



Editors' Introduction

» ELIZABETH WEBBY & GRAHAM TULLOCH

Once again it is a pleasure to welcome readers to a new issue of *Humanities Australia* and a sample of the outstanding research and writing being carried out by Australian humanities scholars. While the contributors to this issue come from a broad range of the disciplines represented in the Academy, including linguistics, philosophy, the arts, history and Asian studies, some common themes have emerged, especially in relation to questions of human rights, both in the past and today.

Those who attended the Academy's 2016 symposium, 'Asia Australia: Transnational Connections', at the State Library Victoria, greatly appreciated the annual Academy Lecture given by our current President, John Fitzgerald. We present an expanded version of his lecture here, under the title 'Academic Freedom and the Contemporary University: Lessons from China'. Fitzgerald draws attention to the Western concept of academic freedom, noting that this 'sits uneasily alongside the immense resources invested in contemporary universities charged with driving innovation, industry, and business in highly competitive national and international markets.' As a leading scholar of contemporary China, he stresses in particular the limitations placed on academic freedom in China, arguing that this has implications for Australian universities as their links with China increase. In concluding, he reiterates our 'need to talk about values': 'We have a duty to speak out about contemporary risks to academic freedom, in

the knowledge that the liberties we enjoy in the academy play an important role in the life of the community at large.'

The second day of the symposium was largely devoted to highlighting three interdisciplinary reports produced under the Academy's auspices as part of the Securing Australia's Future (SAF) program, a multidisciplinary research initiative of the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA), funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). We include here Ian Ang's outline of the report produced by the expert working group she chaired, *Smart Engagement with Asia: Leveraging Language, Research and Culture* (2015). As she notes, this report 'was a unique opportunity for humanities scholars to work together with other researchers — scientists and social scientists — on a topic of crucial importance for Australia's future prosperity and security, allowing them to conduct evidence-based research and generate interdisciplinary findings to support policy development.' The report focuses on three areas — 'languages and linguistic competencies, research and research collaboration, and cultural diplomacy and relations' — highlighting problems in all of them that urgently need addressing.

If Australians know less than is desirable of Asian languages and cultures, their knowledge of Australia's indigenous languages and cultures is even smaller. Nicholas Evans draws attention to this in discussing his current ARC Australian Laureate Fellowship project, 'The Wellsprings of Linguistic Diversity'. As he notes, over thousands

(above)
Academy
Secretariat,
Canberra, Australia.

PHOTO: AAH ARCHIVES

of years our 'indigenous cultures developed a diverse mosaic of over three hundred languages', but, today, these languages are 'invisible and inaudible in the public sphere'. His essay gives an account of some of the links between language, culture and country as well as showing how indigenous cultures were fascinated by language, as seen in the metalinguistic terms, practices and products they developed. While deploring the loss of so many indigenous languages since 1788, he is optimistic about the ways in which new technologies are aiding language recording and retrieval.

For those colonising Australia, indigenous linguistic achievements were certainly invisible; many saw Aboriginal peoples as no better than animals and treated them accordingly. In 'Empathy and the Myall Creek Massacre: Images, Humanitarianism and Empire', Jane Lydon discusses reports of this 1838 massacre, looking in particular at an engraving by 'Phiz', 'Australian Aborigines Slaughtered by Convicts', published in the 1841 edition of a highly popular work, *The Chronicles of Crime; or, The New Newgate Calendar*. She notes the links between humanitarian reactions to Myall Creek and the British antislavery movement, pointing out similarities between 'Phiz's' representation of the 'upraised, shackled hands of the Aboriginal people' and Josiah Wedgwood's widely circulated antislavery logo. Both, as she says, stress 'the innocence and vulnerability of the victims — but also their passivity and need to be helped by the white humanitarian.'

Today, when a striking image can achieve world-wide circulation in a matter of minutes, it is fascinating to see evidence of how such images circulated internationally in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like the Wedgwood logo, an image satirising fashionable hairstyles appeared in many different countries in different forms. This is only one of the insights to be found in Peter McNeil's 'Macaroni Men and Eighteenth-Century Fashion Culture: "The Vulgar Tongue"'. If you have ever been puzzled why the term 'macaroni' appears in the well-known rhyme 'Yankee Doodle', McNeil provides the answer, as well as explaining the seeming incongruity of the same word being used for both a type of pasta and a mode of dress. He even finds an Australian link, since Sir Joseph Banks was apparently one of the 'macaroni' men.

Humanitarian issues return in Joy Damousi's essay, 'Australian League of Nations Union and War Refugees: Internationalism and Humanitarianism, 1930–39', which focuses on the activities of local branches of this Union, formed to promote the values and aims of the League of Nations, in response to the growing number of international refugees. As she argues, members aimed 'to foster within Australia an international and humanitarian outlook towards the plight of war refugees during the interwar years'. In doing so, they put pressure on the Australian government 'to change its international policy and accept more refugees from Europe', pushing it 'into a sphere of independent international diplomacy and relations — one less governed by Imperial interests — a move which was required if a more open immigration policy was to develop.'

In 'A Very Principled Project', philosopher Peter Anstey takes us back to the early modern period, 'the age of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment', a time when 'almost everyone was talking about principles, arguing for them, arguing from them, assuming them, and using them.' His essay draws on research carried out from 2012 to 2016 for his ARC Future Fellowship project, 'The Nature and Status of Principles in Early Modern Philosophy', and reminds us of how fundamental the notion of principles is to a period that laid the foundations of our modern way of thinking.

We are also delighted to include in this issue two new poems by one of our newer Fellows, Chris Andrews, who is a widely published poet as well as an internationally-known researcher and translator. ¶



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