

# Humanities Australia

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» ROSS GIBSON » KEVIN HART » MARGARET KARTOMI » ALEX MILLER  
» BRIAN NELSON & RITA WILSON » JULIANNE SCHULTZ

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Welcome

I am delighted to welcome you to the fourth issue of **Humanities Australia**, the annual journal of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. In this issue we continue to showcase the depth and creativity of humanities scholars, and we are also delighted to feature the artwork of award-winning Australian artist, Kristin Headlam, on the cover and accompanying two poems by Kevin Hart.

The Academy is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, established in 1969 to advance the pursuit of excellence in the humanities, and to promote understanding of the humanities both within universities and the broader community. The Academy now comprises more than five hundred and fifty Fellows who have been elected on the basis of the excellence and impact of their scholarship in fields such as archaeology, art, Asian and European studies, classical and modern literature, cultural and communication studies, languages and linguistics, philosophy, musicology, history and religion.

In our policy and research work we are able to draw on this extensive knowledge base to provide expert advice to government on the social, cultural and human dimensions of the challenges and opportunities facing Australia.

Over the last year the Academy has been drawing extensively on the expertise of its Fellows for a programme of research on 'Securing Australia's Future' conducted in collaboration with our fellow learned academies—the Academy of Science, the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and the Academy of Social Sciences—and with the Office of the Chief Scientist. Over the next few years the Academies, through their peak body, the Australian Council of Learned Academies, will report to the Prime Minister's Engineering, Science and Innovation Council on a range of long-term challenges, such as future technological change, the contribution of science and research to lifting Australia's productivity, alternative energy sources, and Asia literacy.

We also continue our work in support of scholars in the early stages of their careers, host an annual symposium, convene workshops, administer a range of grant programmes, and publish **Humanities Australia**.

I hope you will find this fourth issue of **Humanities Australia** a stimulating and enjoyable reading experience.



LESLEY JOHNSON AM FAHA  
President, Australian Academy  
of the Humanities, 2011–

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# Editor's Introduction

» ELIZABETH WEBBY

*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

(above)

Academy  
Secretariat,  
Canberra, Australia.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY  
OF AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY  
OF THE HUMANITIES.>

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. Breath 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 breath 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 *42<sup>nd</sup> 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.



ELIZABETH WEBBY AM FAHA,  
Editor, Australian Academy  
of the Humanities, 2009-

» KEVIN HART



A Gardener at Midnight:  
**Black Garden**  
by Kristin Headlam.  
1994, oil on linen,  
122 x 122cm.  
Tasmanian Museum  
& Art Gallery

COURTESY THE ARTIST &  
CHARLES NODRUM GALLERY.



KEVIN HART <sup>FAHA</sup> has published several collections of poetry, including **Flame Tree: Selected Poems** (Bloodaxe Books, 2002), **Young Rain** (University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), and **Morning Knowledge** (University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). He is currently writing a new book entitled **Barefoot**. He teaches at the University of Virginia.

# Testament

Since every word I write bespeaks my end,  
And since my body's busy making plans  
It won't reveal to me in steady light,

I pen my testament while light abounds.

*Item:* those little bones inside my ear,  
The ones as fine as hair, I leave them all

To scholar friends, with this: know everything  
Worth hearing may be written there. *Item:*  
One heart, much used, but good in print for years,

I leave to those who kindly read my verse,  
Along with tastes of verbs upon the tongue  
And nouns that populate a Counter-Earth

Where you might live another life. *Item:*  
Deep muddy windings of the Brisbane River:  
I leave them to my students, for their dreams,

And for the sparkle dreams will bring their work.

*Item:* Regret that rises, falls, all night  
While throbbing through the valves of memory;

I owe it to my wife, and wish her well,  
For bearing with a black-edged mind for years  
That cut her all too sharply more than once.

*Item:* I leave my girls a rage to know,  
Which means a little forest's worth of books:  
Read greedily and calmly both at once,

And in your pleasure I shall live again.

*Item:* And for my enemies, though few  
And vaguely out of focus anyway,

I wish some things they'll have no matter what:  
Mosquitoes, meetings, marriages gone sour,  
The noose of wine, dead hopes, old age, limp dicks.



# CREATING A PLACE FOR CULTURE IN POLICY

» JULIANNE SCHULTZ

## CULTURE IN CHANGING TIMES

*I*t was one of those suggestions that seemed like a good idea at the time. When a thousand of the nation's 'best and brightest' gathered at Parliament House for the 2020 Summit, in the early days of Kevin Rudd's short-lived prime ministership, Canberra was glowing at its autumnal best. The air was alive with possibility as an unlikely assembly of people imagined a future almost within reach.

Those invited to participate in the 'Towards a Creative Australia' stream were a diverse group. In the cartoons the facilitators drew to capture their work were famous faces, corporate players, deep thinkers and edgy creatives. The energy and sense of anticipation in the government party room they occupied was harder to capture, but every bit as tangible.

The discussion that occurred over that weekend has reverberated ever since as policy makers, politicians and those with a stake in the cultural sector have attempted to develop a national cultural policy. Creating a policy to encompass and celebrate Australian culture was an ambitious idea, and much more complicated than imagined.

The promise of that sparkling April weekend has been lost in the more mundane and less edifying reality of Australian politics for the past five years. The summit participants put artists at the centre of culture, but imagined a

world in which culture grew in many different directions to enrich lives both materially and through the spirit.

For something so essential to who we are, how we live and learn, how and what we communicate and celebrate, culture is frustratingly amorphous. Though intrinsic to humanity, it is hard to define in the workable shorthand essential to public discussion. The carefully crafted definitions developed by UNESCO, embodied in international agreements and promulgated by scholars, are invaluable but the tinge of bureaucratic legalism, or academic jargon, makes them too cumbersome for general use.

Rather, for most people culture is something you know when you see it: art and entertainment in all their forms, heritage, tradition, belief, language and an ethos that informs, shapes and defines identity.

Culture enriches lives, helps provide meaning, joy and insight. A thriving society is one in which its culture is more than the sum of its parts.

This has always been the case, but is likely to become more pronounced and important in the twenty-first century. In his ground-breaking work *The Empathic Civilization* (Viking, 2012), drawing on insights from brain research and child development, Jeremy Rifkin argues that our newly and intimately interconnected world is creating a 'dawning realization that

we are a fundamentally empathic species with profound and far-reaching consequences for humanity'. Technology and communication, accompanied and driven by revolutionary scientific understandings and the challenges of resource depletion, are at the heart of this transformation. Culture will make it manifest.

The twenty-first century promises to be significantly different to those that preceded it, driven by the positives of knowledge, connection, education and mobility; modified by the uncertainties of global warming and shifting geopolitics. The nature of these changes will only become clear in the future but, like all periods of rapid change, our time feels tentative and unsettled. In addressing current issues, old templates and familiar formulas are of limited utility. Making sense of these issues, defining them, enabling people to see and understand them, increasingly is a task that falls to artists, creatives, communicators and other cultural workers—including scholars, researchers and educators.

Pointers to the patterns that define the times and help shape the future will emerge with varying degrees of clarity. But they cannot be predetermined, even if today we can identify some of the contributing factors.

### THE PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGE

**This context has made** the challenge of crafting a national cultural policy more complex.

For those with an ideological bent culture is a tool for control—a directed assertion of identity and value. Australians have had two significant 'cultural' policies in recent decades, Paul Keating's aspirational arts-lead vision of *Creative Nation*, and under John Howard the grinding experience of the so-called 'culture wars' and competing interpretations of history.

Setting aside the particularities of domestic politics, which have leached optimism and fostered cynicism, the cultural economy is quite different to what it once was.

In the two decades since the last Australian cultural policy, *Creative Nation*, the cultural economy has grown to become much bigger and more diverse. The defensiveness and sense of threat from abroad, which pervaded that document, is no longer relevant—the

cultural cringe is a thing of the past. The cultural economy is strongly connected to many other areas of economic activity, a sector experiencing significant economic and employment growth, with more intersections with a wide range of government agencies and activities, and with more people seeking cultural work than ever before.

The opportunities of digitisation and globalisation are considerable—the old tyrannies of distance and population size are no longer the impediments they once were. The challenges technology presents to traditional business models of many of the



most successful creative and cultural industries also cannot be underestimated, adding another layer of uncertainty to the policy development framework.

This is tricky terrain. Even getting culture onto the policy agenda is something that has long been resisted. The so-called 'culture wars' that dominated the Howard years, when culture became a synonym for a certain sort of politics—rather than signifying larger engagement with humanity—sapped the spirit of many. The narrowing of 'culture' to a point-scoring debate about interpretation of history made many nervous about the terrain. As a result cultural policy has the potential to be tainted by ideology, patronage and controversy.

In a diverse and democratic society, clearly culture cannot be determined by government. Culture is an expression created by a community, drawing on the capacity of the people who embody it, not owned by one

(above)

'Towards a Creative Australia', *Australia 2020 Summit*, 19 – 20 April 2008.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET



group or another. Thus, there is a clear place for government to play an enabling role, and a need to recognise more expansively how getting a cultural policy right could deliver results that have an impact with multipliers across the society and economy.

Government can enable culture to flourish by providing resources for education and training, resources to facilitate the creation of works, and by introducing policies and regulations that enable businesses to become established and grow. Government can place culture at the centre of international diplomacy, support the preservation of cultural heritage, and foster national institutions essential to the distribution and dissemination of cultural products.

One useful description of the role of culture in successful societies is as one of four essential pillars—the others being land, people and institutions. The importance of land and people are well understood, as generators of wealth, security and identity. Accordingly these have received a great deal of policy attention. Similarly the importance of robust institutions

is well understood, and an extraordinary amount of energy and thought has been focused on developing and maintaining them.

But culture has languished, as a virtual no-go area for policy makers, too hard to measure, subject to manipulation and dispute. Yet culture is the glue that binds the other three pillars together—as a product of them, and one with its own demands and disciplines.

The arts undoubtedly lie at the heart of culture, but they are not its only expression. One of the challenges faced by those involved in policy discussions about developing a national cultural policy—since that need was identified by the Creative Australia Stream at the 2020 Summit—was to find a way of broadening the understanding of the cultural economy and its value.

The intrinsic value of art is widely accepted. The economic value of the creative industries is considerable, and measurable by well-established rules of accounting and economics. The social value of culture stretching beyond this is intuitively understood, but inadequately measured, especially as it relates to delivering public value and building national identity.

(above)  
 'Towards a Creative Australia' participants at the Australia 2020 Summit, 20 April 2008.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

When the government released a discussion paper on the proposed National Cultural Policy in the second half of 2011 there was little expectation that the process of turning the colourful Discussion Paper into a serious policy would be so complex and protracted. In part this was due to the responses—hundreds of very detailed submissions, an extensive online engagement and an active reference group—which challenged those involved to think more expansively about what a cultural policy might encompass and how it might intersect with other areas of policy and government.

The submissions pointed to new directions. More than anything, they demonstrated that those with most interest in the policy wanted an expansive and strategic engagement. They wanted culture to be recognised as including the arts, but going much further. As the Academy of Humanities wrote in its submission:

A national cultural policy for Australia needs to employ a more expansive, plural sense of culture than is currently constructed in the Discussion Paper: one that is attuned to the diffuseness and distinctiveness of practice and expression in Australia; acknowledging the centrality of Australia's Indigenous culture and operating with the principles of cultural diversity as a touchstone. A policy framework for cultural development should support cultural heritage, creative industries, cultural maintenance and tradition at all levels—in research, in education, within public institutions (including public broadcasters), within media and content development industries.

The process of thinking about culture in this way is not something that those involved in politics or public policy have had a lot of experience with. Even before the creation of the Australia Council forty years ago, governments have enjoyed dispensing the baubles of the arts. This support while modest has been bipartisan. At times it has been driven by patronage, or recognition of the civilising benefits of engagement with the arts, the creation of community engagement, economic benefit, national identity.

Although Australia has been an active member of UNESCO and a signatory to international covenants assuring citizens of their rights to culture and to participate in its creation and dissemination, this has not been incorporated into legislation. Leigh Tabrett has illustrated the limits of the policy-making framework in Australia in her recent Platform Paper, *It's Culture Stupid* (Currency Press, 2013).

## THE ENABLING STATE

**Discussion about Australia's cultural policy** has rightly focused on the arts, as an area in which the government has a legitimate and long-standing interest, but it has gone further. The discussion is couched less in terms of 'doing'—culture is not something a democratic government can or should mandate—and more in terms of 'enabling'. This means providing resources and a regulatory and policy environment that fosters the best, educates practitioners and audiences, builds resilience and sustainability and provides opportunities for participation and engagement.

This is important because when we talk about culture, the art that lies at its heart, and the steps that need to be taken to enable it to thrive, we need to think about what culture means. How might we define it in a way that keeps it alive, open and innovative, able to celebrate the best, recognise our remarkable diversity and fulfil our human capacity?

The process of developing a national cultural policy is a significantly different task to that which applied at the time of earlier interventions—the creation of the Commonwealth Literature Fund, the support for national theatre companies and state orchestras, the ABC, the Australia Council, Film Australia, training institutions, all building to *Creative Nation* nearly twenty years ago.

These past initiatives have all been important and created the rich texture in which we operate. But the world and Australia are now very different: more diverse, more connected and the place of culture is becoming recognised as something much more than a civilising gloss. The elements of culture which shape how we communicate, how we celebrate, how we cohere, how we imagine and dream, are not a



contribution was only measured in dollars the value of the discipline they had devoted their lives to might be diminished. Underpinning this tension was a sense that for a long time Australia's arts and cultural sector has been fed the crumbs falling from the table of national wealth. This has changed as the cultural economy has grown and developed, but the tension between different groups and interests spoke to the uncertainty that many artists feel about the public value of their work.

Resolving this tension was a task assigned to several people who have been thinking deeply about this area for a long time. Their conclusion was that works of intrinsic value created by the most brilliant artists lie at the heart of the whole cultural sector, that the work of these exceptional individuals was central. This is not a zero sum game where someone's gain is another person's (or organisation's) loss.

This begged another series of questions—how to describe, diagnose and support the full range of cultural endeavour as it intersects

with other areas of society, the economy and government. We needed to find new, more expansive ways of defining, measuring and assessing the impact of the cultural sector.

### MEASURING CULTURAL VALUE

**At one level the numbers are known:** the cultural economy employs more than half a million Australians, growing at three percent between the 2006 and 2011 censuses. The cultural economy is a huge contributor to our GDP—bigger than agriculture and energy generation. We need to do better at communicating the significance of this.

A paradigm shift is needed in our thinking and talking about culture and creativity. Those of us in the cultural sector need to learn from other areas which have become mainstream, but were once at the margins of policy agendas—women, the environment, people with a disability, and the First Australians.

This demands new ways of defining and measuring, and new approaches to removing obstacles. As part of this, we must refine and develop more appropriate measurement tools—so that the real value of culture and its enrichment of society can be recognised, and so that the artists and creative individuals at the heart of this sector are able to pursue sustainable careers, where they make both meaning and money. This challenge is generating international attention. Various proxy measurements have been used in the past—financial profitability of creative enterprises, tickets sold, audience numbers and so on. But the value of culture is not solely a transaction between a consumer and a producer in which money changes hands. A major research project sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom is seeking to establish a new framework that considers 'the value of cultural engagement and the methods by which we evaluate



(left) Julianne Schultz and Cate Blanchett, co-chairs of the 'Towards a Creative Australia' stream, address the final plenary session, Australia 2020 Summit, 20 April 2008.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

value'. A similar project has also been sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in the USA.

Professor Mark Moore from Harvard is at the forefront of new ways of recognising and measuring public value relating to arts and culture. Lord Mayor Boris Johnson sponsored a cultural cities project as part of the London Olympics, and all around the world—in developed and developing countries—governments are trying to loosen the constraints on creativity, to enable culture to flower and encourage the soft connections that make places attractive to others. The dire state of much of the world's economy makes this both a more difficult and urgent challenge.

It is timely to return to a famous statement by Robert Kennedy from 1968, which helps to define the problem and suggests solutions:

Too much and for too long we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things ... we judge by the gross national product that counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armoured cars for the police to fight riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet it does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short except that which makes life worthwhile.

In her fine book *Double Entry* (2012), Jane Gleeson-White described how the whole

process of accounting and economics is man made—constructed for very particular reasons—and that the method of counting we use is not preordained. It is capable of adaptation, and indeed must do so to respond to a changing world. So we have seen the emergence of the triple bottom line, methods of measuring quality of life, attempts to assess the environmental impact of major developments before they proceed, methods to evaluate the cultural impact of traditional sites before development goes ahead. Each has been resisted, but accepted over time.

So we need to think more expansively about culture, and the tools that could be used to measure its public value—tools that include traditional economic indicators, but go further, because culture is about more than just making money.

## VISUALISING THE CULTURAL ECONOMY

Another useful and influential thinker on this front has been John Holden of the Demos Foundation, who sought to measure both the intrinsic and the instrumental and industry values of culture, which he felt were being distorted by an over-reliance on simple economic indicators. Those involved in the *New Models New Money* project supported by the Centre for Social Impact and Arts Queensland worked on this model, and linked it to the UNESCO framework on cultural sectors. This has produced a very useful descriptive and diagnostic tool for visualising the creative economy. It can help reshape thinking and talking about points of intervention in the sector, as well as point to new ways of measuring its value and impact.

Imagine four concentric circles. The inner circle is that exceptional art which has intrinsic value, works of great skill and originality that will endure—the cherry at the centre of the pie.

The next circle represents the institutional value of culture—the works which help define us to ourselves and represent us to others, collected as part of our living heritage in the national museums, performed in the centres we have built as part of national cultural infrastructure.

The next circle represents the instrumental value of culture—the way art can aid social

cohesion, help people achieve their potential, build healthier and happier communities, put children in touch with their imaginations and dreams.

The final circle represents the industry value—the creative industries which draw on cultural creativity to make products that have a significant economic value and enrich our lives as consumers.

Imagine these four circles as a pie, which is divided into eight segments. These segments are the eight sectors UNESCO have agreed, for the purposes of internationally standardised measurement, make up the cultural sector—Indigenous, Heritage, Music, Performance, Screen, Visual, Writing and Design.

So if we take the slice of the pie which is music, you have at the pointy end of the triangle—and a sliver of the cherry at its centre—original works of music composed, created and performed by individuals and groups of genius. This includes the whole body

measuring success and outcomes, a different way of engaging with the public sector and philanthropists, but each informs the other. There could be no industry without the intrinsic works, no institutional opportunities without the instrumental teaching fostering exceptional musicians and informed and knowledgeable audiences.

Similarly public money spent in enabling a composer to create a work, assisting in the maintenance of an orchestra, training musicians and educating audiences, helps create multipliers elsewhere in the sector.

### APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO THE CHALLENGE

**Applying this tool**—or conceptual framework—to public policy arguments about the value of culture, reveals a number of different (yet complementary) areas which need to be measured, and which have a bearing on

WE NEED TO THINK MORE EXPANSIVELY ABOUT CULTURE, AND THE TOOLS THAT COULD BE USED TO MEASURE ITS PUBLIC VALUE ... BECAUSE CULTURE IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST MAKING MONEY.

of heritage works and the new works that open our minds to possibility.

The next segment is the institutional—the performance of music in places of national and local importance, the export of works we consider especially valuable or representative, the works that speak to us as Australians in a global village, as when the Australian Chamber Orchestra performs the greats or Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu sings with a distinctiveness that others recognise as Australian.

The next is the instrumental—the teaching of music, the use of music in health and other community settings—the place where many of those most committed to the teaching, creation and performance of music find their vocation.

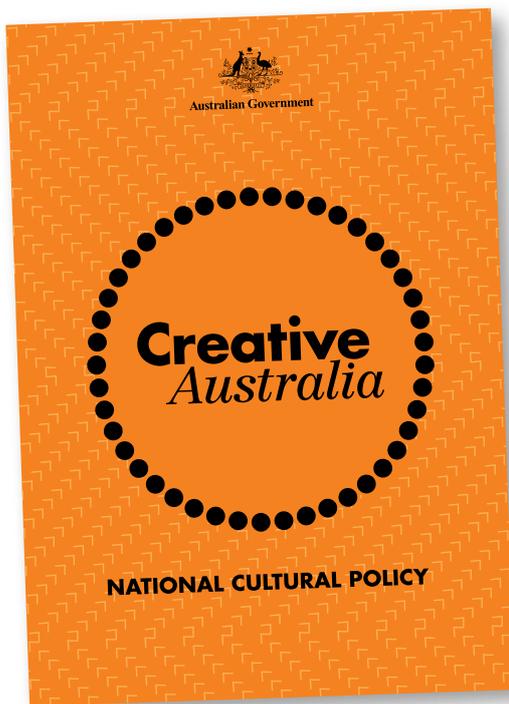
Then the industry of music, the business of recording, performing, producing, selling music which has the world singing along with Gotye or the singers on *Australian Idol* setting new records for iTunes downloads.

Each of these segments requires a different business model, a different way of

the outcomes of other activities. It also suggests a way in which the cultural sector might engage with the whole of government, not just the ministry of arts.

Clearly there is a link between the institutional value of culture and foreign affairs, infrastructure, communications, tourism, even defence; the instrumental role intersects with education, health, welfare, community affairs, migration, Indigenous affairs; the industry sector intersects with trade, research, innovation, tourism, infrastructure, communications and so on.

In the cultural policy discussions we struck on a notion of ‘cultural solutions’—which recognises the place of culture and creative expression in the instrumental ring where a great deal of public funds are spent. One of the members of the group, who came up with this term, described his own trajectory, from being a tear-away in a poor suburb to one of the nation’s cultural leaders—it was exposure to a drama class that turned him around.



How do we begin to put cultural solutions into operation? If we look at many of the biggest issues we face as a society, many have eluded resolution by legal or economic means. A cultural approach may be more rewarding. This potentially extends the scope of cultural sector activities in exciting ways. There is at least as much need to think about the cultural impact of

major initiatives as there is to think about the economic dimension. It may be that cultural solutions are more effective than economic or legal ones, it may be that doing cultural due diligence on major projects could make them more effective.

Few of the biggest projects undertaken in recent years have attempted to factor in their cultural impact, and to prepare for it—for example, Building the Education Revolution, the National Broadband Network, the Northern Territory intervention. All would have been stronger if this had been done before the money was committed. There is circularity in this—we need to attempt to assess the cultural impact of major initiatives before they are undertaken. But if this is to be done properly we will need to find new ways of measuring cultural value, as I have outlined. We will have to ensure that rigorous data is collected and collated and compared over time, that we work with both statistics and stories to assess impact.

Think back twenty years—the notion of an environmental impact statement was contested—now it is normal. You might argue with the reports on major projects at the margins, but methodologies have been developed which make possible informed judgements on major projects. Similarly the process of assessing the cultural value of

traditional Indigenous sites once would have been unimaginable; while there is still contest, ways of measuring and assessing have evolved. Ensuring that there is no discrimination on the basis of gender or disability was also contested and now is accepted—it can be measured and evaluated and we accept that the public benefit is greater than the cost.

Of course, it is still easier at a public policy level to put culture in a small arts funding box that can be topped up or emptied as desired. What is needed instead is an approach which recognises that culture impacts across the whole of government, and that government has a role to play in enabling us to realise our right to create and express ourselves creatively. In the cultural space we need to be similarly assertive—to develop ways of measuring that include but go beyond statistics, that join the dots and develop a new paradigm for cultural value that is not apologetic, mendicant or uncritical but recognises that it is through cultural engagement that full human capacity can be realised, and that the benefit of this is essential to our humanity, of value to our society and economically significant.

This is not something that will happen overnight—but it is a worthy project, one that has the potential to benefit us all, and put a real value on those things that really make life worthwhile.



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This essay was written in February 2013 and is based in part on a speech for the Annual Assembly of the Music Council of Australia, at the Conservatorium of Music, Sydney, in September 2012. The views expressed here do not represent those of others involved in the national cultural policy development process. The National Cultural Policy, Creative Australia, was launched by the Federal Minister for the Arts, Simon Crean MP, on 13 March 2013.

(above)  
Creative Australia,  
The National  
Cultural Policy,  
launched by the  
Federal Minister  
for the Arts, Simon  
Crean MP, on 13  
March 2013.



# BREATHING THINKING LOOKING ACTING

» ROSS GIBSON

ONLY IN THE CONDUCT OF OUR ACTION CAN WE FIND THE SENSE OF MASTERY OVER THE FATES. — JOSEPH CONRAD, *NOSTROMO*<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1950s, Frank O'Hara was working at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, vamping in the town's literary scenes, mapping his bohemian milieu onto the MOMA high society and, in treasured spare moments, filling notebooks with demotic lyrics that seem casual on first encounter but sound pitch-perfect the more they are re-read. Every lunch hour, with all Manhattan at his disposal, O'Hara would wander—north, south, east, west, up the skyscrapers and down the subways—tracing a new line each day through the massed options of the island, absorbed in the pulses of the gridded borough. From this process he composed the beguiling *Lunch Poems*.<sup>2</sup>

In his exertion he would sometimes arrive at a still epiphany, which would become the main ingredient of a lunch poem. The epiphany was never anything so quaint as 'a green thought in a green shade',<sup>3</sup> for O'Hara was the city poet, the bard of hot dogs, record shops and gunk. But often a walk, in this city so depleted of verdure, would lead to a moment of intensified perception or poignancy, a sense of connectedness that oriented him happily so he could give words to some sensible trail that he had divined through the messy signs and flummoxes of the metropolis. No green thoughts

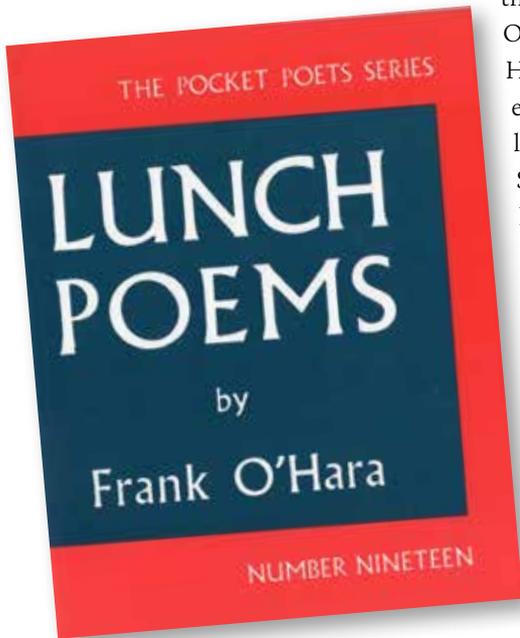
to guide him, therefore. Instead: *breaths*. The tenuous, connective trade of expiration and inspiration. And moments of breathlessness. And moments that take your breath away.

For example, in July 1959, O'Hara was spurred to write 'The Day Lady Died', after a walk in which he had spied a newspaper headline that reminded him of the time he had recently heard Billie Holiday in one of her final performances, accompanied by the great pianist Mal Waldron:

then I go back where I came from to  
6th Avenue  
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre  
and  
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a  
carton  
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with  
her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and  
thinking of  
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
while she whispered a song along the  
keyboard  
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped  
breathing<sup>4</sup>

O'Hara conjures the scene palpably. Off the present-time sidewalk now, and in the recent-time bar with him, we sense an entire congregation being affected and unified by Holiday's almost-gone life-breath of song. We feel the audience becoming a muted organism that is floated into suspended animation by



the performance. In O'Hara's evocation, Holiday's breathy, expiring voice fixes the listeners' inspiration. She changes the way her audience, and O'Hara's readers, are in the world. Or more precisely, her performance moves the world through the listeners in a new way as everybody's access to breath—the animus of existence—gets altered while

Holiday finesses the air. (Let's remember that 'breath' and 'spirit' are words for the same mystery. Inspire-expire-inspire: this rhythm keeps breath in our body and so keeps us spiritual as well as merely material.) Imagining themselves into the scene, readers can feel some meagre but sustaining ether parlay back and forth within each person and around the subtly animated room as Lady Day whispers 'to Mal Waldron and everyone' at the same time as 'everyone and I stopped breathing'. The syntax of the poem drops and catches its own breaths in response to the performance. The verse flutters a couple of ways as the word 'everyone' wafts back and forth in the sentence, pressing sense in two directions while Holiday's tenuous vitality infuses and transforms the atmosphere around her.

