

JOHN HAY AC FAHA

1942–2016

HONORARY FELLOW · ELECTED 2006



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John Hay's death in late 2016 brought to an end a remarkably productive and influential life. Emeritus Professor Hay was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities in 2006, and is well known as a scholar for his work as one of the two General Editors of the *Bibliography of Australian Literature* (2001–08), a four-volume record of all Australian novels, plays and books of poetry published in the last two hundred years. The Academy took the opportunity to recognise his scholarly work when it elected him a Fellow, but the range of his contributions to Australian universities extended far beyond that. John Hay deserves to be celebrated for his achievements as a leader, and the Academy itself can value those achievements all the more because they were founded on a training in the humanities. One of the oldest traditions of the humanities is the study and practice of rhetoric, and John was a brilliant rhetorician. His eloquence was impressive, not just for the fluency he displayed but for the fact that his interventions were so thoroughly apposite. When launching a book at an Academy function, he performed with distinction and easy grace. Addressing politicians about the need to support universities, he provided convincingly direct arguments about social and economic constraints. By the

quality of his speech, both formal and extemporaneous, he commanded authority inside and outside the academic world. At one moment when xenophobic politics appeared to be taking hold in Queensland, he called a general meeting of students at the university in order to rally support for humane and humanist values. On that occasion he took a stand, not by a general affirmation of moral principles, but through a personal narrative of the friendships he had shared with students of diverse cultural backgrounds during his student days in Perth. Those cross-cultural friendships, he said, had changed his view of the world. Exposure and enrichment of that kind was in his view one of the key purposes of a university education.

John Hay was born in Western Australia in 1942 and attended Perth Modern School. He studied literature at the University of Western Australia and went on to hold a research scholarship at Cambridge University. His Australian academic career was shaped throughout by a strong interest in institutional policy and practice. At the University of Western Australia he held the position of Chair of English and Head of Department before becoming Deputy Chair of the Academic Board. Having moved to Monash University, he became Dean of Arts and Chair of the National Key Centre for Australian Studies before being appointed Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor. In 1992 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Deakin University and in 1996 Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, a position he held with great distinction for twelve years.

The role of Vice-Chancellor as he understood it called for a broad range of relations with institutional and personal interlocutors outside his university. That is how he came to be Chair, at various times, of the Group of Eight, of Universitas 21, and of the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. At the heart of his career was an ongoing commitment to the humanities. In a farewell text written to members of the University of Queensland on the occasion of his retirement, he wrote: 'For as long as I can remember, literature, the arts and the challenge of new ideas have compelled my imagination, just as the aspiration to teach and undertake research shaped my life.' That commitment and those values found characteristic institutional expression when he took on such roles as Deputy Chair of the Council of the National Library of Australia, Chair of the Queensland

Art Gallery Board of Trustees and Trustee of Queensland Performing Arts. Yet all the while his intellectual and discursive versatility were such that he was able to play influential roles in scientific institutions, serving for example as Chair of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research's Berghofer Institute, as well as on civic and governmental boards of various kinds. In 2004, he was made a Companion in the Order of Australia (AC) in the Australia Day Honours List for exceptional services to higher education, especially in research and innovation and in the creation of new academic, research and administrative structures.

On the occasion of his passing, the current Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, Professor Peter Høj, rightly observed that Emeritus Professor Hay had created a template for a university chief executive officer of the twenty-first century.

John Hay is survived by his wife, Barbara, and by his children Chris, Kate, Tim, and Ben.

PETER CRYLE FAHA