



Editor's Introduction

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*L*ast November, the Australian Academy of the Humanities held its Annual Symposium at the University of Western Sydney under the title 'Challenging (the) Humanities'. One of the papers in the session on 'Material Histories' presented a fascinating historical overview of some of the wider ramifications of the development of the beef industry in Britain. While the bodies of various breeds of cattle had been changed thanks to selective breeding, the bodies of those who ate them had also developed in different ways thanks to more meat in their diets. Not all of the changes in either cows or humans had been for the better. As this paper demonstrated, a topic that initially might seem only of interest to agricultural economists had a significant social and cultural dimension.

Over the years, the Academy, through the efforts of successive Presidents, Executive Directors, and a large number of Fellows and Honorary Fellows, has tried to ensure that a humanities' perspective is present in the advice given to government on the development of policy in a wide range of areas. While there has been a particular focus on education, research, languages and the arts, the Academy has also stressed the need to consider the cultural and social implications of proposals in other areas.

The problem of taking a too narrow view of a particular area is well demonstrated in Julianne Schultz's essay 'Creating a Place for

Culture in Policy'. Professor Schultz has made a major contribution to Australia's cultural life as founding editor of the *Griffith REVIEW* and in her many other roles, so we are delighted that she found time to share her insights into Australian cultural policy. As she explains, it is important to see culture not just as a matter of concern to artists and their audiences. In addition to the artistic value of cultural products, it is necessary to consider their institutional value, instrumental value and industry value. Drawing on the homely image of a pie with a cherry in the middle, she finds a way to embody the many contributions the arts make to Australian life.

The other essays in this issue discuss cultural products of various kinds, from a wide range of periods and places: twentieth-century France and North America; Bronze Age Cyprus; Aceh from the sixteenth century to the present. Many essays also have a material focus and an emphasis on the roles cultural products, whether films, dances, pots or high fashion, play in particular societies at particular times.

Anne Freadman's 'Colette: An Eye for Textiles', for example, takes us to Paris in the earlier twentieth century with a focus on the arts journalism of French writer Colette, in particular her writing about uses of new textiles in the fashion industry. Professor Freadman argues that Colette's journalism needs to be recognised as a significant contribution

to literary modernism, demonstrating this through detailed analysis of passages from her articles. Colette, she notes, was practising the ancient art of ekphrasis, in writing about the visual in ways that manage vividly to recreate the experience for the reader.

The careful spaces in the title of Ross Gibson's 'Breathing Looking Thinking Acting' alert us to his focus on the first of these everyday actions. Breathe is truly essential to who we are but, like culture, 'frustratingly amorphous'. Beginning with Frank O'Hara's poem 'The Day Lady Died', which captures the way a great performance can take one's breathe away, Professor Gibson goes on to look at the impact of a central speech in Orson Welles' 1948 film *The Lady from Shanghai* on both other participants in this scene and the spectator. Like Colette, he practises ekphrasis, translating the visual into the literary, though going further to convey the way a spectator can literally be possessed by a performance, and so made conscious of the possibility of change.

The creativity required to translate the visual into the verbal is also essential when translating from one language to another, though this is not always as recognised as it should be, Brian Nelson and Rita Wilson argue in 'Perspectives on Translation'. Professor Nelson demonstrates some of the creative choices made in his translations of Zola's novels, concluding that 'The activity of the writer and that of the translator are indivisible.' While the concept of world literature would be impossible without translations, in an increasingly interconnected world the significance of translation goes well beyond the literary, as the authors note, with translation studies now a growing area of study.

Another type of translation can be seen in Margaret Kartomi's 'Acehnese Sitting Song-Dances and Religious Conversion' which links these dance forms to 'the broad social movement known as *dakwah*, meaning the early outreach and conversion to Islam and the continuing call to believers to deepen their faith and piety.' Religious beliefs and exercises not only influenced the development of such performances in the past but have ensured that sitting-song dances continue to be culturally significant in Aceh today.

A very different type of performance, the Busby Berkeley dance sequences in Hollywood musicals of the 1930s, is central to Barbara Creed's 'Evolutionary Aesthetics: The Hollywood Musical as Darwinian Mating Game'. Reading *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* alongside Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871), she points out the many similarities between the sexual display and mating rituals of birds as described by Darwin and the songs, dances and plots of these musicals. But while the male bird takes the lead in display and ritual, in the musicals the emphasis falls on the female body, especially in Berkeley's artfully filmed dance sequences.

In an increasingly digital age, the significance of actual material objects, whether books or archaeological collections, can be overlooked as the shelves of libraries and museums become crowded and funding harder to come by. The research outlined in David Frankel's 'Recovering Two Ancient Cities in Cyprus' was possible only because objects and documentation relating to two earlier excavations in Cyprus had been preserved in museums there and in Australia. Both sites are now in the Turkish part of Cyprus and not accessible to foreign archaeologists but new interpretations have been possible thanks to the preserved material.

We are delighted to also include in this issue a story by one of Australia's leading novelists, Alex Miller. In 'The Wine Merchant of Aarhus', as in his novels, Miller draws on personal experiences and people he has known, transforming them through the power of the imagination. Here, in a story 'which is not really a story', he creates a powerful atmospheric portrait of a lonely house and, by implication, the loneliness of the woman living there. The two new poems by Kevin Hart, 'Testament' and 'Father', are also deeply personal while at the same time deeply embedded in a material world that they bring vividly to life for the reader.



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