With her sparse, aestheticised breath rendering her almost anaesthetised, Holiday helps O'Hara know some rhythm of life. She helps him know this vital rhythm in his lungs and his blood because her rarefied vitality can be felt all the more keenly while her death—the expiry of her breath—is so

close in her inspired performance. All this stems from Holiday's manipulation of the way breath can be made active, meaningful and affective in the particular aesthetic medium of vocal performance. She acts on the air as she organises ideas and emotions with exquisitely uttered noise.

All human action is in some way a manipulation of breath. Anyone performing an action expends energy that is fuelled partly by the air. Live performance is such an action and it can alter the aspirations of the performer and the audience. Recorded music can do the same, even in the absence of the actual body of the original performer. And in film, where the ventilating body of the actor is only virtually present, a performance can press into a witness's flesh and nerves. The body of the spectator can be changed in its spirit. Which is to say, witnessing an inspired film performance can affect your breathing, your pulses, tempos and temperatures.

Film actors and editors know how to conduct the action of breathing. For these artists, breath is a 'raw material'; it is an element of nature that can be shaped aesthetically into versions of bodily experience so that patterns of thoughts and emotion can be conveyed in artistic output. By trimming breath into patterns of duration, emphasis and repetition, an actor or an editor can package cues for sensations that are not merely the by-products of living, not merely reactions to the randomness of experience. Rather, the representation of controlled breathing can be the product of deliberate thought and feeling, deliberate artistry. In other words, controlled breathing is one way to apply *significant form* to the raw matter of everyday experience.<sup>5</sup>

It is not only breath that gets deployed this way. The American filmmaker Walter Murch sees this work-on-the-world also occurring in actors' *looks*. When he edits, he tries to tune in to the governing dynamic of a scene. He often finds himself taking instruction from the way actors are blinking, for the eyes show a great deal about how an actor is working to make sense, to think-and-feel productively in response to the dramatic complex of propositions that make up a scene. Murch understands the shuttering of an eyelid this

(above)  
Cover of the 1964  
City Lights edition  
of *Lunch Poems*, by  
Frank O'Hara.

way: 'the blink is either something that helps an internal separation of thought to take place or it is an involuntary reflex accompanying a mental separation that is happening anyway.'<sup>6</sup> In linguistics, of course, *the sentence* is commonly presumed to be the mechanism facilitating the 'separation of thought'. But Murch is suggesting that the human body, particularly in its neuro-optical system, works comparably. He maintains that the time between blinks is closely related to the duration of a single, attained thought. Blinking therefore marks the tempo of a person's cognition and composure. The way an actor is blinking is a reaction to the stimuli in the scene and it is also symptomatic of an attempt to govern the scene, including all its other blinking participants. The pattern of blinking within a scene tells us something about the *agency* of all the various people therein. According to this logic, a well-composed person will be measured in their

participation rather than observation. It can prompt you into willing suspension of disbelief because it puts a version of the actor's exertion and composure into your body even as it puts your virtualised body into the screen-space for a time, into worlds other than your own. Thus you gain the impression that you are palpably immersed in the compelling world of the drama. With your body, as well as your mind, you can sense the imaginary world coursing through you even as the actor is moving through that world for you. The actor is your representative, breathing you and blinking you and thereby extending you and helping you inhabit experiences other than your own.

Many modes of exertion and composure are regimes of breath. Yoga is one. Sport is another. Great sportspeople learn to marshal their active presence (and sometimes their panic) through the regulation of their breath so that respiration becomes a generator of efficient

THE ACTOR IS YOUR REPRESENTATIVE, BREATHING YOU AND BLINKING YOU AND THEREBY  
EXTENDING YOU AND HELPING YOU INHABIT EXPERIENCES OTHER THAN YOUR OWN.

gaze—steady-eyed, unruffled; a person in panic, anger or confusion will be blustered, blinking like a shutter in a gale.

Murch's insight about blinking brings clarity to the way breathing works in meaningful performance. Along with looking, breathing is the actor's most basic resource for generating dramatic impact. Through the management of breaths and blinks, an actor can make culture from the messy flux of nature. Breaths and looks are props, perhaps, but they are so integral to the actor's body that you, the spectator, do not perceive them to be part of the 'kit' used in 'actor's business'. By concentrating on the eyes and the aspiration of the actor, you can feel assimilated to the performer. Editors know how to emphasise this feeling. Attuned to the performer's blinks and breaths, you can get a sense of the rigours that the performer is supposed to be 'processing'. So closely felt, so *embodied*, this 'by proxy' process of simultaneous breathing, blinking, thought-forming and acting can feel like an immediate experience for the spectator. It can feel like

energy. They measure, array and enact their energy. In the mastery of their inspiration, we see the conduct of their actions. Exertion produces breathing, yet careful breathing can also produce finesse in exertion. When we watch a body in performance, we watch its breathing, and most crucially we also personify that breathing. Performers with strong presence can get us breathing (and blinking) in sync with them. As we experience their corporeal mien, we also get inklings of their thoughts and feelings. We get these inklings in our bodies, nervously, optically and in the lungs and capillaries. As we feel ourselves occupied and altered by the bodily rhythms of another, we get the measure of these exemplary people, these actors. This is active presence, with dramatic agency. And with bodily poise.

Breath becomes even more transformative when it is regulated in and by sentences of speech. The performance of oratory can be inspiring. Literally so. Thrillingly so. And distressingly so, such as when the presence of an effective demagogue can commandeer the

energies of massed listeners. Inspiring orators, for good or for bad, take our own breath away at the same time as they puff us up with their spirit as they deliver the sentences that carry their thoughts through the air.

In the history of cinema, there are millions of these orations. They are the DNA of the talkies. They are a force that scriptwriters yearn to summon and actors hanker to enact. To understand this driving-force of performance, let's examine a particular cluster of actorly sentences, to know a little more intensively how acting and editing work on the aspirants who watch and listen and breathe in the dark. The example is a monologue, the famous shark story, by Orson Welles in *The Lady From Shanghai* (1948, directed and co-written by Welles).

How to replay this scene on the page? I have to translate it out of its bodily enactment and describe it so that you can imagine its rhythms

and test my contentions the next time you see-and-hear the film. The sequence plays like this:

A beach party is in progress. Welles's character, a sailor named Michael, has detached himself from the society folks who have employed him as the skipper of their luxurious yacht. When summoned to join the festivities, he walks away from the seashore and finds them all lounging and squabbling in a makeshift picnic-camp. He stands and considers them for a moment and then decides to let them have it, working them over with thoughts and images breathed out in a musical pattern of sentences, runs of staccato breaths followed by melodic, attenuated utterances:

Is this what you folks do for amusement in the evenings? Sit around toasting marshmallows and calling each other names?

(below)

Frame enlargement from *The Lady from Shanghai*, 1947, written and directed by Orson Welles.



Sure, if you're so anxious for me to join the game, I can think of a few names I'd like to be calling you myself. [PAUSE] D'you know, once, off the hump of Brazil, I saw the ocean so darkened with blood it was black. And the sun fading away over the lip of the sky. We'd put in at Fortaleza and a few of us had lines out for a bit of idle fishing. It was me had the first strike. A shark it was. Then there was another. And another shark again. Till all about, the sea was made of sharks. And more sharks still. And no water at all. My shark had torn himself at the hook. And the scent, or maybe the stain it was, and him bleeding his life away drove the rest of them mad. Then the beasts took to eating each other. In their frenzy, they ate at themselves. You could feel the lust of murder like a wind stinging your eyes and you could smell the death reeking up out of the sea. I never saw anything worse. Until this little picnic tonight. And you know,

there wasn't one of them sharks in the whole crazy pack that survived.

Michael's monologue is an oasis of stillness and lucidity in a maddening, hyperactive film that is jagged throughout with verbal abuse and turbulent picture-cutting where huge scale-shifts, eye-line mismatches, and spatial discontinuities mug the viewer exhaustingly. Here in his monologue, for a few minutes, Welles settles the world down and tells something that seems to come from the centre of all experience. He takes a moral stand and, in a couple of senses of the word, he makes a *spiritual* point.

How does this happen? Through editing, sound-mixing and lighting, certainly. But, principally, everything is regulated by Welles's bodily tempo. For the duration of the monologue, everything on the screen and in the soundtrack picks up his beat so that the

(below)

Frame enlargement from *The Lady from Shanghai*, 1947, written and directed by Orson Welles.





represented world ‘tunes in’ to him. It all starts when Michael is summoned to the picnic. As he turns away from watching the undulating sea—waves coming in and out like the pulse of the world—he exhales cigarette smoke which shows his breath like a substance you could weigh, then he ditches the butt and walks through a couple of musical changes in the soundtrack. He strides toward his meeting, taking with him nothing but his self, his breathing self. The smoke he expelled was a stuffy signal, alerting us to the palpable effects that he can breathe forth.

When Michael arrives at the picnic, he stops, settles and then does not move anymore, except for the minimal actions of his talking and respiring. No. More precisely, there is the action of his glancing too, which takes some time to calm down—his eyes flitting for a while then focusing—in phase with his breathing. But as the scene progresses, his breath quickly

predominates and he casts his distilling influence over the audience in the picnic and the audience in the cinema.

Who makes up this composite audience, apart from us in the cinema? We see the wealthy, embittered Arthur Bannister (played by Everett Sloan), kvetching as he’s rocking nauseatingly in a hammock. There’s the toady lawyer Arthur Grisby (played by Glenn Anders), buffeted and jittery as he agitates a cocktail canister amidst the nasty banter. And Arthur’s wife, Elsa (played by Rita Hayworth), pale and barely alive, it seems, as she endures the squabbling. As Michael takes his position, the camera settles at last and gathers calm after the editing has been throwing the viewer through a range of perspectives within the emotionally turbulent space he has just entered. The participants in picnic-space and the audience in the cinema-space fold into each other while slowly the camera and Grisby and Bannister are

(above)

Frame enlargement from *The Lady from Shanghai*, 1947, written and directed by Orson Welles.

immobilised by Welles's talk as the evermore focal Elsa listens and does nothing more than breathe. And if you take time to monitor *yourself* as you watch and hear the scene, you will notice slight modulations in your own pulses as every rhythm in the scene slides over to Welles's tempo. In a delightfully strange sensation, you feel yourself become the breathing of both Welles and Hayworth. You feel your body being dispersed, infiltrated, altered and calmed into batches of suspended animation that you can identify only as something other than the self you walked into the movie-house.

How does Welles command such attention and imitation here? Partly, it is simply a somatic response: we attune ourselves to the rhythm of the focal point in our immediate experience. Finding the governing force in the immediate environment, for the purposes of self-preservation, we *heed* this force. (Ironically, in this case, self-alteration rather than preservation is the cardinal outcome of the attunement.) But to garner the force, the film must first convince us that Welles is focal and transformative. How does this happen? Why do we opt to transfer some of our being to him?

In the case of *The Lady from Shanghai*, the answer is to do with a moral force that gets generated through the film's management of the spirit or breath of the world. Welles is telling an allegory, a tale that issues from a centre of worldly wisdom, and he is telling it in such a way that the audience sees and hears the entire world 'lock in' around him. Even more spell-like, the spectator feels the borders between the world and the self blur as the spirit of the picnic-space and the spirits of several cast members infiltrate the attentive spectatorial body that is breathing in the darkness of the cinema. By attuning to the breath of Welles's character, the spectator becomes a participant in the scene. At the picnic-ground, once Welles settles and begins his burred oration, all extraneous noise quietens; the theatrical, rhythmic brogue of his patter amplifies and is brought to the aural foreground in the sound-mix; in regular medium-close-ups, Hayworth's luminous body rises and falls subliminally for him; Anders settles down; Sloan's hammock stops swinging.

As he channels his breath into the mesmerising language and parcelled diction of his story, the actor (aided by the editing) generates the impression that he exerts a moral force that emanates, through the resonating air, from his speaking position. In their nervous and respiratory systems if not in their cerebration, the audience senses that, at least for the duration of this particular performance, Welles's character governs the spirits of this mortal coil. By steadying down the aspirations of the world he has stepped into, Welles seems to gain mastery over the Fates. He performs spiritually for us and transforms the spirituality—the complex of breathing that binds and vivifies us—of the cast and the audience till finally, in a miraculous moment, Welles ends the tale by muttering, 'I'll be leaving you now' and then, as he turns to go, cosmically on cue, the sea behind him utters a whooshing sigh as a perfect little wave breaks on the beach. It is as if *the world* has just realised that it has been holding its breath. As a spectator, you sense the end of a stint of 'possession'. Once the wave has fallen, the world syncopates and goes skittish again. You get your own breath back, and you worry and wonder about surrendering yourself so completely ever again.

It's a disturbing moment: waking up from this possession. You feel yourself change—which is always a challenge and a stimulant for the political portion of one's imagination—but you also feel how you have acquiesced and lost vigilance—which is always the objective of the demagogue. Ultimately, this is the great importance of a performance like Welles's. In the transition moments—when you slide in and slide out of the spirited actor's 'spell'—you realise that alteration is possible, that you can change the way you inhabit the world, the way you act on it and absorb it.

As Frank O'Hara discovered after Billie Holiday's expiring performance in the 5 SPOT, being under the spell of a skilled performer can lead you to losing or to trading your consciousness. The truly transformative moment, the moment when you understand that you and the world can be changed, is when you gasp for your own breath again and realise that you have to take back responsibility for your own vitality. Billie Holiday was so close



to death that she took everyone at the 5 SPOT over to the edge of existence and helped them realise how delicate and precious life can be. At the picnic-ground, Welles comes so close to controlling the world that the spectator suddenly realises how vital it is to be engaged in the turbulence, to get up out of the hammocks that cosset the decadent shark-people who seem to rule the world.

A performance can take your breath away, but it is at its most vital when you demand your spirit back. As Joseph Conrad wrote, in his seafarer's tale of *Nostromo*, we must learn to conduct our own action if we want to tussle with the Fates. And it is with the spirits that the Fates fuel their actions. ¶

An initial draft of this reworked essay appeared in Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros (eds), *Falling For You: Essays on Cinema and Performance* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1999). The author thanks the editors for their work and support.

\* \* \*

1. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), p. 66.
2. Frank O'Hara, *Lunch Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1964).
3. The reference is to Andrew Marvell's poem, 'The Garden', first published 1681.
4. O'Hara, 'The Day Lady Died', in *Lunch Poems*, p. 26.
5. See Clive Bell's influential essay, 'Art and Significant Form', first published in Bell's book *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914). The essay is currently freely available on the excellent website of the late Dennis Dutton: <<http://denisdutton.com/bell.htm>> [accessed 5 January 2013].
6. Walter Murch, *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing* (Sydney: AFTRS, 1992), p. 60.

(above)  
Frame enlargement  
from *The Lady  
from Shanghai*,  
1947, written and  
directed by  
Orson Welles.



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# Colette

## An Eye for Textiles

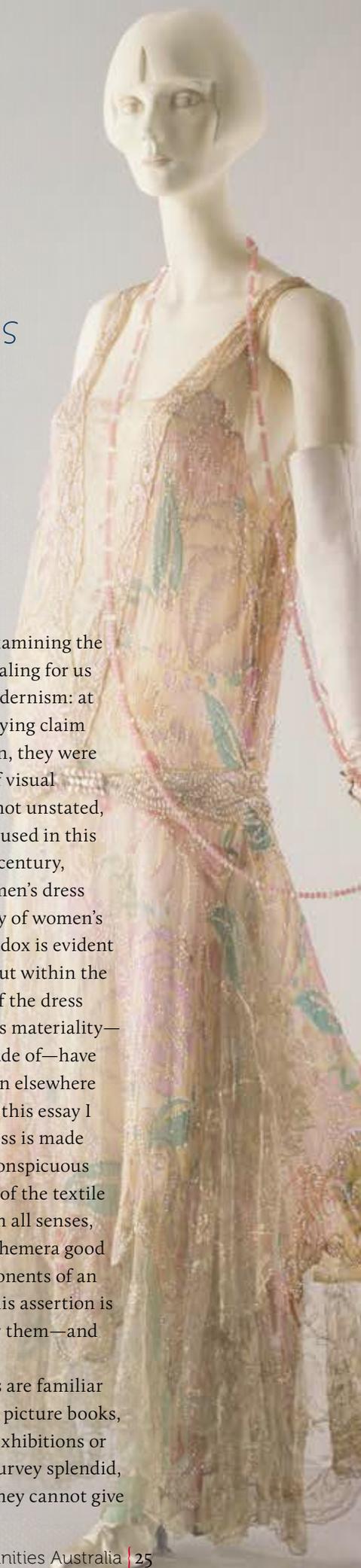
» ANNE FREADMAN

The French writer Colette (1873–1954) is now best known for her novels—some of them slight (*Gigi*, for example) and others far more substantial (*La Vagabonde*, *La Naissance du jour*), but she had many strings to her bow. She wrote regularly as a journalist in the daily and periodical press, and though not generally a reporter, she had a keen eye for contemporary mores as they played out in the early part of the twentieth century. In particular, she was what we would call now an arts journalist. In this capacity, a major part of her writing career was devoted to *les arts du spectacle*, musical performances and the cinema in the period before World War One, the theatre for decades after that, public gatherings and events in the streets of Paris, and importantly during the 1920s, vestimentary fashion. It is to this last category that I attend here.<sup>1</sup>

In exploring fashion Colette brings all her observational talents to bear on the transformation of women in modernity. Many people have pointed out over the years that Colette was not a ‘feminist’, in the sense of being militant, or even particularly sympathetic to the access of women to professional and other roles in public life. But she herself was primarily a journalist, and she used this position to pursue her interest in women in their daily engagement with the conditions of modern urban life. Most significantly, it is in Colette’s journalistic writing, far more than

in her novels, that we find her examining the evolution of femininity and revealing for us one of the deep paradoxes of modernism: at the same time as women were laying claim to various forms of emancipation, they were lending themselves to the role of visual object in new, informal though not unstated, sumptuary laws. They had been used in this way throughout the nineteenth century, of course, when the sobriety of men’s dress asserted equality, and the display of women’s dress its opposite. A similar paradox is evident in the early twentieth century, but within the feminine realm: here the form of the dress appears to assert freedom, but its materiality—how it is worn, and what it is made of—have other things to say. I have written elsewhere about how the dress is worn.<sup>2</sup> In this essay I am concerned with what the dress is made of. In an era remarkable for its conspicuous consumption, the inventiveness of the textile arts, their sumptuous richness in all senses, and the luxury of their use in ephemera good for a single season are the components of an assertion of social dominion. This assertion is made by the women who display them—and who are displayed by them.

These art textiles of the 1920s are familiar to us through their likenesses in picture books, whether these be catalogues of exhibitions or academic studies.<sup>3</sup> Such books purvey splendid, deeply pleasurable images, but they cannot give



us the feel of these precious stuffs. Indeed, even outside the books, they are seldom available to the touch. Rare indeed is the museum that would authorise a laying-on of hands. So it has interested me to ask whether, in her descriptions, Colette gives a place to tactility, or whether her writing is primarily a writing of the visual. I shall argue that, in general, the latter is the case, but that the restriction to visibility is no mere oversight on her part. It is a significant aspect of her analysis of fashion, and of that special dimension of it which is the art of textiles, that she shows why it matters to understand it as an art of spectacle.

I write ‘analysis’—Colette’s ‘analysis’ of the art of textiles—for two reasons, of which the first is polemical. In general, Colette should, but does not, count as a major figure in French literary modernism. This is partly because much of her journalism is devoted to fleeting moments, to ephemera and to women’s business. Yet surely we should be suspicious of such dismissals. Like a latter-day Baudelaire, Colette’s attention to the momentary is devoted to recording the everyday and to capturing the non-monumental, but it is the feminine everyday, ‘girls’ talk’ made remarkable. She finds, or makes, art from subjects and materials that do not have the status of high art. To dismiss her for doing so is to remain within a certain canon (that is, a rule concerning what counts as Art); it is to fail utterly to understand the extent to which Colette contributes to the contestation of that canon.

My second reason consists in asking the ‘speech act’ question: what is she doing by writing what she writes? This is a question about genre. Colette’s attention to textiles is the work of a cultural critic. She is interested in the temporality of fashion; she is interested in modes of production and consumption and their commercial conditions; she is interested in the relation between handwork and machine work; she is interested in the luxury market and in the moulding of women and of femininity by industrial modernity. Granted, she develops no theory of such things; my point is that what she sees, what she makes us see, is far more ramified than a simple image. But, on reflection, ‘analysis’ is inappropriately used for Colette’s modes of writing and engaging with

her materials: she reads the moment, she reads the desires and the fears and the playthings of that moment; she reads its arts and its crafts, its self-delusions and its hypocrisies. Colette’s writing is not cast in the analytical mode: it is satirical, and it is ekphrastic.

Ekphrasis has many places or functions in literature, and we are most often drawn to its use as a *mise en abyme*. But another crucial function is in criticism of the visual arts; the critic is expected to bring to the gaze of her readers the visible object in all its vividness. In Colette’s writing, this function is associated with a second tradition inherited from the ancient world: this is satire, a genre



(right)

Fig. 1 Callot Soeurs, sleeveless evening dress of printed silk voile, lamé petticoat and net embroidered belt, Paris, ca. 1922.

GIVEN BY LADY VICTORIA WEMYSS.  
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that serves in Roman letters as the setting for literary criticism. Only on the basis of a pointed description could the critic ground his judgements of a work, or of an author. We find something of this sort at the beginning of the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, when the poet invites his reader to ‘Imagine a painter who wanted to combine a horse’s neck with a human head,

the fashion parade. One is from the women whose desire to possess the dresses is solicited by the spectacle; the other is from their male companions, who note particular features of the styling, as they would ‘the characteristics of a school of painting’ (‘Mannequins’, p. 1117). Colette’s interest in this piece is with the mannequin. The aesthetic gaze of the men



(left)

Fig. 2 Betty Joel, furnishing fabric of cotton damask and silk, France, 1928.

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and then clothe the miscellaneous collection of limbs with various kinds of feathers, so that what started out at the top as a beautiful woman ended in a hideously ugly fish.<sup>4</sup> He goes on to draw his lessons from this failed attempt at creative ingenuity. Roman literary criticism was satirical because it made didactic use of exempla, and the passage from Horace shows the potential for this practice to extend into the arena of the visual arts. When description goes beyond itself to ask questions of its objects and their social conditions, to investigate them as behaviours encapsulating values, it blends scopic pleasure with satire. Colette, I shall argue, is writing criticism in this rather lofty sense.

However, it is important not to confuse criticism with the aesthetic gaze. In the following description, Colette discerns two quite different responses to the rhetoric of

disguises—as it always has done—a far more predatory attitude:

Parmi les formes modernisées de la plus luxueuse industrie, le mannequin, vestige d’une barbarie voluptueuse, est comme un proie chargée de butin. (‘Mannequins’, p. 1118.)

(Set amongst the modernised forms of this, the most luxurious industry, the mannequin is a vestige of pleasure-taking barbarity, preyed upon for the booty she bears.)

Furthermore, mannequins, passive instruments of the designer, are caught up in a ‘demoralising vocation’ whereby pretty girls with no money are used to display the outward signs of wealth (‘Mannequins’, p. 1118).

Colette’s observations of this ambiguous profession include her concern with the

reduction of the physical body to pure image: 'elle est la conquête des regards ... la passive réalisation d'une idée' (the conquest of the gaze ... passively projecting an idea). If the task of the mannequin is to address the artwork to the men, and the mirage of the perfect, and purchasable, body to the women, it is clear that Colette's interest in them is not assimilable to either of these positions. She is interested in these women as working women, and in the instrumentalising of their femininity—indeed, their sexuality—in the economics of desire.

So I return to the place of fabric in this economy. Fashion is a luxury industry, and Colette points out that the simpler and skimpier the style of dress, the more extravagant the textiles ('Mannequins', p. 1116). Some designers are known for the richness of their use of embroidery, while others work on the assumption that their customers—like the dandy of the early nineteenth century—may

well find it more tasteful, and more aristocratic, to avoid ostentation. These are the weavers. Figures 1 and 2 show this contrast.

Colette describes something like the fabric of figure 2 as a fiction, the finest of silk hand-woven to imitate the comfort, the discreet patternings of woollen cloth ('Soieries', pp. 1177–78).

The choice of fabric was not confined to the alternative between beading and embroidery on the one hand, and weaving on the other. Printed designs were all the rage, whether on cotton, on satin or on silk velvet. In a description of her fictional friend Valentine (whose function is to represent everything that Colette is not), we see that Colette's interest lies in the multiple dimensions of fashion, not merely in the look of the thing. Fashion is a set of behaviours—'it's *chic* to pop in on a friend four hundred kilometres from Paris, looking as though you've just turned up while taking a walk' ('Vendangeuses', pp. 1129–30). She is



(right)  
Fig. 3 Steiner & Co., printed cotton voile dress fabric, Manchester, England, 1920.

GIVEN BY THE  
MANCHESTER DESIGN  
REGISTRY.  
© VICTORIA AND  
ALBERT MUSEUM,  
LONDON.

noting the new casualness of visits given and received. And fashion is also a relation with the seasons, but in this case, that relation is fictional: the grape harvest is all the rage this year, but not as an activity. It is a *tableau* printed on cotton. Fashion is an urban phenomenon, depending upon the practical separation of urban life from rural realities. This separation is both geographical and a matter of attention, the involvement of persons in place and time: Valentine simply does not see the landscape she is visiting, just as the hunting outfit in ‘Poil et plume’ (p. 1133), is not made for hunting: it comports boots in glove leather, and a snow white crêpe de Chine shirt which, Colette remarks, would give the game all the warning they would need to get away in time.

I wonder, too, if Colette is not making a further point: like Valentine who has popped in to show off the grape-harvesting outfit, fashion is always just visiting, always a ‘tableau’, always

is not just about the look; it is about citation: the master couturier ‘sings the praises of the needlecraft of our grandmothers’ (‘Le Maître’, pp. 927–28) and speaks of his ‘amusing little touches’. The incongruity of the mix of knitting with silk is similar to the decontextualised tableau of Valentine’s little print; ‘la constante prospection de l’avenir’ uses the past as a repository of novelty. ‘Waiting for spring’, the roses of a printed silk allude to a pictorial tradition which was the taste of our mothers in 1880 (‘Soieries’, p. 1177), while alongside citation from the past, we also find citation from distant traditions of the textile arts, Persian carpets, for example (‘Soieries’, p. 1177).

It is in design, specifically in fabric design, that the high visual arts meet the consumer market, and here that the paradoxical temporality of fashion mediates taste, and hence desires both fleeting and intense. The title of the fashion magazine *Art-Goût-Beauté* seems

DESIGN BRINGS TOGETHER THE IMPERATIVES OF NOVELTY  
AND THE FAMILIAR REASSURANCE OF MEMORY ...

arbitrary in that it is divorced from the patterns it borrows. Its own context—and the absence of the context to which it alludes—is registered in its temporality: it is ‘une constante prospection de l’avenir’ (constantly prospecting for the future).

