Guinness stout, that increased in fame throughout the 1990s. These highly original pieces of visual art starred the Ukrainian actor Wenenty Nosul and screened globally from 1989. The first had the tagline “I like to watch,” which Nosul would mumble as a pint of Guinness stout stabilized in its glass after being poured from a tap. It was crucial that this advertising worked, as, before the age of the widespread availability of craft and boutique beers, Guinness was expensive and could not compete with mass-produced lagers and ales on price alone. The “I Like to Watch” campaign subverted the beer-as-reward message to one of celebrating inner patience. In this way, the thing that is most awkward about this particular beer (waiting several minutes for it to settle in the glass after pouring) was turned into a

¹⁰ These can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyuDUVnePsU> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHW15Xp2oCs>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

demonstration of not only expectation, but also forbearance by the consumer. Subtly, the message of beer as reward mutated into beer as a key to self-transformation. By 2002, the Guinness company had developed a specific global message that would unite all the company's advertising efforts. This was summed up by the single and simple rubric: "Guinness brings out your inner strength."¹¹ With the rise of self-transformation as a powerful religious goal at this time, the choice of "inner strength" was astute.¹²

While Guinness were developing their global "inner strength" campaign, the Australian brewery Carlton United were drearily promoting their horse teams as an indication of the traditional source of their beer. Theirs was an unremarkable campaign that used horse drays much in the same way that Budweiser used its Clydesdale teams. But as Carlton moved out of the 1990s they decided to follow the more surreal path laid down by Guinness. Their "Made from Beer" Campaign was developed inhouse and by the agency George Patterson Y&R Melbourne. It was designed to use non-sequiturs and other comic devices to sell the brand.¹³ The campaign ran from 2003, and was so intensely popular that it left a potent legacy for the commercials that would come after it. The surrealist bent allowed the advertisements to play with sacred and mythic themes that, I will argue, flowed over into the aesthetics of subsequent alcohol adverts from other companies at this time. The first television advert called "No Explanations" was a riff off the idea that the beer was so good, it did not need justification. Andrew Meldrum of Carlton explained that their campaign was

a take-down of all the bullshit in beer advertising. We wanted to be brutally honest about where we're from and we kept coming back to the fact that it's a great beer with an unquestioned heritage so it doesn't need to say anything.¹⁴

To stress the special nature of the beer, the campaign ripped away any suggestion that the beer was *actually* special. While showing scenes of the Carlton brewery, the voiceover of the 44-second television commercial explains "Carlton Draught - fermented in a big mental thing... and driven around by horses." The narration of the advert was so bland as to be surreal. It

¹¹ John Amis, "Good Things Come to Those Who Wait": The Strategic Management of Image and Reputation at Guinness', *European Sport Management Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2003), pp. 199–202.

¹² Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

¹³ Robert Ian Westwood and Carl Rhodes (eds), *Humour, Work, and Organization* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 238–239.

¹⁴ Wenlei Ma, 'The Best Ads From Carlton Draught's "Made From Beer" Series', *AdNews*, September 7 2012, at <http://www.adnews.com.au/adnews/the-best-ads-from-carlton-draught-made-from-beer-series>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

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was capped off with the tag line “Carlton Draught: Made from Beer.” At first glimpse this just seems a humorous advertisement, but the reduction of the claims of the product to nothing more than an admission that the beer was indeed beer, opened the door to a whole new level of play in Australian beer advertising, where the hyperbole of claims about the product only increased towards the cosmic and miraculous. It was certainly a hyperbole that undercut itself with humour, but this humour in turn allowed future advertising claims on beer and also cider to become increasingly spiritual, and mythic.

The next “Made from Beer” advertisement from 2004 confirms this move. “Canoe” is a non sequitur, surrealist commercial that shows businessmen in corporate scenarios. The narration starts by explaining that “...a man has *got* to win, and to win he has to do manly things, make the tough decisions, get on top and stay there...” At this point the advertisement seems not only sexist, but intensely “alpha” male. But then it starts to undercut this premise by explaining that none of this can be achieved without a canoe. When we then see the alpha males try to negotiate their lives while carrying canoes, the mood becomes mocking toward this alpha-maleness. The canoe that each man must have, we are told, needs to be “the biggest, strongest, longest.” The humorous intent is magnified as these superlatives confirm the canoe as the alpha male’s “ultimate concern” - as the theologian Paul Tillich might put it¹⁵ - for what may be a metaphor for the alpha male’s penis, or for his life as a corporate dominator. The advertisement concludes by suggesting that managing canoes is a hard task, so just have a Carlton Draught instead. The intent here is that the beer is not a reward for hard work, but an alternative Ultimate Concern that shows up the ludicrous nature of the alpha-male world and its ultimate concerns (hard-to-manage canoes). So, in what seems a pointless and surreal piece of television, under analysis we find the presentation of two worlds; the canoe world (alpha-male, corporate, and surreal) and the beer world (satisfying, and an opt-out). The customer is being encouraged to convert from one world to the other. The surreal nature of the first world (which requires carrying around awkward canoes) is, by its very weirdness, one worth converting away from. Again the conventional message of beer-as-reward is subverted, and a new message developed; that the world you are in is not sufficient and you must move elsewhere – transform into some other world.

