Advance Praise for *The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society*

“Inga Clendinnen’s books and essays are among the finest historical writings of our time, and some of her best essays are collected here for the first time. Each one is a gem – a brilliant, beautifully written entry into the subject at hand, and also a model of precise historical inquiry and an unflinching engagement with puzzling, morally troubling acts of casual or calculated violence.

“In Clendinnen’s explorations of ‘the more interior experience of conquest and colonization’ in Mexico and Australia, all the parties involved are ‘fit subjects for wonder and analysis.’ She finds that experience in her remarkable readings of their words and recorded actions. Above all, her subject is what James Joyce called ‘the mystery of the conscious’ – what people did as they understood it. She is always alert to the opacity of the historical record, ‘the mysteriousness of human consciousness,’ our capacity for self-delusion, and the daunting task at hand. Historians, she writes, are ‘Ahabs pursuing our great white whale, dimly aware that the whole business is, if coolly considered, rather less than reasonable.’ But she does not shrink from the hard, delicate work of discerning and reckoning with actual experience and consequences. Here is history as ‘exact imagining’ at its best.”

– William B. Taylor, University of California, Berkeley
The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society

Essays on Mesoamerican Society and Culture

How can men be brought to look steadily on the face of battle? Tenochtitlán, the great city of the Aztecs, was the creation of war, and war was its dynamic. In the title work of this compelling collection of essays, Inga Clendinnen reconstructs the sequence of experiences through which young Aztec warriors were brought to embrace their duty to their people, to their city, and to the forces that moved the world and the heavens. Subsequent essays explore the survival of Yucatec Maya culture in the face of Spanish conquest and colonisation, the insidious corruption of an austere ideology translated into dangerously novel circumstances, and the multiple paths to the sacred constructed by ‘defeated’ populations in sixteenth-century Mexico. The collection ends with Clendinnen’s transition to the colonial history of her own country: a close and loving reading of the 1841 expedition journal of George Augustus Robinson, appointed ‘Protector of Aborigines’ in the Port Phillip District of Australia.

Inga Clendinnen is Emeritus Scholar in History at La Trobe University, Melbourne. Her publications include Aztecs (Cambridge, 1991), Reading the Holocaust (Cambridge, 1999), and Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517–1579 (second edition, Cambridge, 2003). Her memoir, Tiger’s Eye, was published in 2001; her Boyer Lectures, True Stories, in 1999; and a collection of her literary essays, Agamemnon’s Kiss, in 2006. Her book on the meeting between the First Fleet and Aboriginal Australians, Dancing with Strangers (Cambridge, 2003), won several awards, including the Pacific Rim Kiriyama Prize.
The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society

*Essays on Mesoamerican Society and Culture*

INGA CLENDINNEN
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