Nevertheless, this prospecting is marked by the citation and recycling of the past. It is precisely in, and through, the temporality of fashion that modernity is always already post-modern. In one place Colette ponders the use of new machinery for embroidery; in another, she notes that a master couturier has decided to adorn his creation with ‘une fleur verte, en laine tricotée, d’où pend une grappe saugrenue de cerises bleues, en laine tricotée, sommée de trois feuilles noires, en laine tricotée’ (a green flower in knitted wool, from which dangles a preposterous bunch of blue cherries, in knitted wool, surmounted by three black leaves, in knitted wool).<sup>5</sup> Her judgement coincides with Chanel’s, whom she quotes elsewhere as being horrified at the idea of adding ‘little doohickeys’ to fine fabrics that can stand on their own two feet (‘Chanel’).<sup>6</sup> But again, this

to aspire to a traditional synthesis, while the juxtaposition on its cover of nostalgic nosegays and a bold geometric design is audacious.

Cultural memory does not provide the ground for continuity so much as a collection of motifs that can be quoted. Design brings together the imperatives of novelty and the familiar reassurance of memory, of memories: they are *souvenirs* from another place and time. Both these dimensions—novelty and nostalgia—are to be found not only in the visual design, but also in the technical conditions of textile production. Thus, when the master deposits a knitted ornament on a silk dress, he is citing a manner of making. Its opposite can be found in the strangest of textile innovations. Colette’s satire is at its most hilarious in this sort of case:

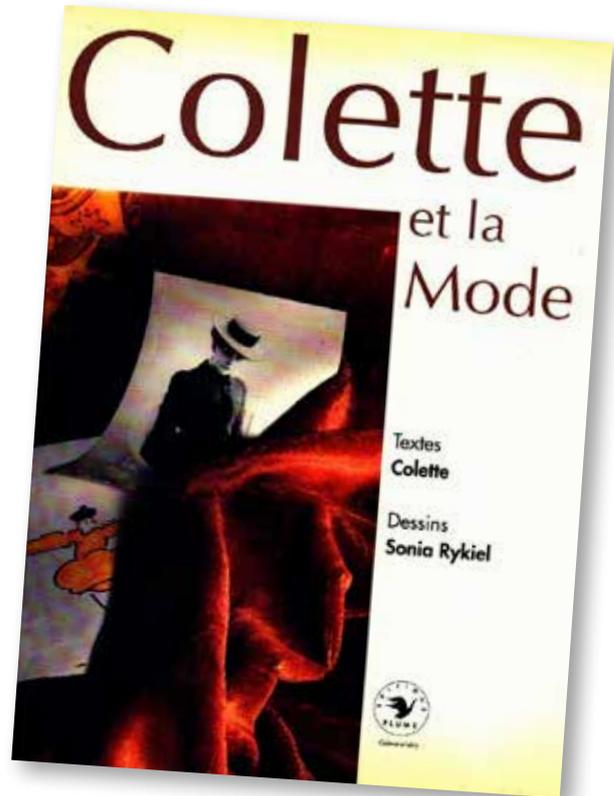
Le roi des tisseurs ne se borne pas à inventer des tissus, il invente aussi leurs noms. Néologismes hardis, sons aussi riches que l’arabesque, aussi doux que la laine thibétaine, vous caressez l’oreille

d'une harmonie qui participe de la sauvage mélopée et de la fumisterie ...

(Not content with creating fabrics, the weaver king also creates their names. My ears swoon to audacious neologisms, sounds as rich as an arabesque and as soft as Tibetan wool, their harmonies a wild mix of recitative and trumpery.)

The juxtaposition of 'mélopée' with 'fumisterie'—of the high-brow allusion to antiquity with the radical absence of serious content—pointedly reflects, as it reflects on, the pretentious innovations of fashion. Her ears lulled to the point of phonetic tipsiness, when Colette reproduces, then mimics, this lexical inventiveness, she is not merely engaged in mockery, she is having—and making—fun.<sup>7</sup>

It is no mere coincidence that textile invention is accompanied by textual innovation: this is the period of the rise of advertising and the fashion magazine. It is also the period in which handwork was industrialised, and in which looking was subject to new technical conditions as a result of electric lighting. As ever, Colette's attention to fabrics is firmly set in the material conditions of their display. She gives us to understand not only that fashion was the object of representation in advertising, not only that textiles themselves represented the world in which they were displayed, but also that they



the firmament, their very brilliance rendering them insubstantial. However, these 'chocolate wrapper' dresses have the most unfortunate effect of reacting badly with body odour. The dancers smell, writes Colette, like badly kept silverware or the cloths used to polish copper ('Arrière-saison', pp. 1163–64).

With characteristically careless misogyny, Colette remarks that women's senses are 'unrefined'. Yet what we may nevertheless learn from this throw-away line about women in this

IT IS NO MERE COINCIDENCE THAT TEXTILE INVENTION IS ACCOMPANIED BY TEXTUAL INNOVATION: THIS IS THE PERIOD OF THE RISE OF ADVERTISING AND THE FASHION MAGAZINE.

were, to borrow a term from Roman Jakobson, 'autotelic': they were designed to contribute technically to their own spectacularisation. Ever a creature of the theatre, Colette intimates that the vogue for lamé was a response to artificial light: 'Que d'or, et d'argent, et de cuivre rouge, mêlés à la soie!' (All this gold, silver, and red copper lamé with silk!) ('Soieries', p. 1176), she exclaims, again noting the incongruity of silk overlaid by metal: these precious stuffs were made for artificial lighting which they reflected back. The wearers of these garments became themselves the source of light, the stars in

period is that their very attention to their own bodies is so controlled by the fashion industry that they become effectively oblivious to any sense other than that of sight. Colette suggests that the use of lamé is determined by the conditions of its display under artificial light. With its insensitivity to smell, and indeed to tactility, with its tableaux and its placement in tableaux, Colette shows fashion to be an art of pure visibility, and the sensuality of women is reduced accordingly.

'Le luxe féminin' is 'exhibé' she writes. Fashion parades are the obvious way in

(above right)  
Fig. 4 Cover of  
*Colette et la mode*,  
éditions Plume  
(Calmann-Lévy,  
1991).

which this pure visuality is theatricalised ('Mannequins', pp. 1116–17), but if the salons were theatrical spaces, the very bodies of the models were gallery walls, showing their rustic scenes and anything else that could be turned to the purposes of pure decoration:

Ah! ce dos! Quatre-vingts centimètres de dos, sans pinces ni pli. Monsieur le Brodeur, souriez: voici de quoi vous ébattre. Brodez, sur ce dos vertigineux, des pagodes, des fruits, des chiffres arabes, des scènes champêtres, des frises pompéiennes et des automobiles. ('Trop court', p. 1139)

(Oh that back! Eighty centimetres of smooth, untucked and unpleated back! Monsieur Embroiderer, rub your hands and smile. On this vertiginous back you can embroider pagodas and fruit, Arabian calligraphy and rural scenes, cars and Pompeian friezes.)

Is there a prohibition on touch? Even the *maître de couture* does not handle his design—let alone his client—during a fitting. He does not feel the fabric ('Le Maître', p. 926). However, there is a counter-example, the matchless Chanel ('Chanel', p. 743) whose salon is a workroom; Chanel, her mouth full of pins, 'sculpts' her customer:

Chanel travaille des dix doigts, de l'ongle, du tranchant de la main, de la paume, de l'épingle et des ciseaux, à même le vêtement, qui est une vapeur blanche à longs plis, éclaboussé de cristal taillé. ('Chanel', p. 744)

(Chanel works not only with pins and scissors, but with her fingers, her nails, the side of her hand as well as the palm, right up against a fabric that is made of mist splashed with crystals.)

On her knees, using her arms, Chanel is a craftswoman engaged in physical work like that of a laundress whose task is to care for fabric. She designs the intimate relation of the body with that fabric, with its fall and its feel. She is the very opposite of the pretentious *maître* whose only concern is with novelty and look.

Nevertheless, the look and looking are our business, and Colette's concern with them is

not so much to condemn them but to make us understand their centrality in fashion. Fashion is one of the arts of spectacle, and it fulfils its role there primarily through the fabrics themselves. In one of the finest pieces of ekphrastic writing she has given us, Colette describes what she saw at a showing of fabrics. We are not dealing here with the mannequins and their audience, but with the exhibition of the raw materials as such. Long before they arrive at Chanel's workshop, they are art in their own right.

In the following, I dwell at some length on a single piece, entitled 'Soieries':

D'une obscurité profonde, où parfois glisse le reflet lent qui éclaircit les sources aux eaux abondantes et paresseuses, monte une ombelle énorme, une sorte d'astre. Son dôme, qui affleure la surface de l'eau, porte les couleurs du bégonia ardent, de la rose sanguine, ses bords noyés redescendent au rouge du métal chauffé, au grenat que l'ombre violace. Derrière la flottante créature empourprée, une ramille traînante, digitée, d'un vert d'algue se balance ...

Il ne s'agit pourtant que d'un velours, et d'une fleur imprimée. L'auteur du dessin assure: 'C'est un pivot ...', et il le croit. Mais moi je sais bien que ventrue, ombiliquée, segmentée délicatement, frangée, et remorquant une traîne filamenteuse, sa fleur est une méduse. Si je dis au dessinateur que c'est une méduse, il protestera, sur un ton digne d'artiste incompris. La mer originelle est loin de nous. Le monstre ou la fleur qu'elle enfante en notre esprit émergent, comme fait le fruit de la châtaigne d'eau, au bout d'une tige si longue que nous ne pensons plus à sa racine submergée. Mais la beauté de la matière ouvrée révèle le secret d'une inspiration: au sein d'un velours riches en moires, touché du reflet aquatique qui court sur une surface buveuse de lumière, le pavot est devenu méduse. ('Soieries', p. 1175)

(A deep dark, shot through from time to time by a gleam like those in slow-moving springs: rising there, an enormous umbel, a sort of star, with a dome brushing the surface of

the water, coloured like a brilliant begonia, a blood-red rose, its submerged edges taking on the hues of heated metal, or a garnet turned mauve by the shadows. Behind this floating, purple creature, swaying fingers, tendrils as green as seaweed.

Yet it is only a printed flower on velvet. The artist is certain that it is a poppy. But I know better: bulging, omphaloidal, finely segmented, its fringe and the filaments trailing behind it, his flower is a jelly-fish. And if I tell him so, he will protest like a misunderstood painter. Far away is its origin in the sea. Like the fruit of the water chestnut, the monster, the flower born from it in our mind's eye emerges from the tip of a stem so long that we forget its underwater root. But the beauty of the worked material reveals the secret of the inspiration: in the

heart of a rich moiré velvet, touched by the watery gleam that runs across a surface thirsty for light, the poppy transfigured has become a medusa.)

Colette describes the image as if she was describing the real thing: we have a modern version of the story of Zeuxis' grapes. But the reality effect denounces itself as the art of illusion: it's nothing but a flower printed on velvet. Furthermore, as Andrew Sprague Becker notes in his fine book on the Greek art of ekphrasis, 'ekphrasis describes an experience of representations, not just their appearance'.<sup>8</sup> This experience was physical—Colette tells us that she found it just too much at times—and it was an experience of interpretation. Thus Colette's reading of the image differs from the artist's intentions. As in the tableau of the grape harvest, we are a long way from the sea. This is worked material whose art is such that it produces not just a realist illusion, but a metaphor which then deconstructs itself as a simile. Similes draw attention to themselves as a verbal art, and as Colette shifts between the double illusion—the realism of the first image, its metaphorical transformation as the *fleur-méduse*—she requires us to read her own art. We are required thereby to note that this is a verbal text. Ekphrasis draws attention to itself, to the fact that it is different from the experience of viewing. It is made of words while the image is made of moiré velvet.

One of the ways in which ekphrasis draws attention to itself is by drawing attention, as Becker puts it, not only to the referent of the image, but also to the relation of that referent to the artisan and the artistry: in the case of Achilles' shield, this is achieved through the medium of worked metal;<sup>9</sup> in the case of Colette's fabrics, it may be the weaver's art, or it may be the new-fangled machines that have come to replace handwork:

Les roses que je froisse baignent dans une brume légère, dans un air tremblant de chaleur, et je songe aux miraculeuses machines dont le doigt d'acier, posant ici un reflet de nacre, ici une goutte de lumière, ici le vert miroir d'une feuille mouillée, ne se trompe jamais. ('Soieries', p. 1177)

(below)

Fig. 5 Raoul Dufy, woodblock-printed cretonne furnishing fabric – La Danse, France, ca. 1920.

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(The roses I rumple bathe in a fine mist, in an atmosphere trembling with heat; I think about the miraculous machines, their steel fingers placing glints of mother-of-pearl, drops of light, the green reflecting surface of a wet leaf, unerring.)

Another example makes these two aspects of ekphrasis very clear: Colette describes both the material art of the material, and her own experience of viewing it: she has to touch it to understand how the illusion is produced, she has to show us both the image, and how she deciphered it. As she is ‘separated’ from the roses by an ‘illusion of mist’, so are we separated from the experience of seeing; as she is drawn in, so are we. And as she multiplies her similes and her metaphors, so are we left with a double art of words, one that interposes itself like ‘a spider’s web in fine silver’ between us and the fabric, and yet reveals it to us (‘Soieries’, p. 1176). We have visual metaphors here, but we also have metaphors of the visual:

Je vois qu’on aime ici une certaine sorte de fantasmagorie, de duperie optique qui est bien près de l’humour. Des avenues de pastilles multicolores, énormes, vous giflent l’œil, puis s’en vont selon la décroissance vertigineuse des réverbères nocturnes. Un jeu de lignes creuse, sur un crêpe candide, de trompeuses perspectives, et sur un autre crêpe l’œil embrasse à vol d’oiseau, comme du haut d’un avion, des cimes et des cimes d’arbres, des frondaisons crépues que souligne un petit trait, un bleu vif d’éclair. (‘Soieries’, p. 1176)

(I see here a taste for phantasmagoria, for optical tricks, that borders on humour. Avenues of huge multi-coloured pastilles assault you, then grow smaller, like street lights in the distance. Plays of curved lines on crepe, trompe l’oeil perspectives, then, on another crepe, in a bird’s eye view as from an airplane, the eye surveys mile upon mile of tree canopy interspersed with curly fronds underlined in bright blue.)

Yet the textile arts are different from the textual arts, seeing is different from reading. In my final example, Colette draws our attention



to those differences by drawing a parallel between them as arts. Discovering the ‘artists’ tricks’, Colette reveals her own by mentioning the very business of lexical choice as she writes: ‘if I may put it this way’. She does not merely create the metaphors and similes for how an ‘invisible grey’ affects the experience of seeing the profusion of colours; she also asks us to note them in their quality of stylistic tropes. In our experience of reading, what is this ‘invisible grey’, if not the line of writing and its unnoticed powers? The accumulation of riches is matched by the lists and the repetitions—‘all this gold, embroidered with gold, on a gold background’—which make fun of themselves as they distance the reader from the experience of glut, keeping her attention as the writer’s art defers the moment when we must look away.

Colette was a professional critic, and it is in this capacity that she attends the exhibitions and visits the showrooms. I have sought to convey an inkling of the writing work that she took this to involve. It is an art of words that describes what she sees and makes us see it; it mediates the image through its own art; and it is an art of satire that takes us into the social and the cultural issues that are raised by ‘la plus luxueuse industrie’. This satire is both

(above)  
Calico Printers’  
Association, roller-  
printed furnishing  
fabric, Manchester,  
England, 1920.

GIVEN BY THE MANCHESTER  
DESIGN REGISTRY.  
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MUSEUM, LONDON.

deeply serious, and very funny, and the people who invited her into their salons were quite aware of the risks they were taking. Recall the *maître de couture* who knows full well who she is, and ‘poses, not knowing whether to expect a flattering portrait from me, or a caricature’ (*Le Maître*, p. 927).

Colette’s attention, however, is not merely drawn to individuals with dodgy taste. Her critique reaches farther into the whole textile industry. We have read her describing fabrics; they are sometimes absurd, sometimes sublime, always the object of the most exquisite verbal attention. But fabrics are also tactile, an experience of the skin. Colette’s eye for textiles is an eye for how the visual has overridden all the other senses—not merely that it has done so, but how. Industrial modernity and the drive to innovation do have the strangest effects. From her matchless hands comes, *in fine*, a biting critique of fashion as industry and as fetish. She notes dyed marabou feathers, which are, moreover, shaven: why not shave a chicken, she asks, or pluck an angora?

Étrange industrie que celle qui s’empare d’une parure animale duveteuse, légère, chaude, suave au toucher, pour la détruire par la chimie ou l’électricité, et proclamer ensuite: ‘Voyez cette peau méconnaissable, dont nous avons fauché l’herbe vivante et laissé le chaume! Voyez ce balai quasi chauve.’ (*Nouveautés*, p. 1158)

(What a strange industry this is, to take possession of some animal finery—light, downy, warm, soft to the touch—only to subject it to chemical or electrical destruction, and then to proclaim: ‘Behold this unrecognisable skin. We have mown down the living grass to the straw beneath. Behold this balding broom!’) ¶



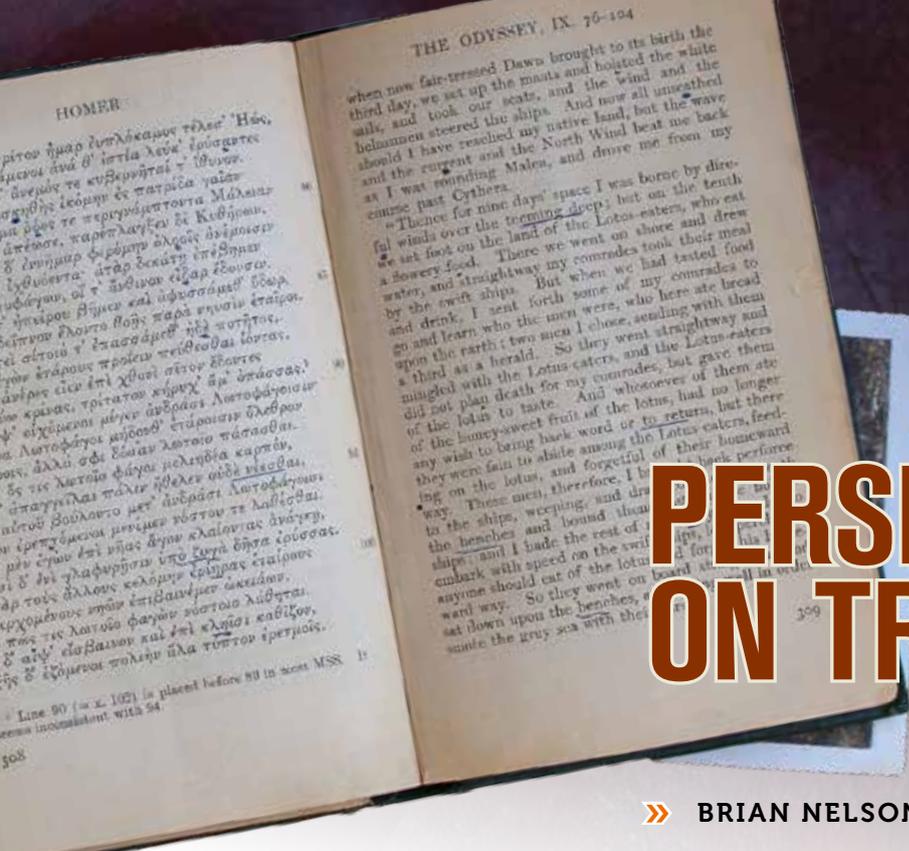
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*livres-souvenirs of Colette: Genre and the Telling of Time* (Oxford: Legenda, 2012).

This is a somewhat condensed version of a chapter to appear with the same title in *The Art of the Text*, ed. by Susan Harrow (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), ch. 8.

\* \* \*

1. My principal source is Colette, *Le Voyage égoïste*, in *Œuvres*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’, 1986), pp. 1091–81. References will be from this text in this edition and will be included in the text with the subtitle noted. Different sections or volumes will first be introduced in the endnotes before again being included in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
2. For this point, concerning the restrictions on women’s bodies required for the wearing of flapper fashion, see Anne Freadman, ‘Breasts are back!: Colette’s Critique of Flapper Fashion’, *French Studies*, 60:3 (2006), 335–46.
3. See, for example, the catalogue to the exhibition on fashion of the 1919–1929 period held at the Musée Gallieri edited by Sophie Grossiord and M. Asakura, *Les Années folles* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2007); Alain-René Hardy, *Art Deco Textiles: The French Designers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003); Doretta Davanzo Poli, *Tissus du XXe siècle. Designers et manufactures d’Europe et d’Amérique* (Paris: Editions Skira, 2007); and Sonia Rykiel, *Colette et la mode* (Paris: Editions Plume, 1991).
4. Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars poetica*, with an English translation by H Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press & London: William Heinemann, 1926; 1970), 1–9, p. 451.
5. Colette, ‘Le Maître’, in *Œuvres*, vol. II, pp. 926–930 (p. 927).
6. Colette, ‘Prisons et paradis’, in *Œuvres*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’, 1991), pp. 655–805 (pp. 743–44).
7. The passage is quite impossible to translate. ‘... quand je lis le lot de la crépellaine, du bigarella, du poplaclan, du djirsirisa et de la gousellaine—j’en oublie!—une griserie phonétique me saisit, et je me mets à penser en pur dialecte poplacote. Souffrez qu’en vous quittant, lectrice, j’empoigne mon filavella, je chausse mes rubespadrillavellaines et je coiffe mon djissaturbanécla; la marée baisse, voici l’heure d’aller pêcher, dans les anfractuosités du rockaskaïa, le congrépellina et la dorade zibelinée.’ (*Nouveautés*, pp. 1160–61).
8. Andrew Sprague Becker, *Rhetoric and Poetics of Early Greek Ekphrasis: Theory, Philology and the Shield of Achilles* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), p. 11.
9. Becker, *Rhetoric and Poetics of Early Greek Ekphrasis*, p. 41.



# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSLATION

» BRIAN NELSON AND RITA WILSON

## RECOGNISING TRANSLATION

Translation still elicits widespread distrust or disregard. In recent years, however, there has been increasing recognition of the creativity of translation.<sup>1</sup> Translation is rightly seen as a form of writing (or, more precisely, re-writing) just as all writing, however original, involves processes that are a kind of translation. Consider what, exactly, translators do. As Catherine Porter, former President of the American Modern Language Association, has written:

[Translators] must ask questions. In what contexts, for example—literary, rhetorical, social, historical, political, cultural—was the source text embedded ...? What type of text is being translated? ... To what extent and in what ways is the source text innovative or deviant in its own cultural context, and how can these innovative or deviant aspects be represented in the target text? What aims and effects can be seen in the original, and how can they be produced in the translation? What was the nature of the original audience, and how can the anticipated new audience be characterized? What range of voices, registers, and subject positions can be identified in the source text, and what adaptations will be required to render these in the target language? Once these determinations are made—subject of course

to revision and refinement as the translation progresses—the translator can begin to engage with the text itself: word by word, phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence.<sup>2</sup>

The choices made by the translator are the result of careful analysis, informed by varying degrees of intuitive understanding, of the work being translated. My aim in the five novels by Émile Zola I have translated<sup>3</sup> has been to transform Zola's prose into something that communicates to contemporary readers the spirit of the original as embodied in language. I've tried to capture the tone and texture, the structure and rhythms, the emphases and lexical choices—in sum, the particular style and textual intention—of the novels in question. Literary translation is anything but a mechanical task. It is, to begin with, an act of interpretation. Specifically, it may be regarded as both a form of close reading (applied literary criticism) and a form of writing (an art and a craft).

Zola founded the so-called Naturalist school in opposition to 'polite' literature. His Naturalism, with its emphasis on integrity of representation, entailed a new explicitness in the depiction of sexuality and the body. *Pot Luck* (*Pot-Bouille*, 1882) centres on the body. The bourgeois go to extreme lengths to maintain the segregation between themselves and the lower classes, whom they insistently portray as dirty, promiscuous, stupid. But class difference is shown to be merely a matter of money and



(above)  
Homer's *The Odyssey*.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF FRED KROH, ORIGINALLY USED FOR MEANJIN'S SPECIAL ISSUE, ON TRANSLATION, VOL. 64, NO. 4 (2005).

power, barely holding down the raging forces of sexuality and corruption beneath the surface. What we're left with is a kind of stew, a melting pot, a world where no clear boundaries remain. This is expressed in the novel's title. Literally, *pot-bouille* is a culinary term; its nearest English equivalent is a stockpot containing leftovers bubbling on the stove. In nineteenth-century France it also meant, by association, the ordinariness of everyday life. And two further associations are exploited by Zola: *faire pot-bouille avec quelqu'un* meant 'to shack up with somebody'; and *faire sa pot-bouille* meant 'to feather one's own nest'. So Zola's title embraces central elements of his novel: its dirty kitchens and stingy meals; its urges and frustrations simmering 'under the lid' of an artificial domestic respectability; its satirical versions of 'shacking up'; its selfishness and self-interest;

a huge bonfire. This was the time when the rush for spoils filled a corner of the forest with the yelping of hounds, the cracking of whips, the flaring of torches. The appetites let loose were satisfied at last, shamelessly, amid the sound of crumbling neighbourhoods and fortunes made in six months. The city had become an orgy of gold and women. Vice, coming from on high, flowed through the gutters, spread out over the ornamental waters, shot up in the fountains of the public gardens, and fell on the roofs as fine rain. (My translation, p. 112.)

The striking stylistic point about those sentences is that, syntactically, human subjects are eclipsed by abstract nouns and things, suggesting the absence of any controlling

LITERARY TRANSLATION IS ANYTHING BUT A MECHANICAL TASK.  
IT IS, TO BEGIN WITH, AN ACT OF INTERPRETATION.

and the dull routines of bourgeois life. Some translators have simply kept Zola's original title. I decided to call the novel *Pot Luck*—in an attempt to echo the original while evoking some of the confusions and contradictions of bourgeois life as well as the activities of the novel's philandering protagonist, Octave Mouret, as he runs up and down the stairs 'trying his luck' with the various bourgeois ladies he encounters. The problem of the novel's title is a good example of the nature and problems of translation generally: the need to achieve a form of equivalence, which often involves making creative adjustments.

Translating the spirit of a text is frequently a matter of voice, register and syntax. Zola is famous for his physical descriptions. And the challenge for the translator is how to capture the dynamism of these descriptions, which express the very meaning, and ideological tendencies, of his narratives. *The Kill* (*La Curée*, 1872) is about the rebuilding of Paris by Haussmann during the 1850s and 1860s and the widespread corruption that accompanied it.

The Saccards' fortune seemed to be at its height. It blazed in the heart of Paris like

human agency and expressing a vision of a society which, organised under the aegis of money and the commodity, turns people into objects.

Voice and register are nowhere more important than in *L'Assommoir* (1876), Zola's first great novel of working-class life. *L'Assommoir* (which I have not translated but have used extensively in teaching) focuses on the life and death of a washerwoman, Gervaise Macquart. But what scandalised and disoriented contemporary critics most was not so much the novel's subject matter (a washerwoman who becomes a tragic heroine) as its style: its use of working-class language and urban slang. The characters' language is woven into the fabric of the narrative, absorbing the written discourse of the narrator. It's as if the characters themselves take on a narrative function, telling their own story. Zola's brilliant ability to capture popular speech patterns, even when writing indirectly, has significant ideological implications, for it brings the reader into more direct and sympathetic contact with the characters and their culture than would have been the case with conventional narrative. So the translator, in his or her attempts to

capture Zola's own stylistic ventriloquism, must make appropriate choices in terms of register and voice.