These developmental themes coalesce in beer advertising in the West in two remarkable examples of television advertising that occurred in 2005, the

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Perennial, 2001).

year that becomes foundational for the eruption of “sacred” advertising. The first example is the third instalment in Carlton’s “Made from Beer” campaign. Simply known as “The Big Ad,” this advertisement fulfills the dreams of every campaign designer in terms of its unqualified success. The action takes place in a valley near Queenstown, New Zealand. The setting refers directly to Peter Jackson’s epic film trilogy of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003). Andrew Lesnie, the cinematographer for the trilogy, was employed to shoot the Carlton advertisement. In this crossover, a powerful marker of “epic” is given to the aesthetic of the commercial, even though it quickly turns to mock epic. In the action, one crowd of men in yellow, red, and white robes is seen rushing towards another crowd of men, similarly dressed. As they run, they sing Carl Orff’s *O Fortuna!* But the words have been changed to “this is a big ad, expensive ad, this ad better sell some bloody beer!” The lyrics take us back to the sparse self-referentiality of the first advertisement in the series. The commercial refers to itself, as nothing but an advertisement, and so seems to subvert its own message.

Nevertheless, the action plays up the powerful sense of self-transformation that counterbalances the humorous lyrics. Overhead cameras show us that one crowd of men resembles a glass of Carlton Draught, the other group of men represent a human body. So, although we might think that these two groups are rushing into battle with each other, the final aerial shot shows one group of men (as beer) dancing into (and thus interpenetrating and transforming) the huge human body (also made up of men). Not only is the ad “big,” but drinking beer, and the flow of beer into the stomach is seen as a process needing to be celebrated as a major event, one that is on parallel with a significant battle, represented with a cast of thousands and by an Oscar-winning crew. The advertisement’s success was unprecedented. A very short run on free-to-air television was augmented by millions around the world going onto the internet to watch it voluntarily. The money spent on production was repaid with substantial free global viewings.

Beer as the Darwinian Mechanism: Noitulove

The second example is British. While themes of the epic/mock epic, self-transformation, and conversion are developing in Australia inspired in part by Guinness campaigns through the 1990s, the Guinness company returned in 2005 to add one more piece to the sacral arc I am describing with their ‘Noitulove’ campaign. This advert does nothing less than present the entire mechanism of evolution on the planet in sixty seconds. “Noitulove” is “evolution” backwards, and the campaign was devised by the agency Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO. In the television advertisement, three twenty-something

men are drinking Guinness in a London pub. They then start backwards out of the pub and through reversed time. We get to see them as cavemen walking through prehistoric Britain, as figures trapped in the ice age, then as apes, then flying foxes and so on. As the world transmutes back to its original state, the three men have un-evolved to be mudskippers, they drink some water and one of them goes “phah!” The advert ends with a photo of three glasses full of Guinness and the title “Good things come to those who wait.” The soundtrack is the song “The Rhythm of Life,” which complements the screen action. The ultimate message being that beverage dissatisfaction (prehistoric muddy water) was the main driver of evolution. Guinness stout then becomes the teleological end-point to a multi-billion-year process of evolution on our planet.

The Catapult (2006)

In February 2006, the Saatchi and Saatchi agency of Sydney launched what came to be the pivotal aesthetic advertisement in the Australian beer-as-sacred arc. It was immediately seen as the Lion Nathan Brewery’s response to Carlton’s Big Ad.¹⁶ At a visual level, residents and workers of an Australian Central Business district pull huge catapults into the middle of the city and use these and other catapults to launch barrels, cartons and packs of beer ingredients (clearly labelled “yeast,” “hops” and so on) into the sky. The action begins to look like a great sacrifice. The ritual action begins to take on a pulp religious aura. The advert positions the viewer as something of an adventurer who comes upon a tribe lost in the jungle performing strange and perhaps threatening obeisance to their strange deity. Two young naked women are also loaded into a catapult and launched into the stratosphere, ostensibly as virgin sacrifices. Finally a live stag (the logo of Tooheys) is shot heavenwards. There is a pause, clouds gather, and then it starts raining beer onto the wild celebrations across the city.