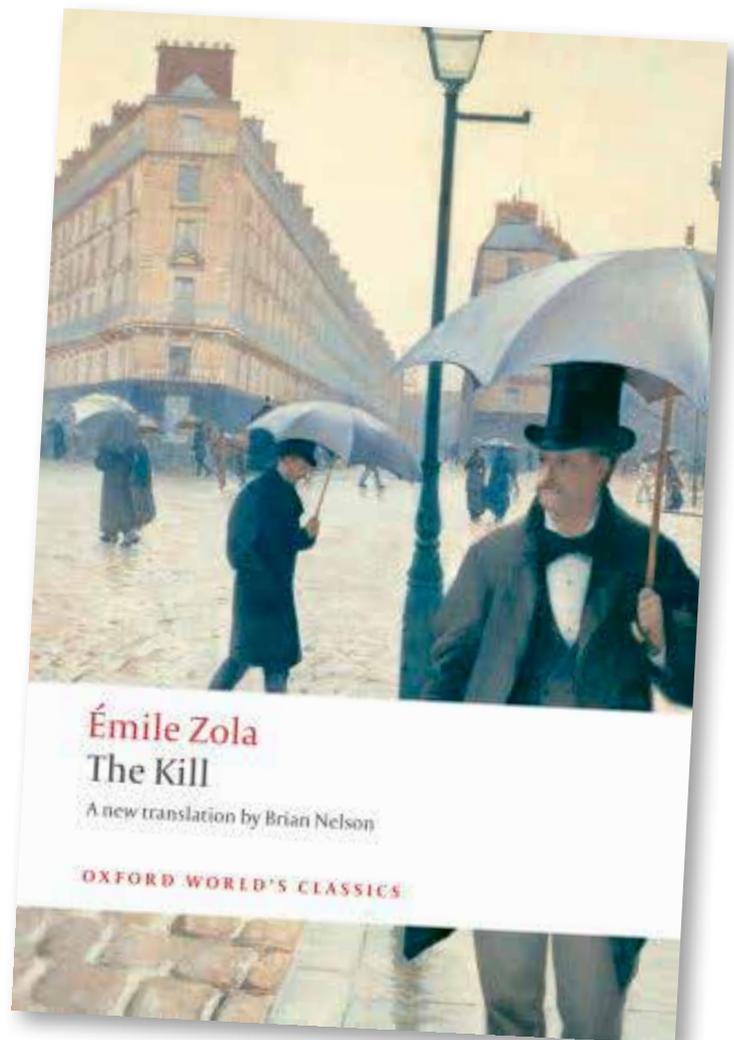
The novel's central chapter (Chapter 7) describes Gervaise's celebration of her saint's day with a great party, where food, drink and companionship are the focus. The sheer extravagance of the feast suggests the lurking dangers of dissipation; but above all, it expresses defiance, through recklessness and prodigality, of the constrictions—the prudence and thrift—of a life always on the edge of starvation. The meal becomes an orgy, and the mounting excitement of the characters is matched by that of the narrative voice, which appears to blend joyously with the voices of the assembled company.

Here is Arthur Symons' version of a representative passage, in his 1894 translation:

Oh Lord! it was a tightener, sure enough! When you're at it, you're at it, eh? And if you only get a good tuck-in now and again, you would be a sap not to stuff yourself up to the ears when you get a chance. Why, you could see the corporations getting larger every minute! The women were big enough to burst—damned lot of gluttons that they were!—with their open mouths, their chins bedabbled with grease; they had faces for all the world like backsides, and so red too, that you would say they were rich people's belongings, rich people bursting with prosperity.

And the wine too, my friends, the wine flowed round the table as the water flows in the Seine.

Even allowing for the fact that Symons was writing in the late nineteenth century, there are clearly some problems of register here. It's like listening to the voice of a Victorian gentleman holding forth from his armchair in a London club. It's a very good example of middle-class domestication. Symons renders in genteel or euphemistic terms items belonging to a vigorously colloquial register. The register of the original—direct, simple, robustly colloquial—reflects the language of the characters. The characters' language is woven into the fabric of the narrative,



blurring the distinction between narrator and characters. A single voice dominates. The jovial apostrophe 'my friends!', its author and addressees uncertain, draws the reader into sharing in the general euphoria. The narrator sits at the table with his characters, participating stylistically in the revelry and implicitly inviting the reader to join in too. And this form of narration subverts the moralistic perspectives on the workers' intemperance that so strongly marked contemporary discourse on social issues and contemporary reactions to (and translations of) the novel. Is it because Gervaise is self-indulgent and given to excess that she undergoes the tragedy of working people? Or is it, rather, because she undergoes the tragedy of working people that she becomes self-indulgent and given to excess?

I would propose the following translation:

God, yes, they really stuffed themselves! If you're going to do it, you might as well do

(above)  
Cover of *The Kill*,  
by Émile Zola,  
New Edition trans.  
by Brian Nelson  
(Oxford University  
Press, 2008).

it properly, eh? And if you only have a real binge once in a blue moon, you'd be bloody mad not to fill yourself up to the eyeballs. You could actually see their bellies getting bigger by the minute! The women looked pregnant. Every one of them fit to burst, the greedy pigs! Their mouths wide open, grease all over their chins, their faces looked just like arses, and so red you'd swear they were rich people's arses, with money pouring out of them.

And the wine, my friends! The wine flowed round the table like the water in the Seine.

The fact that the urban proletariat were considered by the bourgeoisie to be beyond the limits of narrative, that is to say, beneath the level of narrative representation, was held implicitly to justify their exclusion from political representation. If the workers could take over the novel, they might also take over the government. And this politics of representation is inseparable from a politics of translation: how we translate the novel is inseparable from how we read it.<sup>4</sup>

The most crucial element of a translator's work is finding a voice for the text being translated. Every translation of a text is a *performance* of that text as reflected in the selection and sequence of words on a page. Literary translation is a highly complex activity, involving a multiplicity of exact choices about

They wouldn't think that way about an actor or a musician; nor should they about a translator. The activity of the writer and that of the translator are indivisible.

## LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION

Edith Grossman, in her incisive little book *Why Translation Matters*, shows how the very notion of literature would be inconceivable without translation, citing Goethe's belief that without outside influences national literatures rapidly stagnate.<sup>5</sup> Milan Kundera, in his personal essay on the novel, *The Curtain*, first published in French in 2007, argues similarly that there are two contexts in which works of art can be understood: the 'small' context of the nation and the 'large' context of the world, encompassing the supranational history of art forms themselves. Provincialism is the inability to imagine one's national culture in the large context, and Kundera thinks it has done great damage to our understanding of literary history.

If we consider just the history of the novel, it was to Rabelais that Lawrence Sterne was reacting, it was Sterne who set off Diderot, it was from Cervantes that Fielding drew constant inspiration, it was against Fielding that Stendhal measured himself, it was Flaubert's tradition living on in Joyce, it was through his reflection on Joyce that

PEOPLE SOMETIMES THINK OF TRANSLATION AS A KIND OF SUBSERVIENCE, IMAGINING THAT THE TRANSLATOR SUBJUGATES HIS OR HER OWN CREATIVITY TO THE DEMANDS OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT.

voice, tone, register, rhythm, syntax, echoes, sounds, connotations and denotations, the colour and texture of words—all those factors that make up 'style' and reflect the marriage between style and semantic content. In that sense, literary translation is a form of close reading of a text in its totality. Furthermore, in the case of translations of so-called 'classics', it is the result of scholarly reappropriation and recontextualisation. People sometimes think of translation as a kind of subservience, imagining that the translator subjugates his or her own creativity to the demands of the original text.

Hermann Broch developed his own poetics of the novel, and it was Kafka who showed García Márquez the possibility of departing from tradition to "write another way." ... [G]eographic distance sets the observer back from the local context and allows him to embrace the *large context* of world literature, the only approach that can bring out a novel's *aesthetic value*—that is to say: the previously unseen aspects of existence that this particular novel has managed to make clear; the novelty of form it has found.<sup>6</sup>

The entire history of literature, we might argue with Kundera, is informed by a process of transmission—a process which is inseparable from an appreciation of translation. Susan Sontag was right to remind us, in her 2002 essay on literary translation, ‘The World as India’, that translation is ‘the circulatory system of the world’s literatures’. Literature, in its broadest sense, is sustained by translation; and, as Susan Bassnett has observed, there is something ‘curiously schizophrenic’ about recognising the central role of translation in shaping literature while downgrading it into a second-class literary activity.<sup>7</sup> The case for translation as the life-blood of literature was made in a particularly compelling way by Sontag in her essay, the essential argument of which is that a proper consideration of the art of translation is a claim for the value of literature itself:

My sense of what literature can be, my reverence for the practice of literature as a vocation, and my identification of the writer with the exercise of freedom—all these constituent elements of my sensibility are inconceivable without the books I read in translation from an early age. Literature was mental travel: travel into the past and to other countries. (Literature was the vehicle that could take you *anywhere*.) And literature was criticism of one’s own reality, in the light of a better standard.<sup>8</sup>

The cultural significance of translation could not be stated more clearly. Translation signifies encounters with otherness, bringing the ‘foreign’ closer.

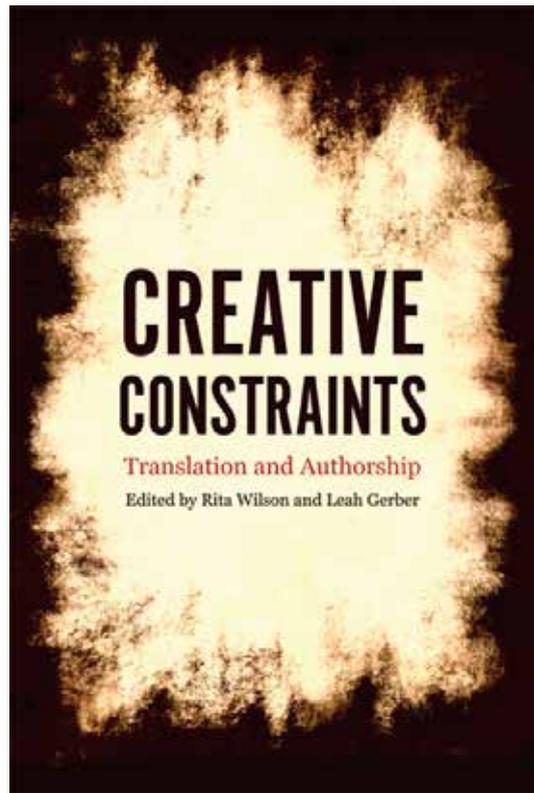
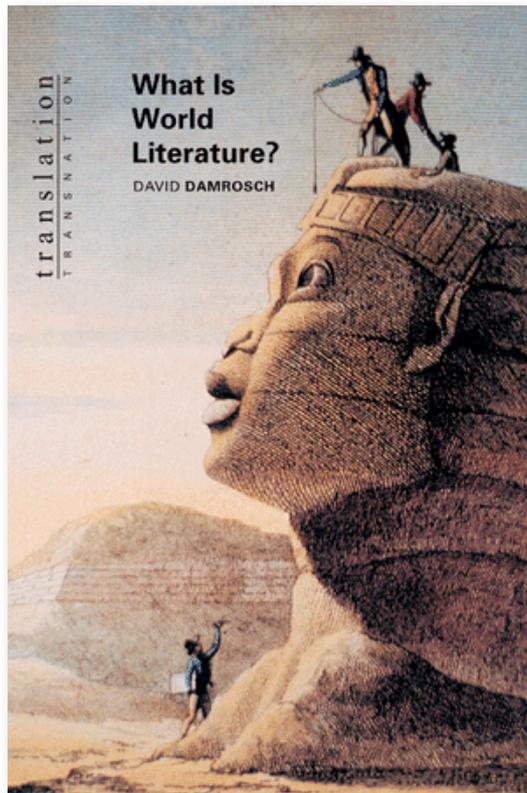
Translation understood as a cultural activity has been central to the interpenetration of the global and the local throughout history. But this interpenetration has accelerated dramatically over the last twenty years, thanks among other things to the revolution in communications, and it has led to what we know as ‘globalisation’. The revolution in communications has coincided with massive movements of peoples around the globe, with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the civilisational confrontation between Islam and Christianity, and the rise of Asia. Globalisation has brought about an ever-greater consciousness not simply

of cultural difference but of the world as one in space and time.

For universities, engagement with the globalised contemporary world implies the development of programs and models of inquiry designed to increase awareness of the diverse cultures and languages of the planet, and of globalisation itself.<sup>9</sup> Translation studies as a distinct disciplinary field has grown exponentially with the advance of globalisation. Translation, by its very nature, is transnational; it embodies intercultural exchange. And in the cognate field of literary studies a global approach has been reflected in an upsurge of interest in paradigms of ‘world literature’. A particularly influential critic in this regard is David Damrosch, whose approach to world literature is predominantly relational.<sup>10</sup> The study of world literature, for Damrosch, concentrates on following the movement of works as they travel between contexts, eras and languages. World literature is defined by the translatability inscribed into the act of translation. Thus conceived, it is a kind of writing that *gains* in translation. In the context of the study of literature in segregated national containers, with their emphasis on national cultural roots, translation necessarily appears as loss; but in the context of world literature translation appears as gain in the sense that it’s the means by which texts transcend their culture of origin, acquiring new depths of meaning and horizons of interpretation as they enter new contexts. Translation clearly has a vital role to play in the propagation of world literature. ‘The study of world literature,’ Damrosch writes, ‘should embrace translation far more actively than it has usually done to date’.<sup>11</sup> The translator, traditionally characterised as a traitor, is now transformed into a kind of hero, a central figure in the world republic of letters.

## THE HUMANITIES AND TRANSLATION

**There is widespread recognition** in academia that translation studies is growing in scale and expanding in scope, while other areas in the humanities are experiencing some decline. This recognition reached its peak in the Anglophone world in 2009, when the Modern



Language Association made translation the presidential theme of its annual conference and proclaimed that ‘translation is the most important concept in cultural theory today’.

The rise of translation studies can largely be attributed to the fact that it has done more than merely draw on other disciplines; it has assimilated and adapted conceptual and methodological frameworks (from cultural studies, sociology and anthropology, among other disciplines) to employ them in the theory and practice of translation. Further, not only has it paid particular attention to the linguistic processes involved in the transfer from source to target text, it has drawn attention to the social and cultural factors that influence both the production and the reception of translated texts. This move from the linguistic to the cultural turn and beyond opens up questions related to the conceptualisation of interdisciplinary relations within translation studies, but it also draws attention to what lies outside the margins of contemporary translation theory: the migration of concepts and methods across disciplinary boundaries that is increasingly evident in research in the humanities today.

Robert Scholes has argued recently for a

reconceptualisation of the humanities by emphasising our need to regain our sensitivity to language, grammar and style—and their importance to both the generation of meaning and the act of interpretation—and to ‘learn how other people think and how they see us’.<sup>12</sup> To do this in any meaningful way, Scholes argues, ‘we need to know how their languages represent the world,’ a statement that, if taken at face value, would seem to call for a radical reappraisal of how we educate our students, especially with respect to the importance we place on foreign-language learning. The interdisciplinarity of translation studies invites innovative approaches to pedagogy by merging the creativity and discipline that inform the practice of interlingual translation with translation theory, and channelling these into a debate with other areas of the humanities (and the social and political sciences). Translation theory is reformulating the parameters of cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and comparative literature—in short, reframing the study of the humanities.

Increasing recognition of translation in the academic world may be attributed in part to the increasingly global nature of literary programs.<sup>13</sup> It is an important trend, but it

(above left)

Cover of **What Is World Literature?** by David Damrosch (Princeton University Press, 2003).

(above right)

Cover of **Creative Constraints: Translation and Authorship**, edited by Rita Wilson and Leah Gerber (Monash University Publishing, 2012).

is only one aspect of the larger strategy we should be pursuing to increase the role of language, literature and culture in education. A complementary aspect should focus on the insights into the process of cross-cultural communication provided by translation. As translation educators, we are invited to teach students to understand and communicate new global realities. Preparing students for a globally interdependent world requires the ability to communicate across multiple kinds of difference. The need for expertise in languages other than English is not only essential for purposes of mutual intelligibility between different 'national' languages and cultures, but also for the larger processes of cross-cultural hybridisation that are creating new and different types of identity. Translation denotes not only the art and craft of the 'literary' or 'professional/technical' translator, but also a larger cultural formation that emerges through the global flow of migrants and refugees.

sufficient numbers of qualified translators for some languages and language combinations. Similar difficulties are being experienced in Australia with regard to 'new and emerging' communities of migrants and refugees.

At the time of the 2004 EU enlargement it became clear that development of the translation profession and modernisation of the higher education systems in line with the Bologna process required much closer cooperation at the European level in order to raise the standard of translator training and foster cooperation between universities. That cooperation is now being extended to universities outside Europe. In 2012, Monash University was granted full membership of CIUTI (Conférence Internationale d'Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes), an international association of tertiary institutions offering degrees in translation and interpreting. Membership is limited to institutions that incorporate in the curriculum the EMT-specified competencies

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A GLOBALLY INTERDEPENDENT WORLD REQUIRES  
THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE ACROSS MULTIPLE KINDS OF DIFFERENCE.

As we seek to develop translation programs and their supporting curricular structures in Australia, it is instructive to look at the European example. The European Union (EU) recently formed the European Master's in Translation (EMT), an elite association of European universities that offer master's degrees in translation that meet rigorous curricular standards.<sup>14</sup> It is well known that translation is a specialty that has long been offered in the EU, and that programs of high calibre exist in almost every EU nation. The initiative to create an EMT network was conceived in response to two concerns: on the one hand, the rapidly growing need for high-level language services in a globalised environment and, on the other, the dramatic increase in the number of official EU languages from eleven (in 2004) to twenty-three (in 2007). These successive EU 'enlargements' revealed how difficult it was for the European institutions to recruit

for professional translators. These are outlined in a 'skills-oriented framework' encompassing language competency, intercultural competency, 'thematic' or subject field competency, information mining and technology proficiency. Applicants for EU programs are required to demonstrate language proficiency in two languages in addition to their native language and to choose either a literary or a professional track for their studies.

It is in this international context that we in Australia must chart our course. In the short term, we need to think about how digital technology is changing the field of translation studies, both in the realm of text interpretations and in the way readers and translators will interact with texts. Digital technology offers something that was not available before: it allows us to present the interpretation of texts in a highly comprehensive manner—verbal, visual, and aural components can all be included to create a

multiple sensory experience. Digital technology allows us to create a fuller understanding of a work, providing a more extensive way of recording the ‘movement’ of the translation process (from source to target text) as well as making it possible to establish continuous interaction with the work.

A new specialty not to be overlooked is the field of audio-visual translation, one of the most complex and dynamic areas of the translation discipline, including the fascinating subject of translating films, video games, and other media. Film translation, encompassing subtitling, dubbing, and voice-over, is a highly technical skill that is in great demand. It is also a growing area of research as evidenced by the number of book series and scholarly journal articles on subjects related to multimedia translation and interpreting and their various social roles.

It is precisely recent research on multimedia translation that enables us to argue for the inclusion in the curriculum of approaches that not only theorise methods of ‘how to translate’ but also recognise literary translation as a social event—an activity that is usually well beyond the control of the individual ‘translator as a person’, and always occurs in a social system and context. Students need to be encouraged to develop a sense of translator agency by moving beyond binary thinking with regard to translation ‘accuracy’ and the differences between two languages and ‘cultures’. The application of systems theory, which is gaining ground in the study of translations, provides useful tools for understanding translation as both a system in its own right, with its own properties, and as a social subsystem, one of the many interacting and competing systems at work within a society and which also affects the way a society interacts with other, foreign societies.<sup>15</sup>

First used in the early 1990s to consider the dynamics of literary translation in relation to a nation- and language-building exercise in the target culture and society,<sup>16</sup> the set of systems theories and research methodologies was later incorporated in descriptive translation studies.<sup>17</sup> Descriptive translation studies engage with the individual translated text, examining it through contrastive analyses with the source text and other translations and

assessing it as a product of its time, translator, publisher, marketing system, etc. to shed light on socio-cultural power struggles otherwise left unobserved and undetected. Today, sophisticated systems theories derived from Niklas Luhmann help to map the complex system of institutions, individuals, practices and values involved in the international circulation of texts. By focusing on the agents of translation (publishers, the media, the academy as well as individual translators), such approaches deepen our understanding of both the purposes and the effects of translation in a globalised society.

We are entering an era of convergence in the arts, humanities, sciences and, inevitably, education. The concept of the university and its curricula as a collection of autonomous disciplines is giving way to one that acknowledges that ‘big questions’ of our time are most fruitfully explored through cross-disciplinary approaches. Translation, the art of creating connections across boundaries, can help this new, integrative vision to take hold and flourish. The expanding field of translation studies, profoundly comparative in nature, is rapidly transforming old notions about cultural as well as academic boundaries and is giving new energy to the humanities. ¶



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1. See Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, *The Translator as Writer* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006); Eugenia Loffredo and Manuela Perteghella, *Translation and Creativity: Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translation Studies* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006); Edith Grossman, *Why Translation Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Rita Wilson and Leah Gerber (eds), *Creative Constraints: Translation and Authorship* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2012); Brian Nelson and Brigid Maher (eds), *Perspectives on Translation: Creation, Circulation, Reception* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2013).
2. Catherine Porter, 'Translation as Scholarship', Address, ADE-ADFL Summer Seminar East, Brown University (Providence, Rhode Island), 11 June 2009.
3. *The Ladies' Paradise* (1995), *Pot Luck* (1999), *The Kill* (2004), *The Belly of Paris* (2007), *The Fortune of the Rougons* (2012)—all published in the Oxford World's Classics series.
4. For an extended discussion of this issue in relation to Zola's use of working-class speech in *L'Assommoir*, see Brian Nelson, 'The Politics of Style', *Meanjin* (On Translation), 64:4 (2005), 90–98.
5. Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*, p. 22.
6. Milan Kundera, *The Curtain* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), pp. 35–36.
7. Susan Bassnett, 'The Translator as Writer' <[http://www.upf.edu/factii/\\_pdf/llicons/bassnetto607.pdf](http://www.upf.edu/factii/_pdf/llicons/bassnetto607.pdf)> [accessed 18 January 2013].
8. Susan Sontag, 'The World as India', in *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007), pp. 156–79 (p. 179).
9. This was the central theme of Sandra Berman's Presidential Address to the 2009 American Comparative Literature Association: 'Working in the And Zone: Comparative Literature and Translation', *Comparative Literature*, 61:4 (2010), 432–46.
10. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Damrosch, *How to Teach World Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
12. Robert Scholes, 'Presidential Address 2004: The Humanities in a Posthumanist World', *PMLA*, 120:3 (May 2005), 724–33 (p. 732).
13. With regard to the recognition of translation practice as research, see 'Evaluating Translations as Scholarship', Modern Language Association, <[www.mla.org/ec\\_guidelines\\_translation](http://www.mla.org/ec_guidelines_translation)> [accessed 12 February 2013]. In Australia, the introduction in 2011 of a new PhD (Translation Studies) at Monash University is a significant milestone in the recognition of translation practice as an area of graduate research (see <<http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/translation-interpreting/phds/>> [accessed 12 February 2013]).
14. 'European Master's in Translation', European Union, <[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/index_en.htm)> [accessed 7 June 2012].
15. See Sergey Tyulenev, *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies: Translation in Society* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
16. Israeli scholar Itamar Even-Zohar first used early systems theory to examine the massive translations of European works of literature, philosophy, and culture into modern Hebrew in the 1950s. The idea was that the Israeli implementation of translation on such a large scale could not be adequately explained only in terms of literary aesthetics.
17. See Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and beyond* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995).



## Acehnese sitting song dances and religious conversion

» MARGARET KARTOMI

*I*n this essay I link an important genre of Aceh's performing arts 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.<sup>1</sup> I argue that the origin and development of the sitting (*duek*) song-dances (performed in the prostrated sitting position of Muslim prayer) were motivated by *dakwah* and fostered by the *tarèkat* (Sufi brotherhoods) and the Sufi movement generally. Song-dances performed in the prostrated sitting (*duek* actually kneeling) position (fig. 1) are distinguished from song-dances in standing (*dong*) position. To identify the possible origins and development of the sitting song-dance genre, it is necessary to examine discussion of the liturgy and the arts by Acehnese artists, researchers and religious leaders, and to look at the history of *dakwah* in Aceh, focusing on a few of the Arab, Persian, Indian and Acehnese saints who contributed to the early development of Islam there.

In their discourse about Acehnese music, dance and religious belief, three teams of Acehnese researchers and artists in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>2</sup> distinguished between two *aliran* (Indonesian), or 'streams' [of thought about the past]: the pre-Islamic (*yoh golom Islam*) and the Islamic stream (*aliran Islam*) or era (*masa Islam*). Isjkarim and his co-authors wrote about the '*aliran* of spirit veneration' linked to the 'Hindu

culture brought to Aceh by Indian traders and migrants', and the second *aliran* that developed 'when the Acehnese people were convinced that they should accept the teachings of Islam', beginning around the thirteenth century and becoming widespread after the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> They identify some standing dances, for example *seudati*, as having originated in the pre-Islamic stream, while genres with religious texts such as the sitting dance *ratèb meuseukat* may have originated in the Middle East and been introduced in Aceh by traders from the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, or elsewhere during the era of the Acehnese kingdoms (*masa kerajaan*). Yet *meuseukat*'s group body percussion (described below, fig. 2) is much more complex than the simple clapping or finger snapping in comparable Middle Eastern forms.

From the 1980s, artistic genres using song lyrics on Muslim themes have been described approvingly as *kesenian Islami* ('Islamic arts'), while those more closely linked with Aceh's syncretic animist and Hindu-Buddhist past are described either as *sumbang* ('wrong, off-track') or, if Muslim phrases are added at the beginning and at various points during performances, as being acceptable forms of 'art with an Islamic flavour' (*kesenian yang bernafaskan Islam*). Thus, Isjkarim and his team of 'traditionalist' Muslim authors express a preference for arts of the Islamic stream, dismissing the pre-Islamic stream as being too

(above)

Fig. 1 A sitting dance (*ratòh duek*) performance with finger-snapping body percussion in Koetaradja around 1900.

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTIAAN SNOUCK HURGRONJE, *THE ACEHNESE*, 2 VOLS., TRANS. BY A. W. S. O'SULLIVAN (LEYDEN: BRILL, 1906) (ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AS *DE ATJEHERS*, BATAVIA: LANDSDRUKKERIJ, 1893–94.) II, P. 226.



*mistik* ('mystical'), citing as an example the *ulak* ('water flowing backwards dance') genre, danced after a shaman makes offerings to the spirits. Yet these same authors express approval of the *ula-ula lembing* ('weaving snake') dance,

be performed without their local, unorthodox components.<sup>5</sup> The traditionalists tend to enjoy not only 'Islamic arts' but also 'arts with a Muslim flavour', 'mystical' arts,

OPINIONS ABOUT THE ARTS VARY WIDELY AMONG ACEHNESE RELIGIOUS THINKERS, WHO DIVIDE BROADLY INTO THE 'MODERNISTS' AND THE 'TRADITIONALISTS'.

despite its clear pre-Islamic origins, noting that phrases such as *La Ila La Ilallah* ('There is no God but God'), *Alhamdulillah pujoe keu tuhan* ('Praise be to Allah') and *Assalamualaikum* ('Peace be with you') are normally added in performances. They also describe and have lent support to the secular arts, including *kreasi baru* ('new creations') based on traditional or popular music and dance styles, such as the *tari Arab* ('Arab dance').<sup>4</sup>

Opinions about the arts vary widely among Acehese religious thinkers, who divide broadly into the 'modernists' and the 'traditionalists'. Although both groups are fiercely proud of Aceh's Muslim identity, the modernists adhere to a literal interpretation of scripture, approve only the 'Islamic arts', and prefer that rituals

and secular performing arts, and find ways to resolve the religious ambiguities while maintaining local religious ideas and artistic genres and their variants.

Though the precise details of the methods of Muslim proselytising have been lost over time, many Acehese artists and writers hold that adherence to Islam initially spread throughout Aceh by way of travelling and resident religious leaders who not only gave sermons, taught people how to pray and drilled them in the recitation of the Qur'an, but also promoted the growth of the Sufi brotherhoods (Acehese *tarèkat*, Arabic *tariqa*) and thereby introduced the physical and mental devotional exercises or chants (*ratéb, diké* [Arabic *dhikr*], *liké*)<sup>6</sup> to inculcate aspects of the liturgy among

(above)  
Fig. 2 A variant of the *galombang* routine in which a row of dancers alternately kneel down on their heels then up with arms outstretched to create wave-like rotating movements. Performed at the Bupati's Arts and Tourism performance in Meulaboh on 7 March 2007.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF IWAN AMIR.

believers. Local religious teachers across Aceh then passed on the Qur'an reading and related liturgical skills from generation to generation, especially in the *dayah* (Muslim boarding schools, fig. 3). All the Sufi brotherhoods valued good conduct, tended to prescribe how their devotees should pray and perform the liturgy, and aimed to cultivate the soul's relationship with the divine through singing and frame-drum playing, the only musical instrument which the Prophet is said to have approved.

Aceh's most important standing dance—*seudati*<sup>7</sup>—and the Muslim and non-Muslim epic (*hikayat*, *haba dang deuria*) singing, both of which normally include partly improvised vocal lyrics, may also have been used long ago to spread the Muslim message, but Acehnese writers regard those genres as having pre-Islamic origins and associations.<sup>8</sup> Present-day modernist *ulama* do not approve of these art forms, even if they are performed in a

The devotees, whether traditionalist or modernist, say they do not regard their performances of *diké* as 'art' because their aim is to achieve mystical union, not the worldly pleasure which art can bring. Yet it is not difficult to believe that such *diké* performances were the source of inspiration for artists who developed the sitting song-dance art forms, whether with religious or secular lyrics. As in the *seudati* dance, the lead vocalist (*aneuk syahé*, lit., 'child of poetry') and the row of singer-dancers (*rakan*) in the religious *ratéb duek* ('sitting liturgy') sing Islamic lyrics. In the secular genre known as *ratôh duek* ('sitting chattering') or *saman* (in parts of western Aceh), the lead vocalist and the row of performers sing mainly secular texts, about nature, love, and daily life (fig. 4).<sup>11</sup>

In the very popular 'extra' (*éstra* or *lanie*) section of a secular *ratôh duek* performance, the lead singers delight—to this day—in

ACEH IS RICH IN MUSLIM LITURGICAL PRACTICES, AS WELL AS IN PERFORMING-ART GENRES THAT ARGUABLY DEVELOPED FROM THOSE PRACTICES.

building with separate seating areas for men and women.<sup>9</sup> The gender-segregated dances performed in the prostrated sitting position of Islamic prayer, on the other hand, have a special claim to *dakwah* origin and status.

Aceh is rich in Muslim liturgical practices, as well as in performing-art genres that arguably developed from those practices. Over at least the past century, and presumably much earlier, members of Sufi brotherhoods in the villages have assembled in the *meunasah* (communal men's house) or the village head's home on Thursdays after 'isya prayers to sing religious lyrics (*ratéb*, *diké*, *liké*) well into the night, as well as on religious holidays and at weddings, circumcisions and funerals. Such devotees took up the 'half-sitting, half-kneeling position assumed by a Moslem worshipper after a prostration in the performance of ritual prayers (*sembahyang*)'. Snouck Hurgronje also mentions that women had a *ratéb saman* of their own, probably performed both as female group prayer and as an artistic performance for a female audience at celebrations, though today, according to my field experience, only the latter occurs.<sup>10</sup>

improvising song lyrics that deal with political issues, nature and the sea, and make ribald sexual references. Sometimes they include quizzes, in sung question-and-response form, about the history and doctrines of Islam, which serve to educate performers and audiences about their faith. Thus, the more broad-minded *ulama* see the *éstra* as potential contributions to continuing *dakwah*, but they approve of this only if men and women perform separately to separated male and female audiences, and inside a building rather than in the open air.<sup>12</sup> Male and female groups perform *ratôh duek* separately, though both sing secular texts about romantic love, sailing, work, farming, religion and other aspects of daily life.

Both the religious and the secular genres have been performed in Aceh from at least as early as the 1890s, and probably much earlier than that, given the time it normally takes for such art forms to develop and consolidate as traditional practice.<sup>13</sup> Performances of the liturgical *ratéb duek* continue today to promote *dakwah* as a pious way to maintain the faith, while the secular *ratôh duek* performances



are also peripherally related to *dakwah* through their frequent addition of religious phrases, such as *seulaweut salam akan saidina* ('Salutations to our Lord').<sup>14</sup>

To answer more fully the question about how Aceh's sitting song-dances may have originated and become established, it is necessary to take a brief look at the legends and history of *dakwah*, focusing on a few of the many Arab and Acehnese saints recognised as having contributed to the development and growth of Acehnese Islam.

The earliest Muslim writers in Southeast Asia known by name lived in Aceh in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They include Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin of Pasai, Nuruddin ar-Raniri and 'Abdurra'uf of Singkel, with the first and last relevant to the present topic. The body of discourse about the Acehnese liturgy holds that these early writers, other foreign Muslim leaders or traders, and returning Acehnese pilgrims brought the prototypical liturgical exercises to Aceh from the Arabian Peninsula, and that the exercises developed and spread throughout Aceh via the expansion of the Naqsyabandiyah, Rifa'iyah, Qadiriyyah, Shattariyyah and Sammāniyyah brotherhoods, each associated with specific *diké* practices. 'Abdurra'uf of Singkel, for example, is known as a theologian who 'promoted certain ideas and spiritual exercises associated with

Sufism'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, he is revered, under his popular names of Teungku di Kuala or Syiah Kuala ('saint of the river mouth', where his grave is believed to be located), as the saint who brought Islam to Aceh.

From as early as the late sixteenth century, and still today, members of the brotherhoods in Aceh have followed the *ilmu tasawwuf* ('body of Sufi knowledge') taught to them by the great mystical Arab, Persian, Indian and Acehnese saints. The sixteenth-century Acehnese poet Hamzah Fansuri, who wrote magnificent poetry and prose tracts imbued with Sufi mysticism, was 'received into the Qadiriyyah fraternity' in Baghdad, the town of the famous saint 'Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, as mentioned in Fansuri's Poem XXI.<sup>16</sup>

To this day, the solo vocalist (*aneuk syahé*) who leads the singing in the main religious sitting dances—the *ratéb duek* ('sitting liturgy')—performs lyrics based on the *tasawwuf* which promote the doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*, or *wujudiyah*). The body-percussion episodes between or accompanying the episodes of group singing are also believed to be Muslim-inspired, as constituting a uniquely Acehnese response to the *tasawwuf*, and therefore seen as a contribution to *dakwah*.

Another kind of religious exercise that featured body percussion was introduced

(above)  
Fig. 3 An Acehnese teacher of Qur'an recitation with his pupils in an Islamic boarding school.

PHOTOGRAPH: SNOUCK HURGRONJE, II: 2.



by Acehnese followers of the seventeenth-century Arab mystic Muhammad Sammān, whose teachings resulted in the creation of the Sammāniyah brotherhood at Medina in the first half of the eighteenth century. Sammān composed the words and laid down the rules of the body movements and accompanying postures of this form of *ratéb*. After members of the Acehnese Sufi brotherhoods had become adept performers of the communal liturgy (*liké*), some artists among them apparently developed the religious sitting dance (*ratéb duek*), with participants kneeling close together in rows or circles as they sang *diké* while swaying from side to side and performing simple body percussion. As Snouck Hurgronje wrote, young devotees usually practised their religious exercises while sitting close together in a row or circle, either in a *meunasah* (male meeting house and prayer house) or in a village *madrasah* (male or female boarding school run by one or more *ulama*; fig. 3). He also wrote that men of all ages practised the *ratéb* separately in their homes and in the *meunasah*.<sup>17</sup>

Sammāniyah was the first Sufi brotherhood in Southeast Asia to attract a mass following, which expanded from the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> It influenced the development and spread of *saman* dances throughout western Aceh and Gayo.<sup>19</sup> The intoning of repetitive texts, rhythmic

movements, and body percussion helped transport male devotees into a state of religious ecstasy through perceived union with Allah via the *tasawwuf*, as in Sufi practice the world over. Unlike other mystic teachers, who liked quiet and restraint for the performance of their *diké*, Syéh Sammān held that loudness and motion 'were powerful agents for producing the desired state of mystic transport'.<sup>20</sup> To this day, the loudness and motion of *saman* or *ratéb duek* performances build up to a series of furiously fast, loud climaxes, with each episode coming to a sudden end. Unlike the religious exercises, the artistic *saman* genres focus mainly on remembered or improvised secular texts and include solo and group vocal episodes (often reaching those very fast tempos at climaxes), which feature episodes of virtuosic body percussion.

By the eighteenth century, returned pilgrims from Mecca and Medina had also further popularised the Shattariyah brotherhood. The Rifa'iyah and Qadiriya brotherhoods had already spread to various parts of Aceh. In the early twenty-first century, the Qadiriya, Rifa'iyah, and Shattariya brotherhoods are still alive, though less formally organised than they were mid-century.

In many parts of western Aceh, the main *ratéb duek*-type genre is called *ratéb meuseukat*. In its secular form (with mainly secular lyrics) it

(above)

Fig. 4 An *aneuk syahé* (lead singer) and part of a row of singer-dancers in a *ratéh duek* dance performance in Meulaboh, 1982.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF H. KARTOMI.

is simply called *meuseukat*, or occasionally *ratôh duek*. A highlight of the body movement routines in this and similar genres is the *galombang* ('wave') (shown above in figure 2), in which a row of dancers alternately kneel down on their heels then up with arms outstretched to create wavelike rotating movements, after which they may clap their own and then their neighbours' hands, or perform other body percussion routines continuously for a period of time.

Meanwhile, the lead vocalist (*aneuk syahé*) and his or her assistant stand on one side and sing preconceived and improvised lyrics, to which the *rakan* row responds in chorus, and the soloists and the row continue to alternate in this way for as long as the lead singer or dance leader (*syéh*) decides. Performers in the row accompany the vocal music with their own body percussion, producing patterns of rhythmic-timbral sound by hand clapping, finger snapping, floor beating, thigh beating, shoulder beating and chest beating.

Evidence from my elderly informants suggests that in the late nineteenth century it was the women who were responsible for developing and teaching the western Acehnese *ratéb meuseukat* genre with body-percussion accompaniment, partly as a form of continuing *dakwah* and partly for the community's enjoyment at celebrations. In many areas during the Darul Islam rebellion of the 1950s, *ratéb meuseukat*, like most other arts, was rarely performed. However, a remarkable choreographer, Ibu Cut Asiah, revived and re-choreographed the traditional *meuseukat* dance for the Bupati's troupe of artists in Meulaboh during the 1960s, after which many female groups began to rehearse and perform it in various versions. From the 1970s, opportunities arose for participating in provincial competitions and international *misi kesenian* (performing arts missions), and some groups of men who had learned from women how to perform *ratéb meuseukat* embarked on provincial, national and international tours, appropriating the form. Meanwhile, some young female *sanggar* (dance schools and performing groups) in certain villages became interested in the new choreographies, and they gave more performances. From the 1970s, when the New Order government directed civil

servants and children to perform political song texts with more virtuosic choreographies, it became mandatory for *meuseukat*, *ratôh duek* and other troupes to sing propaganda texts in their performances during election campaigns, at official ceremonies, and on the local and national media.

The precise origin of the Acehnese sitting genres with body percussion may never be known. It is probable that they developed as indigenous expressions based on the practice of Sufi group prayer, which sometimes leads to simple swaying and body percussion, in or before the early eighteenth century, when the Sammānīyah brotherhood began to extend its influence, given its successful propagation of the *ratéb* and associated *ratôh duek saman* forms to this day. The theory of an indigenous Acehnese origin of art forms based on the *ratéb* gained credence in 2004 when ethnomusicologist Iwan Amir visited some male and female religious schools and found that students sitting or kneeling in a row are taught melodically to chant the 'ninety-nine characteristics of Allah' (*sifeut*), the praises of the Prophet (*angguk rabbani*), the declaration of faith, the religious laws (*rukun*), and the book of supplications (*Dala'il Khairat*). As they chant the religious songs, they sometimes sway and occasionally clap rhythmically, unlike in solo Qur'anic recitation (*beu'et Qu'ran*), group Qur'anic recitation (*daroih*), and individual recitation of the liturgy aloud (*wird*). As Amir concludes, it is quite likely that the *ratéb* song-dances derived from the creative imagination of participants in liturgical exercises while rhythmically swaying their bodies and clapping.<sup>21</sup>

From the 1980s, some official and commercially sponsored teams of artists found new ways of creating secular song-dances 'with an Islamic flavour'. For example, the *tari Arab* ('Arab dance') is choreographed for mixed couples wearing Arab-influenced costumes who perform Malay couples-style dancing (*joget*) with simple body percussion and a pop-Arab-sounding vocal melody, accompanied by a *gambus* (plucked lute of Arab origin) and pop-band instruments. The dance was developed by the governor's art troupe in Banda Aceh in 2002 and was performed in Lhokseumawe at its traditional performing arts festival in

2003. Some artists complain, however, that the body-percussion sounds are drowned out by the loud pop-band accompaniment, and most religious leaders disapprove of the dance on moral and religious grounds, mainly because of the mixed-gender couples dancing on stage. Certainly *tari Arab* has little direct connection to *dakwah*.

## CONCLUSION

Research to date suggests that the distinctive artistic styles and qualities of the sitting song-dances were developed by local genius in Aceh, not by direct import from Arabia or India, though the basic idea of reaching divine union through these devotional forms was originally introduced by Acehnese religious leaders who had studied with the saints in the holy land, other seats of Islamic learning, or Aceh itself. According to the body of discourse by Acehnese artists, art researchers, and religious thinkers on the performing arts, the male and female sitting song-dance genres with religious or secular texts were originally developed from unaccompanied liturgical exercises (*diké*) performed in the prostrated position assumed by worshippers at ritual prayer, with the devotees sometimes swaying their bodies and clapping rhythmically as prototypes of body percussion. Groups of individuals were motivated over time to practise the religious and secular art forms as part of celebrations of rites of passage and on religious holidays, as well as benefiting personally and socially from such creative expression and pursuits. The sitting dances, performed in all-male or all-female groups, were developed as an early form of *dakwah* used to convert the Acehnese to a Sufi-influenced form of Shafi'i Islam. The long-term performance of the genre also served the purposes of *dakwah* in its other sense, as a continuing call to believers to deepen their faith and piety.

In large areas of western Aceh in the late nineteenth century, oral reports suggest that female groups were the exclusive performers of the *ratéb meuseukat* and *ratôh meuseukat*, and this probably remained so until the 1970s, when some male groups appropriated the form for touring and other performance opportunities.

Yet the women contend, on the basis of names and facts, that their female forebears made a major contribution to the creative development of the *meuseukat* genre, including its complex body-percussion component, and in the early twenty-first century they feel they still own it.

The largely secular *ratôh duek* genres were eventually classified as 'arts with an Islamic flavour' in contrast to the *ratéb duek* genres, categorised as 'arts with an Islamic theme'. Only the latter are fully accepted by modernist Muslims, though some tolerate 'arts with an Islamic flavour' as long as they are performed in a building in which the genders can be segregated. Research by Acehnese artists and thinkers also concludes that the body-percussion-accompanied genres developed from genres taught by followers of the Arab saints Ahmed Qushāshī and Mohammad Sammān and the Aceh-born scholar 'Abdurra'uf. Sammān's approach went further than the others in expanding the dynamic range and intensity of body-percussion performance. All the sitting-dance genres are characterised by their complex solo vocal style, choral responses and elaborate body percussion. The body percussion in the *ratéb duek* and *ratôh duek* genres are also seen to contribute to the dominant Acehnese sense of identity, which is by definition Muslim. In Aceh's gender-segregated society, the genres with body-percussion accompaniment, performed by both genders separately, are associated with an Islamic idea of femininity when performed by female groups and an Islamic idea of masculinity when performed by male groups.

Since the 1970s the concept of *dakwah* has served as a focus of various Islamic, nationalist and developmentalist programs that have attracted public and official support in urban and rural Aceh, with the sitting-dance genres used in many of these programs. Since the 1980s, some official and commercially sponsored teams of artists in the cities have found new ways of creating dances with a Muslim flavour by composing melodies that sound Arab, accompanying them in performance with Arab and international pop instruments, dressing performers in Arab-influenced costumes, and dancing in mixed couples with simple body percussion.

Some artists criticise these ‘new creations’ on aesthetic grounds, as the sound of the body percussion is drowned out by the pop-band accompaniment, while religious leaders criticise them for their alleged irreligious aspect. However, others regard the new dances as acceptable as a modern development of ancient Acehese-Malay *joget* dancing, with its particular Islamic flavour. While the differences of opinion in the discourse about the sitting dances genres are significant, a broad consensus exists about their likely Sufi origin and development for the purposes of *dakwah*, past and present. ¶



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**Instruments** (University of Chicago Press, 1990), and **The Gamelan Digul and the Prison-Camp Musician Who Built It: An Australian Link to the Indonesian Revolution** (University of Rochester Press, 2002).

1. *Dakwah* (Islamic ‘outreach’) has been an important concept in the historical propagation of Islamic belief and religious tradition and in current pious practices throughout most parts of Indonesia. Since the 1970s, it has also served as a focus of Islamist, nationalist and developmentalist programs (see Anna Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion and the Recited Qur’an in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), p. 20).
2. Members of these research teams employed by the Department of Education and Culture were (i) Isjkarim (chair), Drs Athaillah, Drs Muchtar Djalal, Mahmud Tammat, Siti Asrah, Hasanuddin Daud, Rosnah, Yusnani Nazar, Faridah Eriany and Suhaina (1980–81); (ii) Firdaus Burhan and Idris ZZ, Drs Abd. Hadjad, Mursalan Ardy, Mahmud Tammat, Isjkarim and Bahrulwalidin (1986–87) and (iii) Drs Z. H. Idris, Drs Abd. Hadjad, Idris ZZ and Drs Alamsyah (1993).
3. Isjkarim et al., *Laporan pelaksanaan studi perbandingan kesenian tradisional Aceh (Saman-Likok pulo, Rapai Pulot-Grimpheng), dilaksanakan di Banda Aceh tg. 27 s/d 30 Des. 1981* (Banda Aceh: Kantor Wilayah Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Aceh, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1980–81), pp. 94, 4.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 104, 94–96.
5. Tgk H. M. Divah Amirullah, ‘Musyawarah Ulama Kabupaten Aceh Utara dan Kota Lhokseumawe, Kesimpulan’ (Unpublished typescript, 2006), p. 2.
6. Acehese *ratéb* (Ar.: *ratib*) as described in Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese*, vol. II, p. 217 bears little resemblance to the Middle Eastern *ratib* (see Iwan Dzulvan Amir, ‘Sing, Adapt, Persevere: Dynamics of Traditional Vocal Performers in the Islamic Region of Aceh from the Late 19th to the Early 21st Century’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Monash University, 2006), p. 192).
7. The references to roosters in *seudati* song lyrics and the rooster-crest headdress worn by the singer-dancers are among the reasons why Acehese artists associate the dance with the farming communities in which it has thrived. Some Acehese artists also believe that *seudati* was at one time used as *dakwah* to spread the faith. The solo *seudati* singers’ improvised lyrics in the extra (*estra* or *lanie*) sections are notorious for spreading religious, political, social or sexual ideas.
8. Isjkarim et al., pp. 57, 220–22.
9. Amirullah, p. 2.
10. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese*, 2 vols, trans. by A. W. S. O’Sullivan (Leyden: Brill, 1906) [Originally published as *De Atjehers*, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1893–94.] vol. II, pp. 247–57, 223, 219.
11. Amir, ‘Sing, Adapt, Persevere’, pp. 202–03.
12. Amirullah, p. 2.
13. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese*, p. 223.
14. Margaret Kartomi, ‘The Development of the Acehese Sitting Song-Dances and Frame Drum Genres as Part of Religious Conversion and Continuing Piety’, in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 166 (2010), 83–106.
15. J. R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. III.
16. *The Poems of Hamzah Fansuri*, ed. by G. W. J. Drewes and L. F. Brakel, *KITLV, Bibliotheca Indonesica* 26 (Dordrecht: Foris, 1986), p. 5.
17. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese*, vol. II, p. 2.
18. Martin van Bruinessen, ‘Origins and Development of the Sufi Orders (*tarékat*) in Southeast Asia’, *Studia Islamika* 1:1 (1994), 1–23, p. 6.
19. The upland Gayo people also have a famous genre called *saman*, though performed in a very different style of singing, movement and body percussion.
20. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese*, p. 217.
21. Amir, ‘Sing, Adapt, Persevere’, pp. 39, 41.

# The Wine Merchant of Aarhus

» ALEX MILLER

*T*he professor, who had gone to Denmark from Australia nearly thirty years ago when she was a young woman, lived in an old railway crossing-keeper's house about five miles out of the town centre. The house stood alone by the railway line in the middle of ploughed fields. It was two storeys with a steeply pitched roof in which, in the Danish style, there were also rooms. Several old apple trees survived in the neglected garden. As soon as I arrived at the house I felt there was something sad and forgotten about its situation. As if I saw at once that it did not really belong there any more and that, in the service of efficiency, at which the Danes seemed to be very good, the railway company should have demolished the old house when the railway crossing was bridged and accommodation was no longer needed for a crossing keeper and his family. The local farmers might then have ploughed over the site where the house and its neglected garden stood and resumed the land for their crops. Who, after all, I asked myself, would wish to live in such a place as this, isolated from neighbours, silent and alone in the middle of empty ploughed fields?

Despite its picturesqueness I could see nothing to recommend the professor's house

as a place to live. I imagined her evenings there after long days spent alone in her study, when nothing would be more pressing than the need to get out and be among people in order to refresh her spirits, to walk in the streets or to meet acquaintances in a café and drink a glass of wine. To step outside the professor's house was to enter the forlorn garden with its views of muddy fields. I was certain, moreover, that no inhabitant of this lonely gatekeeper's house could have any contact with the farmers, whose solid old redbrick homes and cattle byres stood off on the skyline, their windowless backs to the world, as discouraging as military forts to a stranger in need of a little company.

When we arrived, the professor and I paused in the garden to admire the house before going in. There were melting drifts of snow in the shadows of the orchard. It is true, it was during the silvery twilight of a long northern winter evening that I arrived at the professor's house, and I suppose the darkness and the cold and the leafless apple trees and the half-melted snow made the situation appear even more discouraging to me than would have been the case if I had arrived, say, during a summer day. But even so, what about summer evenings? Wouldn't the professor feel especially enticed

out of the house then? To mingle with people and to eat ice creams and drink beer and to laugh with friends, and perhaps even to fall in love? Mightn't the situation of the crossing-keeper's house, I thought as we stood there looking at the garden, be even more solitary and disheartening during the summer than during the winter?

If it can still be as true for us today as it was once for Huysmans, that the beauty of a landscape resides in its melancholy, then in the snowy rustic simplicity of its isolated setting I was prepared to believe that the professor's house was beautiful. But I was glad, nevertheless, that I was to be staying for only a few days and not, as she had, for thirty years. I said, "What an incredible place! It's great! Really fantastic! Beautiful!" And when she turned to go inside I saw the smile in the professor's eyes, and that she did not believe in my forced enthusiasm for her house.

As well as being an eminent scholar in the field of the new literatures in English, the professor was also the editor of an arts magazine. She had decided to publish an issue of the magazine in which my book and my visit to her university at Aarhus would be celebrated. Mette Jørgensen and Lars Jensen, two of the professor's old PhD students, who had become her colleagues and were collaborating with her in the production of the arts magazine, came back to the house with us the next day from the university to have dinner with us and to discuss what should be put into the celebratory issue of the magazine. Earlier in the day I had gone into the town with Lars to do some sightseeing and to help with the shopping for our dinner. It was then that I met Grubert, the owner of the wine shop on Guldsmegade.

It was a small family wine business. A warm brightly lit shop in the busy main street of the town. Grubert took such an obvious pleasure in helping us select the wine from his shelves that it was impossible not to feel that we were part of a privileged occasion. When the wine had been chosen he carried it to his counter and wrapped each bottle separately in tissue paper before handing it to us and receiving his payment. The practiced way Grubert rolled the bottles, with a certain modest flourish, into the crinkly sheets of tissue paper, while Lars and I

stood by the counter and watched him, seemed to me to be a survival from a past time. It was a gentle, unhurried, and really quite complex gesture. It was a gesture that belonged in the time when the professor's house had been a railway crossing-keeper's house and travellers had had to wait while the crossing-keeper came out and opened the gates for them. It seems fanciful to say it now, but as I stood watching Grubert rolling the bottles in tissue paper I felt he was entrusting Lars and I with a message for the crossing keeper: the keeper, in my imagination at that moment, of the past in which Grubert himself still resided.

As we walked away along the street I glanced back at Grubert in his wine shop and caught an image of him framed against the dark evening: the white sleeves of his shirt and the green of his apron in the bright shop as he rolls a bottle of wine into crisp sheets of tissue paper for an expectant customer. It seemed to me he had quietly defied the passing of time and I was convinced that in his life nothing was hurried.

"Why do you call him Grubert, and not Hr. Grubert, or John Grubert?" I asked. Lars explained to me that during the past few years in Denmark the use of *Hr.* had come to sound too formal and old-fashioned. "Perhaps the rich women whose husbands own the houses overlooking the bay still call him Hr. Grubert," Lars said, "when they telephone to order their wine. But everyone else would consider *Hr.* an affectation these days." "And things haven't relaxed so far that you'd call him by his first name?" I asked. "Grubert," Lars said, listening to himself. "It sounds right."

When we'd finished the shopping Lars took me to his favourite café and ordered two bottles of Tuborg. We drank the beer and talked. The café was busy with young people drinking and smoking and talking. The beer was light and to my palate nearly tasteless. Outside it had begun to rain again. Our coats were wet from an earlier shower, from which we'd made no attempt to shelter. "We'll soon get dry again," Lars had said, the rain shining on his face and in his hair. It was pleasant in the café. I was curious to find out as much as I could about Denmark during my short stay. Lars had visited Australia several times and we talked about differences between Denmark

and Australia. The weather mostly. I ordered the next round of Tuborg, and attempted the Danish, which was unnecessary as the waiter spoke excellent English. But there is a peculiar pleasure to be had from trying out the strange sounds that make up another's language. To articulate the odd, meaningless sound and get a sensible response has the magic of incantation in it. The waiter laughed with us, sharing our pleasure, and Lars complimented me on my pronunciation. Everyone seemed to be friendly and happy. Denmark, I thought, is a friendly country. I was reminded, by this thought, however, that I was enjoying that period of amnesty from care that we experience whenever we are in a new country for the first time; a brief, and to the writer a precious, period during which the stranger is permitted to enjoy a kind of innocent wonder. As if it has been agreed that for a little while the stranger, like the child, will not be held accountable for the reality in which he finds himself. I had experienced such a period in China some years earlier and it had proved profitable to my writing. I knew that detachment was possible during this moment in-between, as it were, a moment of disconnectedness during which I would be permitted to read the social dimensions of this country as my own fiction. A moment for receiving impressions, before the imagination is closed by exact knowledge. Of course I said nothing of this to Lars. I knew that to speak of such things is to destroy their power.

At the professor's house that evening after dinner, during the discussion about what to put into the celebratory issue of the arts journal, Lars suggested that a short story from me would be a good idea. "But I've never written short stories," I said. "That doesn't mean you can't write one, does it?" he asked. I said, "Suggest something. Tell me what to write and I'll write it." I waited while they looked at each other, puzzling over what to suggest to me. It was Mette who was first to lose patience with this procedure. "We're not the writers," she said. "You should think of something yourself. That's part of being a writer, thinking up your own stories?" I said, "Maybe. But it's nice to have things suggested sometimes."