The soundtrack tells a slightly different story. Elmer Bernstein’s theme to *The Great Escape* (1963) plays throughout. In the first instance, this uses a military-like march to build the atmosphere of collective action. But the idea of a “great escape” also alludes to something else this advert is doing. Although no doubt done humorously, what the advert is showing is the way that the preparation of beer actually opens a break between the quotidian world (as represented by the CBD) and something far more paradisiacal. By sacrificing, hops and virgins, the city dwellers are able to forge a situation

¹⁶ CB, ‘Beer, Glorious Beer: But Is Saatchi’s Blockbuster Tooheys New TVC a Match for the Big Ad?’, *Campaign Brief*, 14 February 2006, at <http://www.campaignbrief.com/2006/02/beer-glorious-beer-but-is-saat.html>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

where heavenly-blended beer literally rains back down on them, transforming the terrestrial world as it goes. Although the other advertisements that I have discussed touch in some way on the theme of self- and world-transformation, it is Tooheys' Catapult campaign that most potently uses (mock) religious ritual to show how the product (in this case Tooheys Dry) is able to not only transform the self, but also the world and permit a sacral exchange between the regular world and something more heavenly or pure.

From the Pure to the Everyday

In the years leading up to 2010 a range of beer advertisements (and one notable cider commercial) develop this paradigm where the alcoholic product provides a mediating point between worlds. For the sake of brevity, I will discuss the three most notable examples in this part of the sacral arc.

In 2009, the Sydney agency BMF created the "Birds Versus Humans" campaign for *5 Seeds* cider. This was an offshoot of the Tooheys Dry campaign, driven again by the brewers Lion Nathan. The first 40 seconds of the 60-second advertisement presented a black, white, and grey dystopia where humans scrounge on the ground for apple cores abandoned by large black birds who rule the skies. The advertisement starts with a slide explaining, "...with the apple came knowledge." One of the humans notices an apple high in the branches and does her best to get at it, but flocks of birds pounce on her and she falls. The last 20 seconds of the advertisement is replete with colour and presents a rich landscape of West-European intensity. A naked woman with luxuriant hair reaches easily for an apple. A bird watches her do this, but she eats it. Words appear next to her, "Thankfully, we claimed the apple first." The tag line is ambiguous. It suggests that the human species can access this Edenic state through apples; or, more importantly, through drinking *5 Seeds* cider. However, the "we" could also be Lion Nathan, suggesting that as this company claimed the apple first, Eden, and all that came with it, is only available through this particular brand of cider. In either case, the inference is that the product and its constituent ingredients are the crux of these two worlds. It suggests that what is to us the natural hierarchy of nature has been granted by the apple and the product. What we have in this example is a message very far from the original trope of "beer-as-reward." The knowledge granted by the apple means that no struggle is now required by humans. The only thing needed to access a perfect world is this one product.

The next campaign worthy of mention is that of the Pure Blonde brand of beer. This campaign is significant as it covers a period from the release of the first advert in October 2007 through to the last example in 2013. The overall campaign was called "Brewtopia," and it began with a television

advertisement devised by Clemenger BBDO Melbourne. Again we are presented with an Edenic state. Lion cubs, white infant bears, lambs, and doves all cavort in a landscape rich in fertility. Drops of water gather in rivers aerated by puffer fish and waterfalls. Hops infuses the water and flocks of birds hold spider-web nets to sieve the liquid now turning into beer. Blonde humans in perfect white tunics riding white horses are seen bottling the beer by simply filling bottles from the stream. Everything seems pure and ideal; the music is a whispery chorale. At this point a Pure Blonde articulated lorry backs into the scene. A sweat-drenched, overweight driver opens the cab door, and we hear Warrant's "She's My Cherry Pie" blasting from his cab. The blond dwellers of this particular Eden load the truck. The driver uses a sparrow to open a bottle of beer. He gets in his cab and accelerates hard; the blonds are covered in mud from his spinning tyres. The tag line appears at the end; "from a place more pure than yours." Again, the product is seen as the mediating point between a nasty, yobbo-like, Australian reality and a perfect realm.

All the commercials I have discussed thus far have attracted attention because of the spectacular nature of their production, their use of irony, irrelevance, and non sequiturs, and their mythic/ pop cultural religion content. Although religious, very few of these adverts raised the ire of the religious in Australia. Complaints against Carlton's "Big Ad" focused on the use of "bloody" when the chorus sings "this ad better bloody sell some beer."¹⁷ The two girls being sacrificed to the heavens by way of the catapult in the Tooheys Dry advert received some attention, but during this time the advertising campaign that received the most complaints was a Tooheys Dry advert that preceded "Catapult" (and not discussed here) that featured a disembodied tongue taking itself to a party and stealing beer while its owner was asleep (2004).¹⁸ This lack of complaint suggests that, unlike many controversial Lamb campaigns over the years (their 2017 offering discussed in the preface to this article was only one of many controversies perpetuated by Meat and Livestock Australia), brewers in Australia were happy to allow advertising creatives to play with general religious themes, but not go into religious specifics in such a way as to touch on blasphemy, or damage sales of the product.