While we considered the problem of what I was to write about for their magazine the

professor poured the last of the wine for us. One of us once again remarked on how good the wine was and the others readily agreed. The professor, however, was silent. She was thinking. "As good as Australian wine," Lars said, looking into his glass. The professor had left the table and was standing at the window gazing into the dark night toward the bare cold hill of ploughed land with the small lights of the distant farmhouses on the skyline. She seemed to have forgotten us. As if, accustomed to sit here alone during the long evenings in the spell of the old house, she had fallen into an habitual reverie, sipping Grubert's good red wine and gazing out the window while the silvery light lingered and lingered on the ploughed fields, waiting for the landscape to grow quite dark, and then forgetting to wait any longer and just standing, deep in thought. After a while she lifted the glass to her lips and drank. She drank the wine like an Australian drinking his first beer for the day, and she made a sound like a groan that someone might make in their sleep. Then she turned and looked at me, her gaze direct and challenging, and she said, "Grubert," as if she were forming the word out of the groan. "Lars said you liked our Hr. Grubert. So why don't you write us a story about the wine merchant of Aarhus?"

They watched me and waited. A fast train went by within a few feet of the back wall of the house, making the china tinkle and tremble. In the stillness after the passage of the train I recalled my image of Grubert in his shop, surrounded by his tall racks of handsome wine bottles, just like me in my study at home in Australia as I am at this very moment writing this story that is not really a story, surrounded by my tall shelves of books, loving being here. "I suppose he's the third generation of Grubert wine merchants," I said, "and just like his father and grandfather before him has been going to that same shop regularly at the same hour every day for thirty or forty years without a break and that the locals safely set their watches by him." The professor said, "Good start! That's our Grubert. What else?" "Well," I said. "One day Grubert takes off his green apron in the middle of the afternoon, long before his usual time to go home, and he puts on his jacket and closes his shop and hurries down Guldsmedgade

(opposite)  
The way to Anna's house.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ALEX MILLER.



without looking either left or right and without greeting any of his numerous acquaintances as he passes.”

While I drank from my glass of Grubert’s good red wine my three friends waited. And when I had drunk and remained silent Mette leaned towards me. Resting her elbows on the blond wood of the table she examined me with her large blue eyes, a frown, which seemed to question my integrity as a storyteller, creasing the centre of her broad intelligent forehead. “What then?” she asked. “Where was Grubert going?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“Did he have a lover?”

“It’s a sort of jest,” I said. “Like a haiku, or a Chinese micro story. Everyone in the town knows the wine merchant has never varied his habits for forty years, then without any explanation one day he does something different, and at once there is this mystery about what he’s up to. You immediately think he might have a lover. And all because a man has walked down a street that is as familiar to him as the thoughts in his own mind.”

Mette and Lars looked at the professor. Were they waiting for her verdict before giving their own? I wondered. “We need something a bit longer than that,” the professor eventually said.

“Perhaps other things will occur to me when I write it,” I said.

“I want to know why Grubert leaves his shop,” Mette insisted.

“But it’s not a story about why Grubert leaves his shop,” I said. “It’s a story about your

town. It’s a story about Aarhus and how steady a town it is.”

“Even so,” the professor said. “It still needs to be longer.” She pushed her empty wine glass to the middle of the table and got up and went and stood by the window with her back to us again. This seemed to be her favourite place. A place of contemplation. It was quite dark outside now. After a while she said, “You’ll just have to pretend to know why Grubert leaves his shop in that unexpected way.” There was just an edge of something impatient in her voice, her interest no longer really connected to the possibilities of the story, wishing, perhaps, to think of other things. “Make something up,” she said, standing at the window gazing out into the cold winter night across the dark ploughed fields that were no longer visible toward the twinkling lights of the farmhouse on the horizon that now looked like stars.

“A lover,” she said eventually, when I no longer expected her to speak again of the story. “A lover is a very good idea.” ¶



ALEX MILLER FAHÁ is one of Australia’s most esteemed authors. His ten novels have won many awards and he recently received the 2012 Melbourne Prize for Literature in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Australian Literature.

‘The Wine Merchant of Aarhus’ appeared in an earlier form in *Kunapipi* XV, No. 3 (1993), 7–45.



# Evolutionary Aesthetics

The Hollywood Musical as Darwinian Mating Game

» BARBARA CREED

THE MALES SOMETIMES PAY THEIR COURT BY DANCING, OR BY FANTASTIC ANTICS PERFORMED EITHER ON THE GROUND OR IN THE AIR ... ON THE WHOLE, BIRDS APPEAR TO BE THE MOST AESTHETIC OF ALL ANIMALS.

CHARLES DARWIN<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to sexual selection, there is nothing more vibrantly Darwinian than a Busby Berkeley line-up of tap-dancing chorines in exotic costumes, beating out a rhythmic melody in an overt sexual display of bare flesh, flashing legs and seductive smiles. The lyrics of Berkeley's songs were just as explicit. The hit number 'Pettin' in the Park' from *Gold Diggers of 1933* said it all. 'Pettin' in the park', the hero croons suggestively. 'Bad boy!' a woman responds with a playful rebuff. Kaleidoscopic patterns, beautiful geometric designs, fertility motifs, assembly-line precision—these are the hallmark features of a classic thirties Busby Berkeley dance sequence from films such as *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *Dames*. Berkeley, who played a crucial role in the establishment of the Hollywood musical as a genre in its own right, is most famous for his design of complex, decorative musical pieces that starred large numbers of chorines or showgirls whose performances on screen appeared to obey a series of laws based on geometric patterning. Determined to exploit the artistic properties of the new medium, he explored the power of the moving camera, the effects of framing shots and unusual angles, kaleidoscopic vision

and the possibilities of constructing different spectatorial positions.<sup>2</sup>

Rising to prominence during the Great Depression, the musical was a huge crowd pleaser—an instance of popular entertainment at its best. Critics and theorists, however, have looked for deeper meaning in Berkeley's musical extravaganzas, which they have interpreted from a number of perspectives. A popular approach is to evaluate the musical in relation to gender, class and race.<sup>3</sup> A more specialised perspective has been adopted by those who have analysed his films in the context of machine art and the values of utility, streamlining and modern design.<sup>4</sup> Stylistically, the Busby Berkeley musical represents both art deco and the new style of streamlining, which has been associated stylistically with eugenicist values of the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Some critics have pointed to the way Berkeley's films epitomise the context of a new spirit of collectivism—as distinct from traditional American individualism—which developed in response to Roosevelt's New Deal.<sup>6</sup> Theorists have argued that the Hollywood musical, as a genre, is primarily about 'escapism', 'utopianisms' and 'entertainment', all of which are seen as positive

values.<sup>7</sup> The theories of Freud and Marx have proven useful in the above analyses of the Depression-era musical, but virtually nothing has been written that draws on a Darwinian approach to these texts. This is surprising given that Darwin himself wrote on the role of dance and music in animal and, by extension, human courtship.

Musical tones and rhythm were used by our half-human ancestors, during the season of courtship, when animals of all kinds are excited not only by love, but by the strong passions of jealousy, rivalry and triumph ... We can thus understand how it is that music, dancing, song, and poetry are such very ancient arts.<sup>8</sup>

Darwin disagreed with Spencer that 'the cadences used in emotional speech afford the foundations from which music has been developed' (pp. 638–9, note 39). Instead, Darwin

both male and female (or only the female) use their vocal organs in pursuit of a mate; these include frogs and toads, male alligators, fish, various crustaceans, insects, gnats, spiders and birds. Mammals similarly use their voice during the mating season but with mammals, such as the gibbon, it is usually only the male. Even mice are known to sing during courtship. Darwin cites a letter from a colleague who describes a mouse who 'had no ear for time, yet she would keep to the key of B (two flats) and strictly in a major key ... Her soft clear voice falls an octave with all the precision possible; then at the wind up, it rises again into a very quick trill on C sharp and D' (p. 634).

Displaying characteristic acumen about what might please audiences, Hollywood created a unique cinematic genre, developed from the stage, with the aim of creating elaborate visual scenarios of song and rhythm designed to explore the sexual desires of the human species. In my view, the Hollywood

THE HOLLYWOOD MUSICAL IS ESSENTIALLY A MATING RITUAL IN WHICH THE SEXES MEET AND IMPRESS EACH OTHER WITH THEIR SPECTACULAR SONG AND DANCE ROUTINES AS A PRELUDE TO MATING.

argued that human speech developed from music and that 'musical sounds afforded one of the bases for the development of language' (p. 639). He argued that music not only preceded speech but was in fact the origin of speech. The beginnings of music thus lie in sexual display and sexual selection.

I conclude that musical notes and rhythm were first acquired by the male or female progenitors of mankind for the sake of charming the opposite sex. Thus musical notes became associated with some of the strongest passions an animal is capable of feeling, and are consequently used instinctively, or through association, when strong emotions are expressed in speech. (p. 639, note 39)

In Darwin's view 'the vocal organs were primarily used and perfected in relation to the propagation of the species' (p. 632). In his chapter on voice and music, Darwin refers to a large number of non-primate species in which

musical is essentially a mating ritual in which the sexes meet and impress each other with their spectacular song and dance routines as a prelude to mating. The narrative of courtship and marriage is such an 'obvious' element of the musical it has rarely, if ever, been analysed in terms of sexual selection and its parallels with the rituals of other species.

In recent years theorists and writers have turned their attention to interdisciplinary studies in the sciences and arts, particularly the influence of Darwinian theories concerning evolution, the emotions and sexual selection and the influence of these on literature, painting and the visual arts. Dame Gillian Beer's ground-breaking 1983 work, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* was followed by other important studies of the influence of Darwin's ideas on literature by writers such as George Levine and Joseph Carroll.<sup>9</sup> Theorists and art historians such as Linda Nochlin, Jonathan Smith, Jeanette Hoorn, Barbara Larson, Sabine Flach

and Fae Breuer have written on the impact of Darwinian ideas on the visual arts.<sup>10</sup> The most recent work, *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History* examines the intersection of Darwin's ideas with theories of aesthetics. To date, however, there has been very little written on the influence of Darwinian ideas on the cinema. In *Darwin's Screens*, I argue that Darwin's theories of evolution, sexual selection, deep time, chance and entanglement influenced the evolution of early film genres through a significant number of stage and literary adaptations as well as through public fascination with evolutionary theory. Many writers, whose works were adapted for the screen with great success, acknowledged the influence of evolutionary theory on their thinking; these include Robert Louis Stevenson (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*), H. G. Wells (*The Island of Doctor Moreau*), Bram Stoker (*Dracula*), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Lost World*), Jules Verne (*Journey to the Centre of the Earth*) and Edgar Rice Burroughs (*The Land That Time Forgot* and *Tarzan of the Apes*). Darwin's ideas about the nature of time, metamorphosis and transformation also influenced early cinema in its development of special effects technology. This is particularly true of the special technology developed to represent the remarkable transformation scenarios in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Mamoulian, 1932). Darwin's interest in photography and visual transformation gave him what is best described as a 'pre-cinematic eye'. In his discussion of Darwin's use of photography, Phillip Prodger writes: 'Darwin's photographs have proved inspirational to generations of artists, and may even have fuelled the invention of motion pictures'.<sup>11</sup> While *Darwin's Screens* primarily explores genres, such as science fiction, horror, the detective film and film noir, which focus on the dark side of human nature, this essay takes a lighter approach in its discussion of the early musical. I am not arguing that the creators of the musical were directly influenced by Darwinian ideas (although they may have been) but rather that the musical by its very nature, that is, its focus on sexual display and sexual selection, is powerfully aligned with evolutionary ideas.

The musical is, in essence, an evolutionary narrative of bodily display and sexual selection. It is a Darwinian mating ritual based on song and dance in which pair bonding, family and future succession are the key elements. It is also Darwinian in its emphasis on motifs of abundance, fluidity and fruition and in its endorsement of the importance of struggle in daily life—motifs discussed by Gillian Beer as central to Darwin's theory of evolution. The successful couple is the one that strives to achieve, to stand out from the group, to sing and dance with the greatest flair and distinction. Through an analysis of the musical as an evolutionary ritual and the similarities between the sexual display and mating rituals of birds and humans, I will also demonstrate that it is possible to destabilise the anthropocentric point of view that is central to the cinema and by implication other forms of representation. As Margot Norris convincingly argues, the Darwinian revolution in ideas resulted in a 'subversive interrogation of the anthropocentric premises of Western philosophy and art'.<sup>12</sup>

### THE MATING ANTICS OF BIRDS

Darwin's detailed research into the mating rituals of the bird world reveals a number of parallels with Hollywood's representation of mating rituals in the popular musical. Both human and bird species place utmost importance on the aesthetics of sexual display as a prelude to sexual selection and procreation. There are also key differences in terms of display and selection. Amongst birds, it is the male who is the more beautiful and the male who performs elaborate acts of sexual display. Some species such as the Australian bowerbird even erect elaborate stages on which to perform. In contrast to the human, the females of most bird species do not present themselves as objects of sexual display, nor do they sing or dance to attract the male. The females are the observers, sometimes sitting together in rows to watch the male go through his act. Some male birds create instrumental sounds to accompany their dances. Some species mate for life and become visibly distressed if separated from their partner.

Darwin describes the male birds' fantastic attributes and powers of attraction in great detail in *The Descent of Man*:

They charm the female by vocal or instrumental music of the most varied kinds. They are ornamented by all sorts of combs, wattles, protuberances, horns, air-distended sacks, top-knots, naked shafts, plumes and lengthened feathers gracefully springing from all parts of the body. The beak and naked skin about the head, and the feathers, are often gorgeously coloured. The males sometimes pay their court by dancing, or by fantastic antics performed either on the ground or in the air ... On the whole, birds appear to be the most aesthetic of all animals. (p. 407)

Darwin's comment that—apart from the human—birds are 'the most aesthetic of all animals' relates to his belief that beauty plays a crucial role in natural selection and that birds, along with other creatures, possess an aesthetic sense. The females choose the most beautiful males, whose gorgeous colours or distended plumes have gradually evolved over time in response to the workings of natural and sexual selection.<sup>13</sup> According to Jonathan Smith, Darwin himself did not elaborate in full on the implications of his theory of aesthetics. This was done by Grant Allen in his book, *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877).

Synthesizing Darwin's work on mate-selection in animals and the evolutionary relationship between flowers and insects with the physiological psychology of Spencer and Alexander Bain and the physiology of sight and hearing most closely associated with Hermann von Helmholtz, Allen argued that aesthetic feelings have a physical basis, are a product of natural and sexual selection, and thus are not unique to humans.<sup>14</sup>

As Darwin noted, male birds sing and dance and in some instances create instrumental music to attract the females:

We have as yet spoken only of the voice, but the males of various birds practise, during their courtship, what may be called

instrumental music. Peacocks and Birds of Paradise rattle their quills together. Turkey-cocks scrape their wings against the ground, and some kinds of grouse thus produce a buzzing sound. (p. 424)

Some species even erect elaborate stages on which to perform their 'love-antics'. The parallel with the musical in this instance is striking:

But the most curious case is afforded by three allied genera of Australian birds, the famous Bower-birds—no doubt the co-descendants of some ancient species which first acquired the strange instinct of constructing bowers for performing their love-antics. The bowers which, as we shall hereafter see, are decorated with feathers, shells, bones, and leaves, are built on the ground for the sole purpose of courtship, for their nests are formed in trees. (pp. 430–431)

Male birds also seek to impress and some are highly aware of the female audience for whom they perform. According to Darwin, the males of many species strut before the females, displaying their beautiful plumage. The female pea-fowl of India sit in rows of twenty to thirty watching 'the males displaying their gorgeous trains, and strutting about in all the pomp of pride before the gratified females' (p. 445). Some males actively seek the gaze of the female:

The Gold and Amherst pheasants during their courtship not only expand and raise their splendid frills, but twist them, as I have myself seen, obliquely towards the female on whichever side she may be standing, obviously in order that a large surface may be displayed before her. They likewise turn their beautiful tails and tail-coverts a little towards the same side. (pp. 446–448)

The most marked difference between human and animal courtship rituals is that it is almost always (particularly in the bird world) the male who is the most beautiful and the one who puts himself on display. It is the female, Darwin

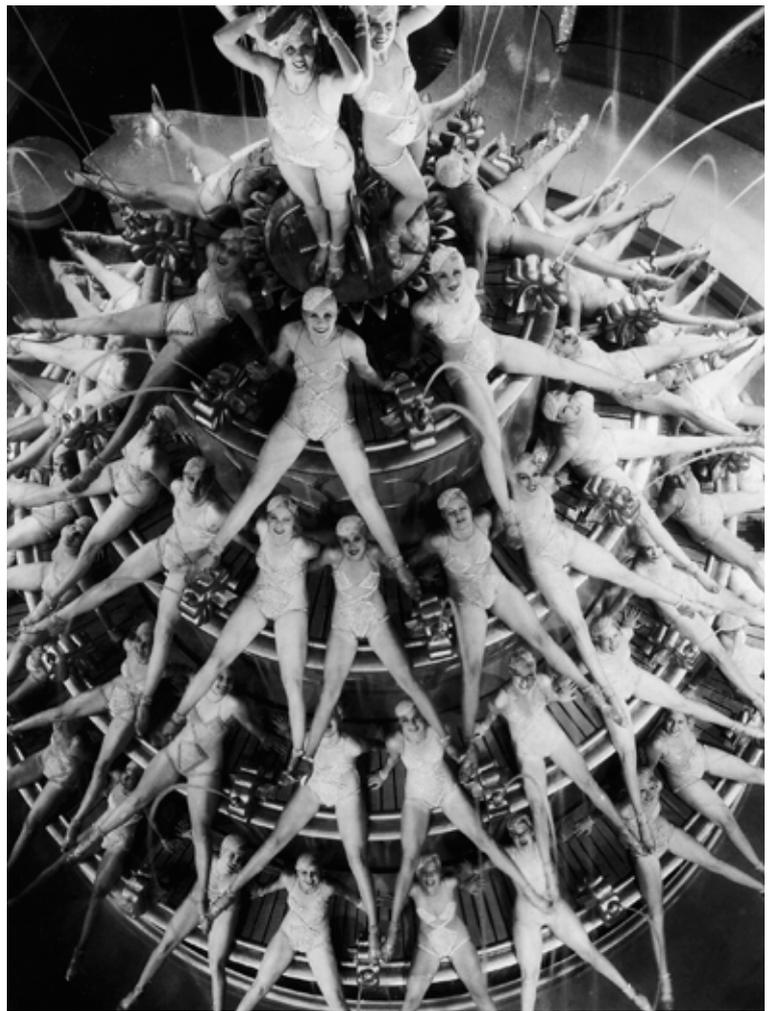
argues, who selects her mate from amongst the most impressive males:

When the sexes differ in beauty or in the power of singing, or in producing what I have called instrumental music, it is almost invariably the male who surpasses the female ... It is the male alone who elaborately displays his varied attractions, and often performs strange antics on the ground or in the air, in the presence of the female. (p. 455)

In human societies, however, he notes that it is usually the male who chooses and the female who practices the art of adornment. In the mating rituals of the musical, this gender division is not as clear cut, although Darwin's comments on this matter generally hold true.

In the early musical both male and female wear costumes and decoration, but the costumes of female performers are more elaborate. Although both sexes partake of the ritual itself—dancing, singing and performing on stage—in the Busby Berkeley musical, the visual emphasis is on the female chorus line (fig. 1). Not only do the women knowingly put themselves on display (smiling and winking at the camera and spectator) but the sexual parts of their bodies are eroticised as in, for instance, the controversial 'crotch shot'.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, despite these differences, the parallels between the mating rituals of birds in the wild (and often in captivity) and the staged rituals of humans are striking.

In addition, Berkeley created what became known as the kaleidoscopic shot in which he creates beautiful geometric patterns, based on stylised arrangements of the female body. Writers tend to dismiss these as visually stunning but of little significance. A close analysis of the kaleidoscopic shot, however, reveals many are intended to represent images of the female reproductive systems and abstract patterns signifying scenes of insemination. Berkeley's kaleidoscopic shot is a visual representation of evolutionary aesthetics *par excellence*. Beauty is not there simply to delight the viewer but to arouse the viewer through coded images of sexual display. Consciously or otherwise, Busby Berkeley adopted an evolutionary approach to the musical, sometimes



drawing clear parallels between the natural and human worlds, as in the amorous monkey scene in *Gold Diggers of 1933*, the scene of a cascading waterfall of women in *Footlight Parade* (1933), the frisky pettin' scene with cats, also in *Footlight Parade*, and the spectacular ornamental head display of Carmen Miranda's 'tutti-frutti' hat in *The Gang's All Here* (1943). Carmen Miranda's exotic fruit-laden top-knot offers a wonderful instance of evolutionary aesthetics at its best.

#### 42ND STREET

**Directed by Lloyd Bacon, *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (1933)** is generally regarded as the film that revived and reinvented the musical genre. Its success was largely due to Berkeley, who staged and directed the dance sequences. A Broadway-style musical comedy, *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* epitomises 'The Show Must Go On' style of musical that came to fruition during the Great Depression. A classic Darwinian tale of struggle, survival and

(above)  
Fig. 1 'Sexual display in the Hollywood musical': *Footlight Parade*, 1933.  
RKO/THE KOBAL COLLECTION.

success, *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* tells the story of Broadway director Julian Marsh (Warner Baxter), who despite ill-health is determined his next venture, *Pretty Lady*, will be a winner. Having lost everything in the Wall Street crash, he is desperate to succeed. He pushes the performers past the point of exhaustion, but they keep coming back for more. Broadway is represented in the film as a symbol of what makes America great: hard work, cooperation and an overriding desire to succeed. Marsh tells his hand-picked group of chorines that he will transform them from an unfit, unruly bunch into an accomplished professional chorus line capable of reaching the heights of perfection. They will achieve this feat through the sheer power of practice and work.

The heroine, newcomer Peggy Sawyer (Ruby Keeler), who is in the chorus, gets her big chance when the star, Dorothy Brock (Bebe Daniels), breaks her ankle. The question is: Does Peggy have the talent to succeed? Will she impress the hero with her display of beauty, song and dance? The pace is fast and furious and the characters quip and quarrel but, once on stage, co-operation and harmony prevail. Made before the institution of the Production Code (1934), the film contains jokes about prostitution; morals appear relaxed and costumes in some scenes almost non-existent.<sup>16</sup> Just before Peggy, clearly suffering from nerves, goes onstage on the opening night, Marsh delivers a fiery speech designed to shock her into giving her last drop of blood to make the show a success.

Now Sawyer, you listen to me and you listen hard. Two hundred people, two hundred jobs, two hundred thousand dollars, five weeks of grind and blood and sweat depend upon you. It's the lives of all these people who have worked with you. You've got to go on, and you have to give and give and give ... Sawyer, you're going out a youngster, but you've got to come back a star.

Marsh's exhortation emphasises the crucial importance of qualities with an evolutionary advantage such as youth, energy, mutual aid, work and determination. This will be Marsh's final show; he belongs to an ageing generation,

soon to be replaced by a new one. The show must go on with a new team and a new star. The livelihood of individuals and families are at stake, dependent not just on the director, but also on the cast of working girls. While the plot of *Pretty Lady* is fairly thin—a boy-meets-girl tale—its subject matter is ageless.

In *Darwin's Plots*, Gillian Beer explores the way in which Darwin's theories influenced and shaped his culture and were simultaneously both adopted and resisted by writers and novelists. She is particularly interested in the way evolutionary theory—given its interest in time and change—affected narrative forms and the nature of fiction. Darwin believed that the principles of variation and change were ever-present in the struggle to survive. He saw life as marked by an 'inextricable web of affinities'.<sup>17</sup> According to Beer the 'cluster of common contiguous metaphors (tree, family, web, labyrinth) was given a new meaning by his theory'.<sup>18</sup> In his writings on sexual selection Darwin quoted Schopenhauer:

No excuse is needed for treating this subject in some detail; for, as the German philosopher Schopenhauer remarks, 'the final aim of all love intrigues, be they comic or tragic, is really of more importance than all other ends in human life. What it all turns upon is nothing less than the composition of the next generation ... It is not the weal or woe of any one individual, but that of the human race to come, which is here at stake'. (p. 653)

In his writings on sexual selection, Darwin emphasised various complex factors at work: individual desire, beauty, money, family pressures, community values. 'It began to be asked what emotions, values, and reflex actions help the individual and the race to survive ... What was the role of women, whose progenitive powers physically transmitted the race?'<sup>19</sup> These questions influenced the novel, taking the narrative in new directions. According to Beer:

Topics traditional to the novel—courtship, sensibility, the making of matches, women's beauty, men's dominance, inheritance in all its forms—became charged with new

difficulty in the wake of the publication of *The Descent of Man*. As so often with Darwin, his writing intensified and unsettled long-used themes and turned them into new problems ... For Darwin love-intrigues and the marriage market involve the future of the human race.<sup>20</sup>

Beer explores the way in which Victorian novelists responded to the ideas generated by Darwin's theory of sexual selection and his reversal of the role of selector in human affairs, attributing it to the male, as distinct from other species, where it is the female. She suggests that both George Eliot and Hardy 'emphasise the discordance between a woman's individuality and her progenerative role'. She also examines Hardy's 'post-Darwinian insistence that beauty of body and disposition, as exemplified in *Tess*, provide the only true "standard"'.<sup>21</sup>

important drama of all. This certainly is the main theme of the popular Hollywood musical with its staged song-and-dance rituals of sex and pair bonding and marriage.

Just as the Victorian novelist sought to represent traditional topics from a Darwinian perspective, the 1930s musical addressed the problem of *how* to represent sexual display and sexual attraction in the cinema in a modern era of mechanisation. Busby Berkeley's approach was to choreograph his erotic musical numbers in terms of the new assembly line and the increasingly rapid pace of modern life. As a result, his musical numbers are carried out with assembly-line precision, drawing on kaleidoscopic patterns and exotic geometric designs. The musical number also draws on the aesthetic of display as a form of consumerism—an aesthetic that could be observed in the elaborate and exotic window displays of the

THE MUSICAL REPRESENTS SEXUAL DISPLAY IN A THOROUGHLY MODERNIZED CONTEXT—  
THAT OF A NEW, CURIOUS, AND FASHION-CONSCIOUS URBAN AUDIENCE.

Along with the novel, the newest art form—the cinema—was similarly responsive to tales about love and marriage, beauty and wealth, passion, family and children, the roles of men and women, the composition of the next generation and the values most necessary for the successful continuation of the race. Many popular Victorian novels were adapted for the screen during the silent period with Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* filmed as early as 1903. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1911), *Oliver Twist* (1922), *David Copperfield* (1923) and many more followed. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1915), *Silas Marner* (1916) and *Daniel Deronda* (1921) were classics of the early cinema. Thomas Hardy lived to negotiate screen rights for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1913 and 1924), *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1915), and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1921) and was present during parts of the filming. The concerns of Victorian novelists and their narratives of family, romance and future generations, influenced the evolution of early cinema and the development of emerging new film genres. 'Love intrigues', as Schopenhauer remarked, constitute the most

new shopping malls. The musical represents sexual display in a thoroughly modernised context—that of a new, curious, and fashion-conscious urban audience.

Darwinian themes of sexual selection are central to the new musical. If we apply a Darwinian perspective to films such as *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* we are able to make sense of the function of the musical numbers and their place within the narrative as a whole. Such an approach offers a new perspective on the specific roles of the three full-scale production numbers choreographed by Busby Berkeley (usually dismissed by critics as pure spectacle, and lacking any meaning at all): 'Shuffle Off To Buffalo', 'I'm Young and Healthy' and '42<sup>nd</sup> Street'. In the main, critics view these sequences as stand-alone spectacles in their own right with little direct relevance to the film's over-all love story and narrative of struggle and success. Critics have rarely analysed the musical numbers as an integral part of the wider narrative about sexual selection, marriage and family. Martin Rubin claims that because the musical genre

developed from earlier nineteenth-century forms such as vaudeville and burlesque it 'remains in a state of unresolved suspension between spectacle and narrative, between aggregation and integration'.<sup>22</sup> In relation to the Berkeley musicals of the early 1930s, he argues that this tension is not 'unresolved' because 'the world of numbers is compartmentalized and set apart from the world of the narrative'.<sup>23</sup> Rubin sees the Berkeley musical numbers as constituting an end in themselves: 'Of crucial importance to the creation of Berkeleyesque spectacle is a sense of gratuitousness, extravagance, over-indulgence, flaunting—of display for the sake of display'.<sup>24</sup>

Certainly, display is crucial to the Berkeleyesque spectacle, but display itself is not without meaning. In the musical 'display' means something. The musical numbers are *about* sexual display leading to marriage and the creation of a new generation; the scenes of 'flaunting' and 'extravagance', designed to attract a mate, are central to Darwinian rituals of pair bonding, descent and generation. In this sense, the musical sequences are carefully constructed visual spectacles designed to demonstrate evolutionary biology at work. The human attributes or qualities that are put on display may vary from decade to decade and in relation to the type of musical genre under consideration, but this does not alter the fact that the musical is primarily a Darwinian ritual of sexual selection. And within this ritual, factors such as familial and social distinction play an important role—as they did in the Victorian novel. (In *Dames*, for instance, the wealthy head of the family even points to a large wall-hanging of the family tree, singling out a particular branch of the family that he intends to excise to prevent the possibility of an unsuitable marriage.)

The opening sequence of *Pretty Lady*, 'Shuffle Off To Buffalo', is not just an end in itself; rather it stages a key ritual of sexual selection for the human species—the honeymoon. The setting is a train station where the conductor announces that the train's destination is the popular honeymoon resort of Niagara Falls. Annie (played by Peggy) and her new husband Bert set off on the love train as their friends wave goodbye. On board, Peggy and her partner

stand cheek-to-cheek as they sing to each other about what they hope will be a 'slow' journey to Buffalo. Song and rhythm play key roles in their courtship.

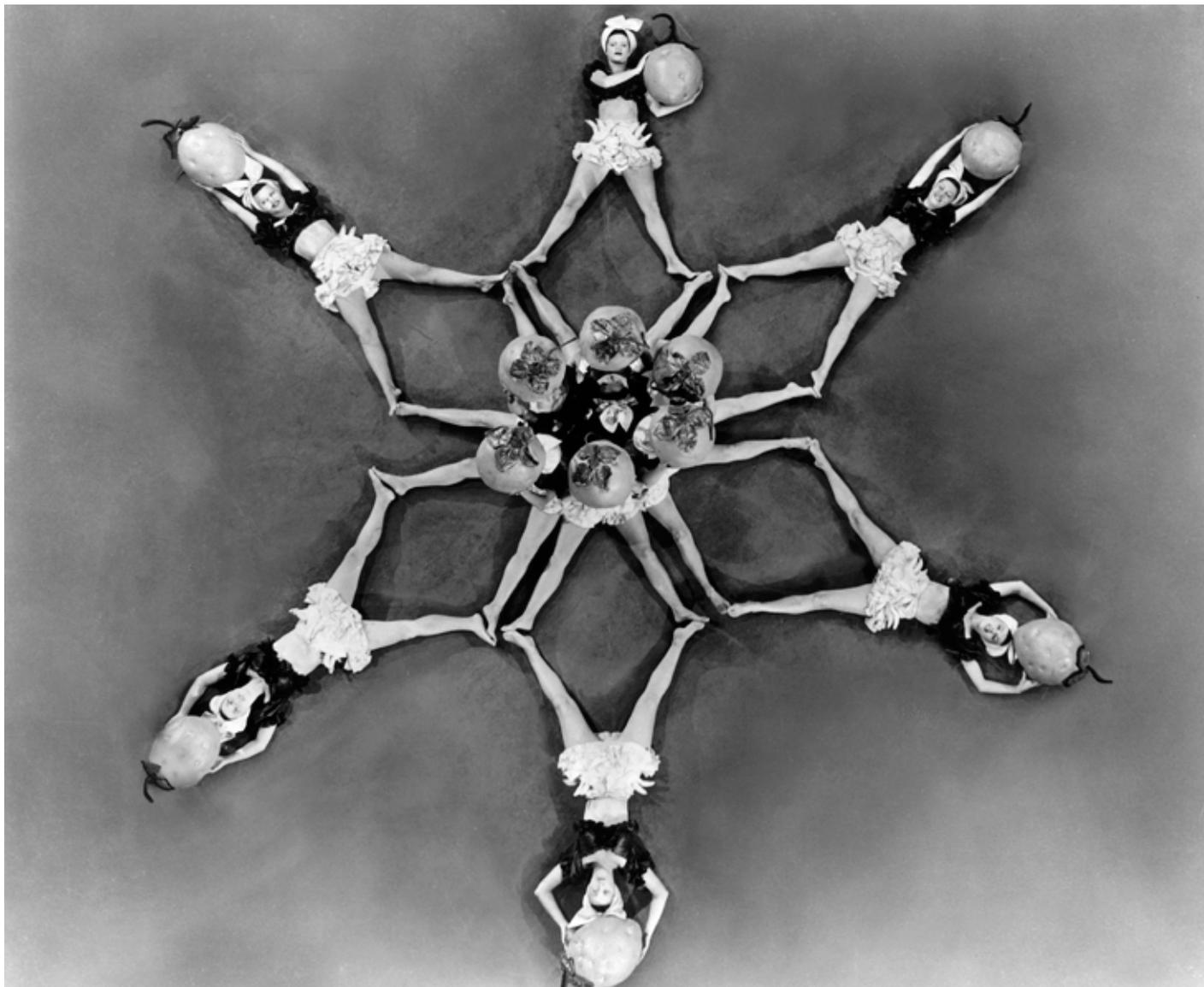
The honeymoon in store  
Is one that you'll adore  
I'm gonna take you for a ride  
I'll go home and pack my panties  
You go home and get your scanties  
And away we'll go  
Off we're gonna shuffle  
Shuffle off to Buffalo.

The provocative lyrics leave no doubt in the viewer's mind that the couple plan to engage in slow sex on their journey. As the song and dance sequence continues, the train splits down the middle to reveal an interior view of the sleeper compartments and their mainly female inhabitants, all of whom appear sexually available. The couple skip and dance along the length of the coach. Two of the chorines, Ann and Lorraine, who are sitting in one of the top berths, sing, somewhat cynically, of the dangers of marriage and the inevitability of divorce.

Matrimony is baloney  
She'll be wanting alimony  
In a year or so  
Still they go and shuffle  
Shuffle off to Buffalo.

Women in the modern era not only see through the marriage game, but have earned the right to divorce with a financial settlement. The story told by *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* is a different story from the Victorian novel, in which women did not have the freedom to leave an unhappy marriage on their own terms. Still, the marriage game must continue even if in a different form.

The next major sequence incorporates the song 'I'm Young and Healthy', which is also clearly Darwinian. Here Billy serenades one of the leading chorines (Toby Wing) about his youth, health and virility. 'I'm full of vitamin A', he croons. He is a fine specimen who has accrued all of the qualities associated with the workings of successful natural selection over the millennia.



I'm young and healthy  
 And you've got charms  
 It really is a sin  
 Not to have you in  
 My arms.

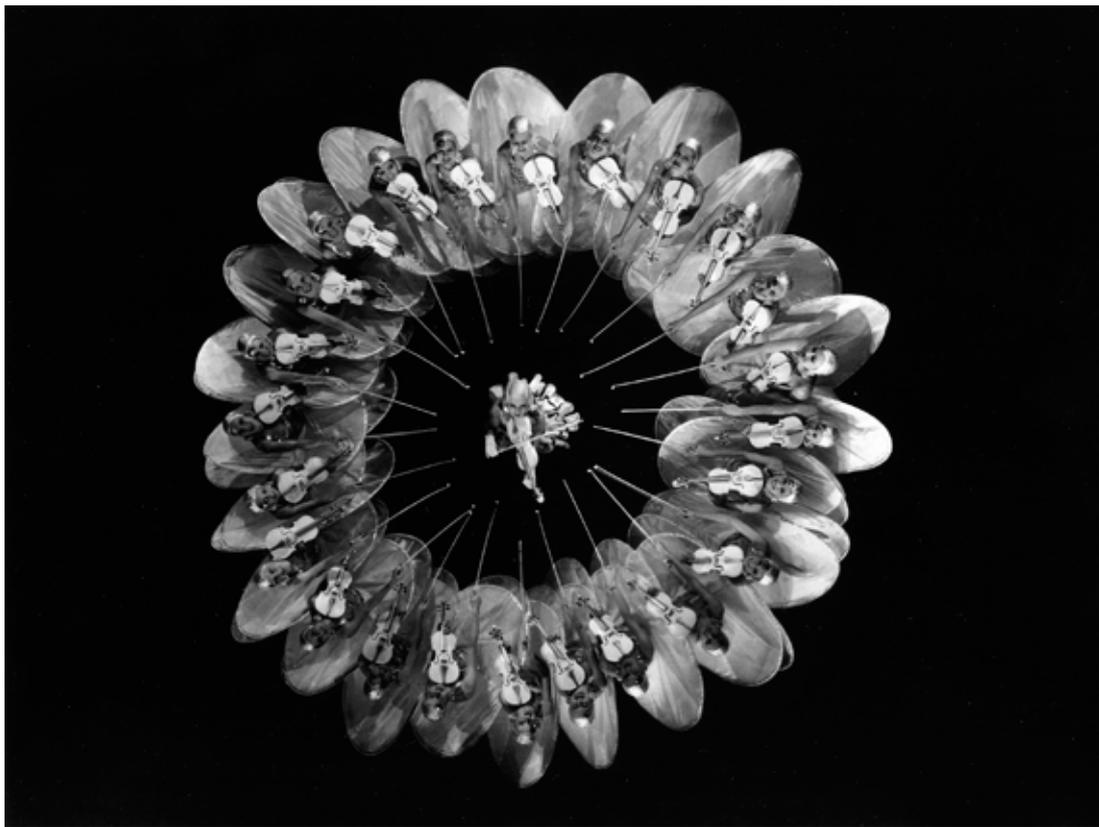
The Toby Wing figure is also young and healthy: blonde, fleshy and forever-smiling, her parted lips signify her ample 'charms'. In case the viewer needs this image of ripe womanhood reinforced, Berkeley has designed a rotating wheel composed of dozens of other healthy, blonde and fleshy chorines, all adorned with brides' bonnets; they rotate smoothly past the crooning male. Lyn Phelan has noted that there is a 'curious intensification of both female fleshiness and abstract uniformity' as Berkeley's camera 'one moment swoops for a closer look at

a chorine's dimpled knee and the next ascends to the God's-eye-view provided by the overhead shot that dissolves the individuals into massed kaleidoscopic pattern'.<sup>25</sup> The contrast emphasises the seductive flesh of the individual while also pointing to the way the chorines, seen from a different perspective, form an abstract pattern, almost like a close-up section of a feminised and animated helix of genetic information (fig. 2). Berkeley's kaleidoscope is a scientific microscope, his scenario a marvel of modern design. This is the future generation that will rebuild America. Success is in the genes. 'Young and healthy', vibrant and vibrating—the spectacle of excessive female flesh surrounding the young, healthy and virile male is a testament to the virtues of both natural and sexual selection.



(above)  
 Fig. 2 'Design, fruit and fertility': *The Gang's All Here*, 1943.

RKO/ THE KOHAL COLLECTION.



### THE MUSICAL AS DARWINIAN MATING RITUAL

Theorists who have written on the Busby Berkeley musical sequence point to its motifs of profusion and excess. In his influential ‘Entertainment and Utopia’, Richard Dyer emphasises the idea of the musical as ‘pure entertainment’ whose performances are designed with ‘the sole (conscious) aim of providing pleasure’. He argues that a central thrust of the musical is utopian and that utopianism is about feelings. Entertainment ‘presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized. It thus works at the level of sensibility’.<sup>26</sup> Dyer argues that the musical employs non-representational signs (‘colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork’) to signify the qualities associated with utopianism. In his analysis of a series of musicals, Dyer organises his discussion around five headings: energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and community. Significantly these categories relate to categories that Beer identifies as central to the new Darwinian worldview: the qualities of abundance, struggle,

community, movement and vitality.<sup>27</sup> Dyer cites Berkeley’s *Gold Diggers of 1933* as embodying all of these qualities. I agree with Dyer’s proposal that the musical presents the feelings associated with utopianism, but I would add these can also be interpreted as Darwinian. In the musical, Dyer’s ‘non-representational signs’ are those elements that are necessary for the success of the musical mating ritual. In Darwinian terms these non-representational signs—colour, rhythm and melody—also signify a superior mating partner, an individual of the species who is strong, healthy and attractive—that is, someone who is genetically well endowed. The Berkeley musical sequences thus represent a utopian and Darwinian display of sexual prowess, eroticism, cooperation and community. They also place great emphasis on beauty.

It is clear from Darwin’s writings that beauty is essential to sexual selection in both human and animal species. Although Darwin rejected the view that signs of beauty and design in the natural world offered evidence of God’s existence, he did not reject the central role of design in nature. Beer points out that in his *Autobiography*, Darwin referred to ‘the endless

(above)

Fig. 3 Dance and design in nature: *Gold Diggers of 1933*, 1933.

RKO/ THE KOBAL COLLECTION.

beautiful adaptations' in nature and the role of such beauty in sexual selection.<sup>28</sup> Variation and chance lead to permutations and possibilities, but the constant factor is the creation of arresting and beautiful forms whose function is to ensure the perpetuation of the species through sexual selection. He argues that beauty is also subject to evolution and discusses in detail how the beautiful wing patterns of the Argus pheasant have evolved over the millennia. Margot Norris makes the important point that Darwin, 'displaces the concept of beauty from the realm of the ideal and the spirit and attaches it to the sexual and erotic instincts in humans, animals, and even plants'.<sup>29</sup>

Berkeley was also interested in a scientific exploration of beauty, which he sees as a seemingly arbitrary arrangement that can be refigured into a harmonious, symmetrical pattern. He uses the kaleidoscopic shot with spectacular effects in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Watching a Busby Berkeley musical number is like viewing a breath-taking geometric pattern unfolding in a kaleidoscope.<sup>30</sup> These assume various shapes—a microscopic view of a snowflake or minute cellular organism, a flower opening (fig. 3). Berkeley's kaleidoscopic shots demonstrate the crucial role of beauty in the dynamics of sexual display and attraction. He demonstrates the way beauty can evolve through the creation of harmonious and symmetrical patterns designed to stimulate the viewer. Berkeley's musical extravaganzas are distinctly Darwinian in their focus on the values of excess, reproduction, perpetuation and continuation. With its focus on both male and female beauty, early cinema similarly represented beauty from a sexual perspective resulting in the creation of a secularised aesthetic of beauty.

### GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933

**Busby Berkeley's** most successful thirties film, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, is also a study of sexual selection at work. The first of four Gold Digger films, *Gold Diggers of 1933* tells the story of four showgirls who are unemployed and broke but determined to put on a show. Directed by Mervyn Le Roy, it again features Berkeley's extravagant dance spectacles,

overhead kaleidoscopic shots and remarkable special effects, including a number involving neon violins and electrical skirts. *Gold Diggers of 1933* further demonstrates how Berkeley was able to modernise the ritual of sexual selection in order to adapt it to the times. *Gold Diggers of 1933* features three spectacular Berkeley numbers: 'Pettin' in the Park', an amorous number about the pleasures of sex; 'The Shadow Waltz', a surreal abstract piece of Baroque proportions; and the unusually serious, social justice number, 'Remember My Forgotten Man', which features a number of heart-broken women abandoned by their sweethearts whose lives and marriages have been destroyed by war and unemployment.

The musical number that most clearly explores and highlights the film's Darwinian theme of sexual selection, though, is 'Pettin' in the Park'. Even taking its pre-code status into account, 'Pettin' in the Park' is remarkable for its minimal use of costumes and suggestion that the chorus girls were virtually naked. The main focus is on sex and sexual selection as a game. The scene commences with Brad reading a book, *Advice to Those in Love*. The advice is that those who have been working hard all day should relax in the open air and look for a mate. Polly enters and sits beside him nibbling on a sweet from a container labelled 'Animal Wafers'. He bursts into song with a provocative opening line: 'Pettin' in the Park'. 'Bad boy!' she replies firmly. 'Pettin' in the dark. Bad girl!' he responds. The procedure is gradually to pet 'up a little' and then 'you get a little kiss'. It is wise to 'act a little shy' and 'struggle just a little'. As Polly responds with her own lines, her eyes open wider and flash seductively. Brad hugs her amorously. She jumps up and breaks into a tap routine in which the rhythmic sounds of her tap-tap accompanied by the flash of her bare legs are clearly intended as indicators of sexual allure. The emphasis on tapping in the musical recalls Darwin's account of the origins of music. He theorised that the origins of music could be found in the musical notes and rhythms of mating rituals such as the tapping of the woodpecker's beak and the drumming of the snipe's tail.<sup>31</sup> The key role played by the tap-dance in the Hollywood musical, accompanied by shots of flesh and tapping feet, suggests

that the sounds of tapping play a crucial and possibly ancient role in arousing human sexual desire. The action of tapping conveys the impression of a body that is ready for mating—loose, fluid and vibrating. Polly dances for her mate in a scene of erotic foreplay and then they dance for each other. As they move away from the camera, it moves in to focus on Polly's packet of 'Animal Wafers', which reveals two monkeys pettin' in a cage. The image fades to a shot of two actual monkeys hugging, one nibbling the other's face, as the lyrics comment on their pettin' antics. Pettin' it seems is part of the mating rituals of all species. The camera moves around the stage revealing a range of different couples, white and black, old and young, human and animal, all 'pettin' in the park'. The city is barren: the park lush and fertile with possibilities.

The 'Pettin' in the Park' number celebrates the art of sexual display in which human and animal species are depicted as having similar, not different, desires. In Berkeley's view there is an art to pettin' or foreplay that the human species, weighed down by work, the demands of urban life and the threat of unemployment, is in danger of forgetting—hence the title of the new show, *Forgotten Melody*. The setting for courtship rituals is the wide, open space of the city's park where the pettin' couples are exposed to the vagaries of nature's changing seasons. Playing hard to get ('struggle just a little') is an essential part of human courtship. After the drought comes plenty. The dominant impression of the Berkeleyan spectacle is one of beauty, excess, eroticism and abundance. It is an anti-anthropocentric evolutionary scene in which human and animal alike engage in the erotics of sexual display and sexual selection. Darwin's radical ideas about the continuum between human and non-human animals continued to influence popular culture throughout the twentieth century. In the musical these inform the development of an evolutionary aesthetic.

### THE CROTCH SHOT

The Busby Berkeley crotch shot, constructed by a moving camera that literally tracks through the legs of the chorines, has proven

highly controversial with critics, some of whom have described it as voyeuristic and exploitative of the female body. Nadine Wills refers to Rick Altman's argument that Busby Berkeley's 'crotch shot' of the female genital area is central to the way in which the musical constructs the 'show as female' and the voyeuristic gaze of the camera as phallic and male.<sup>32</sup> There are however crotch shots of male dancers in Berkeley's musicals, although these are not as numerous. In my view, the Berkeleyesque crotch shot signifies that the dance is definitely a mating ritual. This is why Berkeley draws close visual attention to the genital area (of female and male) through the movement of the tracking camera. Berkeley makes it perfectly clear that the female dancer—like the male Argus pheasant—is on visual display, thrilling her audience with her fantastic antics. He frequently underlines his intention with an inventive scene of abstraction that signifies mating. This is particularly true of the opening number in *Dames* (1934) in which the chorines present the film's signature number 'Dames'. Their bodies are arranged to form the shape of a long tube or tunnel that suggests a journey through the reproductive pathways of the female body. The fleshy tunnel rotates as we travel through; just as the tunnel shot appears to reach its end the hero breaks through the black space at the back of the tunnel creating an image signifying rupture and fertilisation. In his representation of the human reproductive system in his dance sequences, Busby Berkeley anticipated the dynamics of reproductive design exhibited in General Motors' Futurama display at the New York World's Fair of 1939.<sup>33</sup>

Berkeley generally accompanies the crotch shot with telling lyrics. He uses the shot to great advantage in *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* during the 'I'm Young and Healthy' number. The camera tracks through the legs of the female dancers as the male lead and chorus sings,

I'm full of Vitamin A  
Say: I'm young and healthy, so let's be bold  
In a year or two or three maybe we will be  
too old.

The message is clear; the future rests with the younger generation. In the final waterfall



sequence of *Footlight Parade*, Berkeley directs his underwater camera to film the chorines as they tread water. The chorus girls are fully aware of what is happening, of what is on show. In the next shot the bathing beauties dive into the water to smile at the camera (and audience). Wills points out that the ‘knowingness’ of the chorus girls ‘complicates’ the voyeurism of the shot.<sup>34</sup> I agree but it does more: because the girls openly acknowledge the camera’s voyeurism, they render it ineffectual. The underwater crotch shot emphasises that the waterfall extravaganza is primarily about sexual display and sexual selection, procreation, fecundity and the future. The function of the musical as a mating ritual is made abundantly clear in the number from *Dames*, entitled ‘The Girl at the Ironing Board’. Here a group of singing chorines, who work in a laundry, wash and iron a collection of assorted male undies while singing of sex and love. In the final scene, one of the chorines sniffs the male scent that lingers on the material as birds chirp in pleasure. The musical also offers olfactory

pleasures to those gripped by the mating urge. Berkeley’s musicals draw attention to the close parallels between species in relation to sexual selection and in so doing help to erode the anthropocentric viewpoint that seeks to separate, not unite, species both human and animal.

In terms of putting on a display nothing exceeds Busby Berkeley’s final sequence in *The Gang’s All Here* (1943). Carmen Miranda’s ‘Tutti Frutti Hat’ number enjoys iconic status in the history of the musical. One of the reasons is its indisputable appeal to an evolutionary aesthetic. The location moves to a desert island where Berkeley’s chorines perform a very humorous and suggestive scene in which they form a long swaying line, each one waving a giant banana (fig. 4). Berkeley then cuts to one of his famous kaleidoscopic sequences in which the girls dip the tips of the bananas into the oval centre of a flower pattern, clearly representing a scene of fertilisation. An early expression of camp sensibility, the final number—in which Carmen Miranda sings



(above)  
Fig. 4 ‘The banana phallus: musical mating rituals’: *The Gang’s All Here*, 1943.

RKO/ THE KOBAL COLLECTION.

‘The Lady in the Tutti Frutti Hat’—has become a celebrated moment in the history of the musical. The scene emphasises the key elements Darwin specified as necessary to attract a mate: evocative singing, rhythm, excess, colour, sounds, movement. The Hollywood musical evokes a mating ritual whose evolutionary aesthetic is shared by all species. As Berkeley’s camera pulls back, Carmen Miranda stands at the centre of a phalanx of gigantic bananas looking very much like a Neolithic fertility goddess. Resplendent in her gigantic fruit-laden hat, Miranda would no doubt have inspired awe in Darwin’s audience of female birds with their penchant for an elaborate display of ‘combs, wattles and top-knots’.



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1. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 1871 (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 407.
2. Busby Berkeley directed musical numbers for virtually every important Warner Brothers film produced between 1933 and 1937. Initially Berkeley directed only the musical sequences, but after his amazing success with films such as *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *Footlight Parade* he directed his own films. His musical extravaganzas were the talk of the thirties.
3. For an analysis of the musical in relation to issues of class, gender and race see the excellent collection of essays in *Hollywood Musicals, The Film Reader*, ed. by Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
4. Nicole Armour, ‘The Machine Art of Dziga Vertov and Busby Berkeley’, *Images*, issue 5, <[www.imagesjournal.com/issue05/features/berkeley-vertov.htm](http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue05/features/berkeley-vertov.htm)> [accessed 12 February 2013] offers an interesting account that locates the musical within the culture and politics of modernity.
5. Christine Cogdell in *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2010) argues that the new influential eugenic ideology was intimately connected with a 1930s design movement in the United States known as ‘streamlining’ or ‘Streamline Moderne’ which developed from, and (some would say) in reaction to, Art Deco. Its style emphasised long horizontal lines and curving forms—the features that suggested the new values of the modern period—aerodynamics, motion and speed. Designers who championed this new style included Norman Bel Geddes, Raymond Loewy and Walter Dorwin Teague. The Futurama exhibit at New York’s World Fair (1939–1940), designed by Bel Geddes, offered stunning displays of streamlining. Cogdell shows how the ideal of eugenics—‘efficiency, hygiene, and the ideal type’—meant that its aims were ‘coincident with deeply rooted ideals in American culture’ (p. x). There is no evidence that Berkeley was at all interested in eugenics; in my view, however, his musicals represent a combination of art deco and the new streamlining style.
6. See Mark Roth, ‘Some Warners Musicals and the Spirit of the New Deal’ in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. by Rick Altman (London, Boston and Henley: British Film Institute, 1981), pp. 41–56.
7. See Richard Dyer’s important essay, ‘Entertainment and Utopia’, in *Hollywood Musicals, The Film Reader*, ed. by Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 17–30.
8. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, pp. 637–38. As this is a principal source for this essay all subsequent page references will be included in the text.
9. Further discussion of Darwin’s influence on literature and the visual arts can be found in Bert Bender, *The Descent of Love: Darwin and the Theory of Sexual Selection in American Fiction, 1871–1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); James Krasner, *The Entangled Eye: Visual Perception and Representation of Nature in Post-Darwinian Narrative* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). His influence on psychology is discussed in Lucille B. Ritvo, *Darwin’s Influence on Freud: A Tale of Two Sciences* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

10. See Linda Nochlin, 'The Darwin Effect: Introduction', Special Issue of *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 2:2 (2003); Jonathon Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Reframing Darwin: Evolution and Art In Australia*, ed. by Jeanette Hoorn (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009); *Darwin, Darwinisms and Visual Culture*, ed. by Barbara Larson and Fae Breuer (USA: University Press of New England, 2009); *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History*, ed. by Barbara Larson and Sabine Flach (Surrey & Burlington: Ashgate, 2013).
11. 'Photography and The Expression of the Emotions', Appendix III in Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Introduction, Afterword and Commentaries by Paul Ekman (London: Fontana Press, 1999), pp. 399–410; 401.
12. Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, p. 5.
13. Recent research into the mating practices of finches reveals that the females have much more control, even in determining the sex of offspring, than formerly realised. See Bridie Smith, 'Head colour keeps gender on agenda for female finches', *The Age*, 20 March 2009, p. 3.
14. Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture*, p. 161.
15. The crotch shot is constructed by a moving camera that literally tracks through the legs of the chorines. See Rick Altman's essay in *Genre: The Musical* in which he argues that the female crotch shot is basic to the way in which the musical represents the musical numbers as female and helps to create a voyeuristic gaze.
16. The Production Code (1934) was a form of self censorship whereby Hollywood studios abided by a list of material that they were not permitted to depict such as scenes miscegenation, sex between adults and scenes in which wrong-doers such as the 'fallen' woman or homosexual individual were shown to triumph or enjoy a happy ending. The Code was carefully regulated by the Hays office.
17. Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 156.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.
22. Martin Rubin, 'Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical' in *Hollywood Musicals, The Film Reader*, ed. by Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 53.
23. Rubin, 'Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical', p. 59.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
25. Lyn Phelan, 'Artificial Women and Male Subjectivity in *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* and *Bride of Frankenstein*', *Screen* 41 (2000), 169.
26. Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', in *Reframing Darwin: Evolution and Art In Australia*, ed. by Jeanette Hoorn (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009), pp. 19–20.
27. Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, pp. 29–53, 58–59, 65.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
29. Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, p. 50.
30. An ancient instrument, the word 'kaleidoscope' is derived from the Greek words, *skopos*, *kalos*, *eidos* which mean 'view', 'beautiful' and 'form' respectively. It was reinvented in 1816 by Sir David Brewster who intended it for scientific purposes. Although the patterns in a kaleidoscope seem to appear magically, the sense of symmetry is attained because the parts are organised in an intricate manner. In many of his carefully orchestrated sequences, Berkeley copies the kaleidoscopic effect to create a 'kaleidoscopic shot', which almost always signifies the intricate and beautiful world of nature.
31. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, ch. 3.
32. Nadine Wills, "'110 per cent Woman": The Crotch Shot in the Hollywood Musical', *Screen* 42:2 (2001), 121–141.
33. According to Cogdell, Norman Bel Geddes: 'consciously created a sexual narrative in the architectural layout of the General Motors Futurama at the New York World's Fair'. Arens did the same in his design for the Hall of Public Health in which fairgoers walked through an 'architectural re-creation of a female reproductive system', Christine Cogdell in *Eugenic Design*, pp. ix, 118.
34. Wills, "'110 per cent Woman'", 129.