When in 2010, the Pure Blonde "Brewtopia" campaign released its third instalment, the content was telling. Shot over ten days in the wilds of

¹⁷ Advertising Standards Bureau (2017), at <https://adstandards.com.au>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

¹⁸ Simon Canning, 'Ad Ranks Despite Tongue Lashing', *The Australian*, September 23 2004, at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/archive/news/ad-ranks-despite-tongue-lashing/news-story/f62969819a2eb720f1780e2ff40476a7>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

Slovenia and directed by Paul Middleditch (who also directed the “Big Ad”), this advertisement has something of a Tolkienesque feel to it. Two men, following an “ancient” map make a pilgrimage through lush landscape to a place marked on the map as “Mount Utopia.” They ford rivers, tramp through forests and climb mountains. Finally, as the 90 second advertisement reaches its conclusion, they arrive at a great crystal palace. A unicorn appears, Pure Blonde beer bottles appear in their hands, and, as they drink, a white-clad blonde handmaiden arrives with more beers. One of the men burps and the whole edifice crashes around them. One might say that the content of the advertisement itself is so cliché-ridden, that we see here the sacral arc I have been describing, collapse in on itself.

This collapse is perhaps proved by a more recent offering by Pure Blonde. Launched in 2013 the campaign “River of Blonde” tries to create a rupture of pure beauty, rather than seek to play with sacral motifs.¹⁹ In an old European city, a great line of young blonde people dressed in white flow around empty city streets as though they are indeed a river, and eventually they swirl around a subway entrance and disappear, as if the earth has finally ‘drunk’ them.²⁰ The soundtrack uses a blissed-out version of Steve Windwood’s “Higher Love.” Whilst one might say that this campaign seeks to discreetly refer to the purity of nature, this campaign does not work. The image of an all-blonde crowd in a European city, does a little too much to link the idea of ‘purity’ to ‘whiteness.’ The sacrality here is suddenly vested more in racial politics than it is in a remembrance of the sacral magic of nature.

Conclusion

What I have sought to do in this article is to identify a sacral arc that emerges within a range of advertisements for beer in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Australia and elsewhere, and, framed within various aesthetics and within particular tensions as defined by community standards, censorship, and client needs to show how that arc developed and eventually how it exhausted itself. I demonstrated how the conventional message of beer advertising, that is ‘beer as reward,’ mutated into something that was clearly more ‘sacred’ in its conceptual language. This sacrality was vested in national myth to a small extent, but was more powerfully represented by the creation of

¹⁹ Ricki, ‘Pure Blonde Delivers a “River of Blonde” Brand New Campaign Via Clemenger BBDO, Melbourne’, *Campaign Brief*, March 20 2013, at <http://www.campaignbrief.com/2013/03/pure-blonde-delivers-a-river-o.html>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

²⁰ Ricki, ‘Pure Blonde’.

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ideal, paradisaical, Edenic worlds. The product (beer or cider) was seen as the enabling point between the quotidian world and the 'pure' world, and in the transference of purity and sacrality, transformations of the self and the quotidian world were possible, not by any particular force of effort by the consumer, but simply because they had consumed the product. In all this I do not seek to challenge the basic premises of Jhally and Sheffield's claims regarding the religiosity of advertising, but have augmented their claims. By deploying an aesthetic paradigm and analyzing the content of a range of outstanding beer (and cider) advertisements from 2004 to 2013, I have demonstrated how far breweries and advertising producers dared go in revealing the sacral power of advertising as Sheffield identified it. The product, in these examples, is depicted as a device of self and global transformation. I also demonstrated how far these campaign creators were willing to venture into the field of the overtly religious. It might be concluded, on reflection, that they did not go very far at all. A general stereotype of sacrality - Edens, pure places, natural utopias - was deployed. I also considered how this aesthetic eventually exhausted itself. The Meat and Livestock campaign from 2017, however, may be an indication that, with formal religious affiliations continuing to decline in Australia, the advertising industry will develop a renewed taste for deploying religious content. It will be interesting to study in the coming years exactly how far this will go, not with ideal worlds and pure places, but with the immediate facts and personalities of specific living religions. But one suspects, even as this new field develops the Prophet will still be phoning it in.