» KEVIN HART



**A Gardener at  
Midnight: Red Garden**  
by Kristin Headlam.  
1994, oil on linen,  
122 x 122cm.

COURTESY THE ARTIST &  
CHARLES NODRUM GALLERY.

# Father

My father's only still a child in death.  
So can he speak that quiet language now?  
And can he walk the ways they slowly teach?  
And does he smell thin summer here below?  
So questions flicker through a hot dry day  
When summer leans too hard upon the land,  
When days seem cornered by a violent sun,  
When days weigh more than two or three a time,  
When rain is no more than the faintest myth  
And all you do is sit inside and read  
And live in words made soft and stretched by sun,  
And squeeze the day for any minutes left.  
I think my father makes his way in death,  
Avoiding trouble, somehow getting by,  
I think he's learned enough to say, well, "Love,"  
And say it with a steady even voice,  
And hover in it, like a bird of prey,  
And look down here, where summer scolds us all,  
Creatures of mud, as he well knows by now,  
All cut with cracks, as he once was back then  
When he would walk the earth in heavy sun.  
But days go bad; wild light falls hard and long;  
And questions rot before an answer comes.  
This summer's worse than any I have known:  
The sun grows vaster with each fallow day,  
My father ages fiercely in his death.  
Not enough rain to blur the cracks in mud.



# RECOVERING TWO ANCIENT SITES IN CYPRUS

» DAVID FRANKEL

Ancient places and things exist in the real world, but archaeological sites are concepts, created by archaeological research. Archaeological facts, especially when they are elided with the physical material on which they are based, have an appearance of being self-evident—once uncovered, ruins and the objects they contain are concrete evidence, seemingly obvious testaments of the past. Reality is, as always, more complex as in many ways excavators impose their structures onto the material as they uncover it and later in integrating and assessing various lines of evidence. These constructs—the material evidence transformed into useable information—are, ideally, formal site reports, which draw together and present the disparate observations and records made during and after excavations. For British archaeologist Martin Carver ‘...the preparation of an archaeological research report is among the most complex tasks asked of any professional working in the humanities’.<sup>1</sup> It is, perhaps because of this daunting and time-consuming complexity, a task all too often neglected by excavators, who become conspirators in maintaining archaeology’s ‘dirty secret’,<sup>2</sup> as they leave behind a trail of ‘wanton destruction’<sup>3</sup> of unpublished excavations.

If we understand the imperative to fully publish our own excavations as a primary ethical responsibility to the heritage we

are privileged to investigate and to our discipline, to what extent does this extend to the incomplete projects of our predecessors? There is little doubt that excavators are in the best position to work up their own sites, to read through the various field notes with an understanding of their reliability and completeness: and this is, of course, best done before the memories of complexities and decisions fade. But, even where the excavator is no longer with us, the primary field documentation lost or obscure, and the excavation strategies less than ideal, the task is both a necessary and a valuable one. I will illustrate this with two examples stemming from recent and current joint research with Jenny Webb on Bronze Age Cyprus.

## THE CEMETERIES AT KARMI

In 1962 James Stewart, Professor of Archaeology at Sydney University, died. He left unfinished a major study of Early and Middle Bronze Age material<sup>4</sup> and also the formal reports on his excavations at several sites on the island. His last excavations took place the year before his death when he worked at two cemeteries, *Palealona* and *Lapatsa* near the modern village of Karmi in the hills overlooking the north coast of Cyprus. A single posthumously published paper reported on one, unusual, tomb—a small chamber with a single burial



of an adult man accompanied by grave goods including a Minoan cup, imported from Crete.<sup>5</sup> This was clearly a significant find, providing evidence of interconnections and valuable for chronological analysis, linking the sequences on the two islands. It was, for Stewart, ‘the most important discovery since the 1890s, since it is so definite and the repercussions so widespread’.<sup>6</sup> The lack of further publication meant that this one find came to represent the site. But its place within the site as a whole could not be appreciated; nor could any other aspects of the cemeteries be considered.<sup>7</sup> Their archaeological importance is further increased as the northern half of Cyprus has been inaccessible to Greek Cypriot and foreign archaeologists since the Turkish invasion in 1974 and further archaeological research in the area has not been possible.

The publication of excavations in which one has not been directly involved is always difficult. This was exacerbated in this case by the lack of any formal field notes—these were lost soon after Stewart returned to Australia. Fortunately the meticulously drawn tomb-plans prepared by Mrs D. E. (Eve) Stewart survived, along with numerous black and white negatives of the excavations in progress. These were supplemented to some extent by the diaries of Dr Robert Merrillees, then a student at Sydney University, where he recorded his own activities on the excavations. The finds themselves provided additional challenges. Apart from two tomb-groups, all were brought to Australia in 1961.<sup>8</sup> Many were later distributed to museums in Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States, and some were lost or stolen.

Although most items were drawn and described before being sent overseas, others were not. However, we were able to access those items still in Australia and Cyprus.

The cemeteries at Karmi *Lapatsa* and *Palealona* lie midway between major contemporary settlements at Lapithos (eight kilometres to the northwest) and Bellapais (twelve kilometres to the east) in one of the most densely populated regions of the island during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Stewart excavated forty-two rock-cut tomb chambers (fourteen at *Lapatsa* and twenty-eight at *Palealona*). At both sites the tombs typically have rectangular *dromoi* (entrance shafts), measuring on average about two metres wide and two to three metres long, cut into the soft limestone with sloping floors to a depth of one to two metres. At the deepest end a small oval or rectangular doorway was cut leading into a low oval chamber, about three square metres in area. Given the time it must have taken to make a tomb, it can be assumed that they were cut well before their first use and that the construction of a tomb was in itself an important activity, signalling status, identity and belonging.

Most tombs were used for a number of successive burials. It is rarely possible, however, to determine how often or at what intervals a chamber was opened for re-use, as older corpses were frequently disturbed or removed along with some or all of their grave goods. It seems that, despite the importance of tombs in the inter-generational reinforcement of social memory, older burials within them were seldom treated with respect. Both the dry bones and

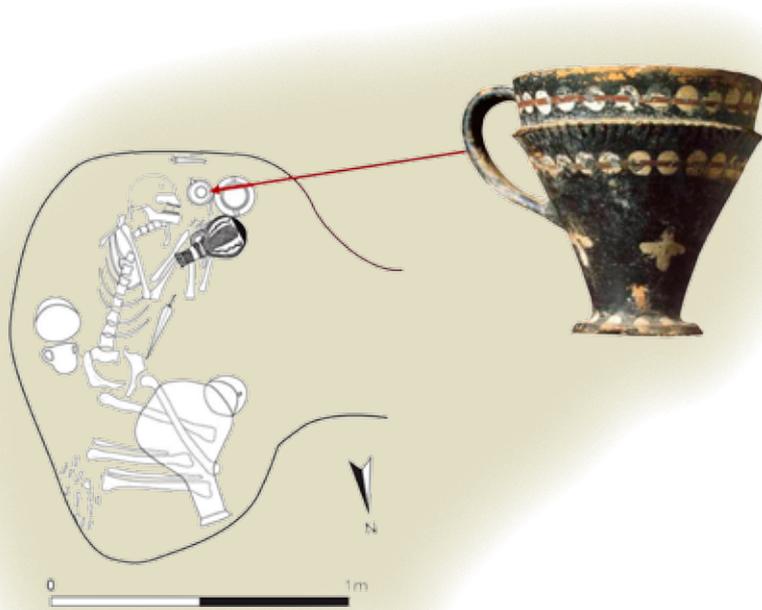


(above left)  
James Stewart  
(1913–1962) at  
the excavations at  
Karmi, 1961.

PHOTOGRAPH: WEBB  
ET AL., THE BRONZE  
AGE CEMETERIES AT  
KARMI: FIG. 1.10, KARMI  
EXCAVATION ARCHIVE,  
NOW IN THE NICHOLSON  
MUSEUM, THE UNIVERSITY  
OF SYDNEY.

(above right)  
Eve Stewart  
supervising  
excavations at  
Karmi, 1961.

PHOTOGRAPH: ROBERT  
MERRILLEES; WEBB ET  
AL., THE BRONZE AGE  
CEMETERIES AT KARMI:  
FIG. 1.6.



the grave goods were frequently pushed aside or removed to make room for new occupants. In many cases the remnant presence of earlier vessels in the chambers suggests a long history of use and re-use. Several tombs at *Palealona*, for example, appear to have been used for at least three hundred years.

Not all tombs were re-used. One significant example of a single burial, dating to the Middle Bronze Age, was Stewart's 'Tomb of the Seafarer'. As a result of new analyses, we can now say that this was the articulated remains of a man who, despite a severe congenital back problem, survived to the relatively old age of forty to fifty years. Around the body were seven pottery vessels, a bronze knife and a bronze spearhead. The pottery included examples of White Painted ware, characteristic of the Middle Bronze Age, as well as the more common Red Polished ware. Most unusually, there was also a fine decorated cup of Kamares ware – an import from Middle Minoan Crete which provides, as noted above, an important chronological reference point, linking the first phase of the Middle Bronze Age in Cyprus with the Middle Minoan II period in Crete. Such imports are extremely rare in Cyprus, which appears to have been relatively isolated from the outside for some centuries before this time.

Funerals are likely to have been significant occasions of social display, reflecting the status of the deceased as well as that of the mourners. It is possible to suggest that most grave goods are the residue of mortuary feasts held in or near the tomb at the time of burial.

The placement of jugs and bowls of various sizes in the tombs suggests that both food and drink were consumed in some quantity during mortuary ceremonies. Significant numbers of animal bones, almost entirely from adult cattle, were also placed in the chambers as cuts of meat. These articulated joints, which are likely to represent waste from funerary feasting, suggest the high cost and size of such events which involved intense social interaction manifested through the manipulation of material culture.<sup>9</sup>

Carvings around the entrances to the chambers of several tombs at the nearby sites of Bellapais and Lapithos have the appearance of doorframes—suggesting that tombs were viewed symbolically as 'houses' for the dead.<sup>10</sup> There are no such examples at the Karmi cemeteries, although several *dromoi* have carvings on their side walls. Of greatest interest are those of *Palealona* Tomb 6, where vertical relief panels are found on both side walls and on the end wall above the entrance itself. On the right hand wall there is, in addition, a unique bas-relief human figure, a little over one metre in height. It appears to depict a nude female, but is poorly preserved and there has been considerable debate regarding both its sex and significance. Nothing like it is known from other Cypriot sites. The relief panels, however, recall the vertical uprights on several small clay 'shrine-models' found at other sites, and it is possible to argue that this was initially a funerary shrine, later re-used as the entrance to a tomb chamber.

The significance of the Karmi cemeteries lies not only in these specific finds but also in the different perspective they provide on the material culture and ritual behaviour associated with death and burial during the Early and Middle Bronze Age in Cyprus. Despite recent excavations at settlements and cemeteries in the centre and south of the island which have changed the nature of both evidence and approach, the north coast still retains its importance as the epicentre of our understanding of the sequence of developments at this time—largely as a result of Stewart's earlier research on pottery from Bellapais and Vasilia.<sup>11</sup> The evidence that we are now able to put together from Karmi fits into these earlier

(above)  
Plan of Karmi **Palealona** Tomb 11B (the 'Tomb of the Seafarer') and the imported Middle Minoan which provides important evidence of contacts and contemporaneity of cultures in Crete and Cyprus.

PLAN: WEBB ET AL., THE BRONZE AGE CEMETERIES AT KARMI: FIG. 4.42. PHOTOGRAPH: WEBB ET AL., THE BRONZE AGE CEMETERIES AT KARMI: FIG. 4.45. KARMI EXCAVATION ARCHIVE, NOW IN THE NICHOLSON MUSEUM, THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY.

studies, and contributes toward new ways of interpreting social and ritual behaviour in different parts of the island.<sup>12</sup> It is especially important in providing a comparison with Bellapais—highlighting site-specific as well as regional variations.

Early Bronze Age tombs on the north coast exhibit an expanded range of pottery shapes, a marked increase in the number of decorated vessels and the introduction of specialised ritual vessels with elaborate incised and modelled decoration. There was also an increase in the size, range of shapes and capacity of jugs and small bowls. This was matched by a greater emphasis on individually

and south of the island, smaller, simpler tombs and more uniform, plain vessels suggest a very different attitude toward funerary display and the assertion of status and identity.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, as a result of our work at Karmi, we can now also see significant differences within the north coast as well. The tombs at nearby Bellapais regularly contained very complex vessels, often decorated with incised motifs, such as rayed disks, animal heads and horned figures, or have modelled animals and miniature vessels on the rim. No such items occur at Karmi, despite other close similarities. The carvings in tomb *dromoi* at Karmi and the high quality of the Early Bronze Age grave

FUNERALS ARE LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT OCCASIONS OF SOCIAL DISPLAY, REFLECTING THE STATUS OF THE DECEASED AS WELL AS THAT OF THE MOURNERS.

distinctive vessels, which show deliberate variability involving the accumulation and redundancy of elements of both form and decoration. This use of selected vessels as vehicles of a regionally distinctive ‘symbolic style’ is likely to have been closely linked to the dynamics of identity construction within and between communities. This distinctive ceramic tradition, rich in its array of forms and in the extent and complexity of its decoration, differs significantly from that of contemporary sites in the centre and south of the island where decoration is extremely rare.<sup>13</sup>

This difference is mirrored in the tombs themselves. Well-cut chamber tombs with elaboration in the form of carved *dromos* facades, such as Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6, are found only in the north coast region of Cyprus. They reflect considerable investment in status enhancement and competitive visual display. These distinctive aspects of mortuary practice suggest that differential status and access to resources were expressed and negotiated through tomb elaboration and feasting. The association of such behaviour with death and burial further suggests that ancestral relationships were of particular importance in the formation and legitimation of individual and sub-group identity in this part of Cyprus in the Early Bronze Age, while in the centre

goods leave little doubt that this settlement was founded by individuals or groups fully conversant with the material culture and status referents current at Bellapais. It is equally clear that it was in some ways secondary to Bellapais which was the paramount centre in the central north coast region during most if not all of the EC period, with its emerging control of esoteric knowledge and associated imagery.

#### INDUSTRIAL COMPLEXES AT AMBELIKOU

A different aspect of Middle Bronze Age Cyprus emerges from revisiting another long-neglected site. Ambelikou *Aletri* is set on top of a high

(below)  
Carvings on the sides of the entrance shaft of Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6.

PHOTOGRAPH: WEBB ET AL., THE BRONZE AGE CEMETERIES AT KARMİ: FIG. 3.40; KARMİ EXCAVATION ARCHIVE, NOW IN THE NICHOLSON MUSEUM, THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY.



(right)  
Catastrophic abandonment at Ambelikou, with dozens of jugs scattered across the floor.

CYPRUS MUSEUM  
NEGATIVE B1156,  
COURTESY DEPARTMENT  
OF ANTIQUITIES, CYPRUS.



(below)  
Documenting artefacts from Ambelikou in the Cyprus Museum in May 2011.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY  
OF DAVID FRANKEL.



steep hill overlooking Morphou Bay on the west coast of Cyprus. In 1942, Porphyrios Dikaios decided to carry out excavations there when modern miners working nearby recovered sherds dating to about 2000 BCE when their adit intersected ancient workings some nineteen metres from the surface. As acting Director of the Department of Antiquities, he was not able to spend much time so far from

Nicosia and the excavations were largely left to experienced assistants.

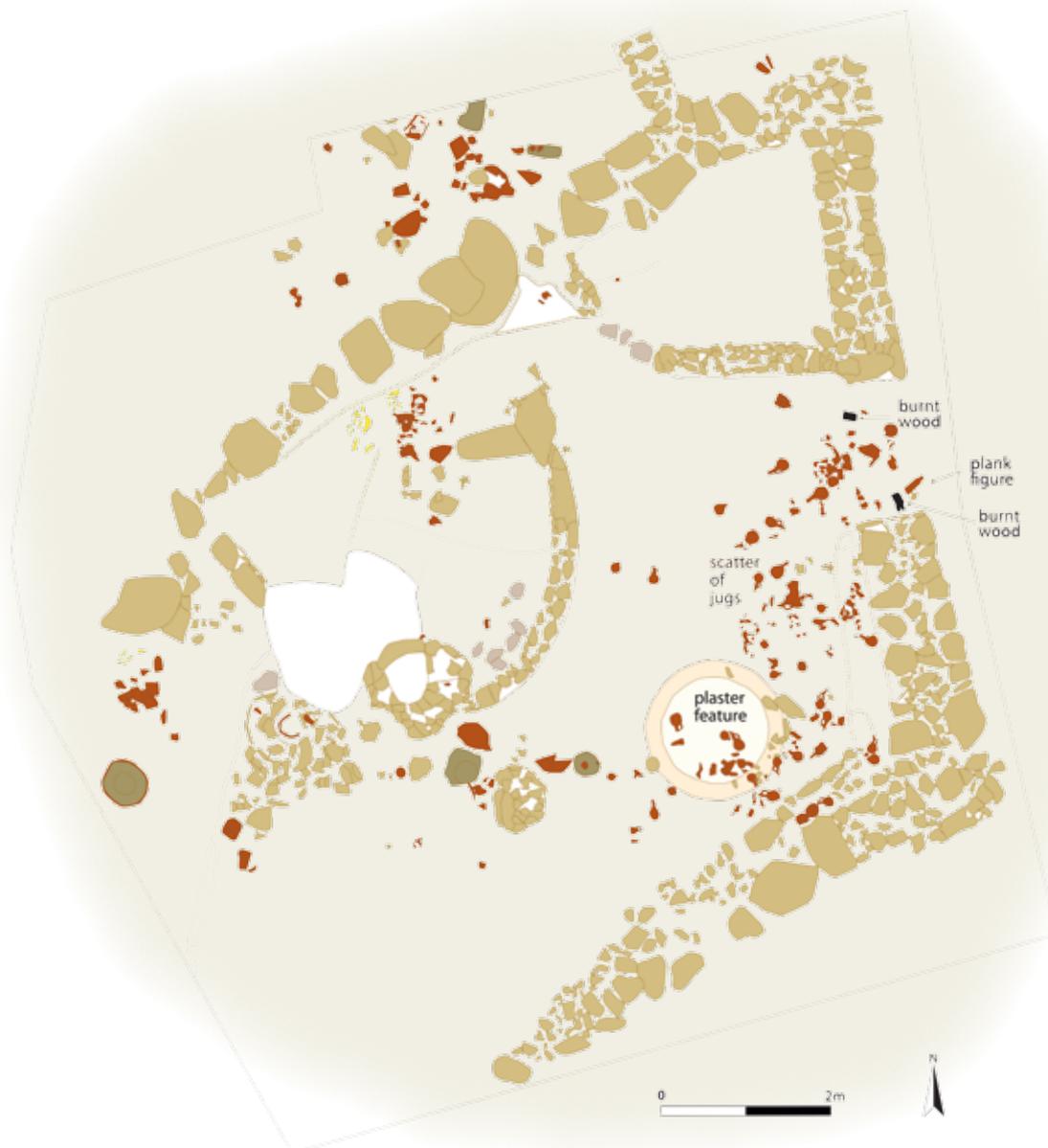
In other respects Dikaios was a model excavator who published his major projects efficiently and in fine detail. This did not happen with Ambelikou. Although the site was clearly of importance, Dikaios' personal research focus on establishing the sequence of Neolithic and Chalcolithic developments on the island and later on excavations at the major Late Bronze Age city at Enkomi meant that small excavations such as these were neglected. He did, however, write briefly about Ambelikou in an account of several 'wartime discoveries' in the *Illustrated London News*<sup>15</sup> (for the first half of last century this was *the* place to expose new and dramatic finds which were transforming knowledge of the past in all areas of the world). Here Dikaios summarised aspects of the Ambelikou and other excavations. While the few finds relating to copper mining and processing became part of general archaeological discourse, other aspects were ignored by everyone in part because no details or clear illustrations were provided.



For seventy years, therefore, Ambelikou has remained a shadowy site on the fringes of Cypriot archaeology; even its date was often misunderstood. Until twenty years ago a small clay crucible, a two-sided clay casting-mould and a few fragments of slag from the site provided the earliest direct evidence of copper processing on the island. Although a plan of some architecture had been published this was without any general context, so that its significance was seen simply in terms of mining and copper-working. This was essentially all anyone knew, or wanted to know. With more recent excavations providing better evidence of village structure and of earlier metallurgy, even this initial value declined. However, after decades of neglect, a new look at the old

excavations provides unexpected information, ideas and research potential.

Ambelikou has several things in common with Karmi. It, too, is in the area of the island under Turkish control and therefore inaccessible to further research. Also, as at Karmi, there are no field notes describing the progress of the excavations or details of features and stratigraphic associations. There are, however, excellent plans of the architecture in the two main excavated areas which show the find-spots of more complete vessels and stone artefacts. There are also black and white photographs of varied quality and, of course, all the artefacts. The conservators in the Department of Antiquities had gone to considerable trouble soon after the excavations to mend many



(left)  
Plan of the distribution of heavily burnt and broken artefacts at Ambelikou.

COURTESY OF DAVID FRANKEL.



(above)  
A selection of Middle Bronze Age jugs, products of the pottery at Ambelikou.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF RUDY FRANK.

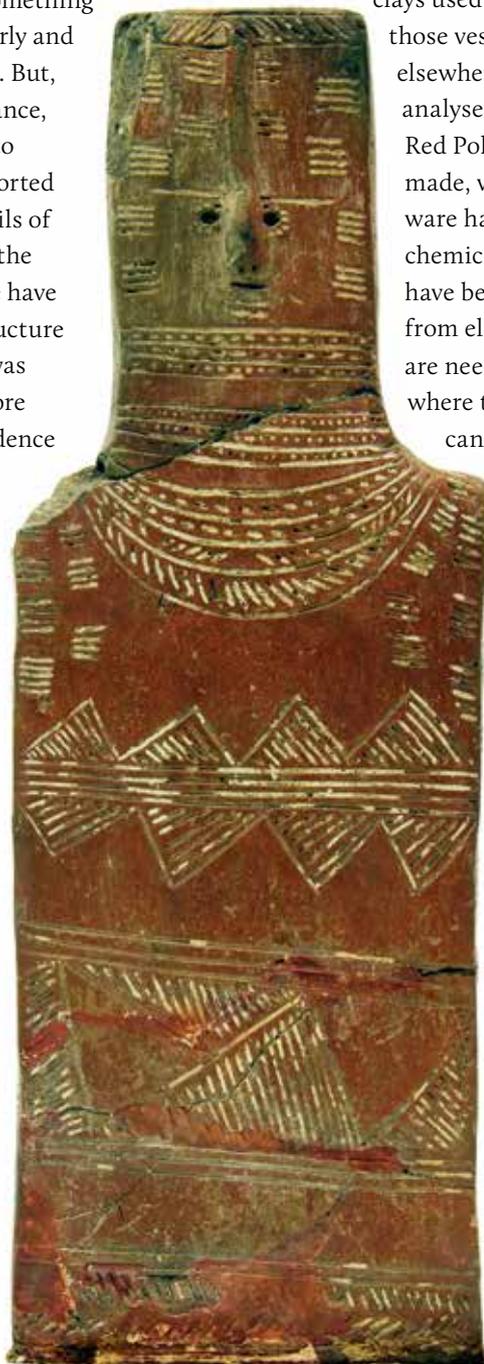
broken vessels. These and large quantities of other sherds, together with numerous stone tools, were all stored in the Cyprus Museum and therefore available for analysis.<sup>16</sup> This was done in May 2011. Over three weeks a small team was able to draw, photograph and fully document over two hundred pottery and stone artefacts and examine over seventy trays of sherds. The fact that we were able to process so much material in such a short time was entirely due to the supportive attitude and efficiency of the staff of the Cyprus Museum, who carried seemingly endless trays of cutaway-spouted jugs to our workroom.

The site plans alone reveal that there was more to Ambelikou than anyone realised. In particular, both the plan and photographs of one area show a scatter of some four-dozen vessels, almost all cutaway-spouted jugs, across the floor of one room. These had been heavily burnt as a result of an intense fire. This was a clear case of a catastrophic abandonment—a rare circumstance in archaeology and one which is particularly valuable because it provides unequivocal associations of artefacts and their place of last use—in normal circumstances establishing forms of discard and meaningful relationships between items is a

contentious task. The fire appears to have been an isolated incident, confined to one area. From evidence at other contemporary sites one would expect bowls to be the most common type of vessel in a normal domestic context. The extraordinary concentration of very similar jugs shows that this area was not used for everyday activities, and must have been associated with pottery making; an explanation reinforced by the presence of wasters—malformed vessels which would ordinarily not have been kept.

In his *Illustrated London News* article Dikaios had in fact suggested that the room was a potter's workshop, something otherwise unknown for Early and Middle Bronze Age Cyprus. But, for all its potential importance, no one paid any attention to this identification, unsupported as it was by any of the details of the location and nature of the finds. For many years there have been debates about the structure of the ceramic industry—was it a household craft or a more complex industry? The evidence from Ambelikou will now play its rightful, albeit belated, role in these discussions.

All the jugs—indeed all Cypriot vessels at this time—were handmade, without the use of the wheel. Having so large a sample of items made at the one time in the one place provides a very unusual opportunity to investigate the degree of variation within a specific episode of production and hence to develop a better understanding of the nature of the ceramic industry and its organisation. This involves both more conventional studies of shape and fabric and additional analyses



of the clays used. Over the past few years archaeologists have begun to take advantage of the development of hand-held portable devices to measure the elemental composition of material using X-ray Fluorescence. Although not a substitute for more comprehensive analyses, we now have the tools to assay very large numbers of samples quickly and efficiently—and, importantly, without damaging the items. Because it must have been made locally, the assemblage from the Ambelikou potter's workshop provides a valuable starting point for characterising the clays used at the site and identifying those vessels brought in from elsewhere. The results of our analyses show clearly that most Red Polished vessels were locally made, while those of Drab Polished ware have a distinctively different chemical composition and must have been brought to the site from elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> More analyses are needed to confirm precisely where they came from, but we

can be confident that this was somewhere in the west of Cyprus where this fabric is found in large quantities. The finer, more highly decorated juglets and bowls of Red Polished ware were also made of different clays. These are stylistically similar to vessels in the north of the island and probably came from that region. This movement of vessels and their contents to Ambelikou was no doubt related to networks associated with the distribution of copper from the site.

Although long understood as a mining site, this simple view will change through a more complete study of the whole site. Large numbers

(left)

The plank-shaped figurine from beside the doorway of the catastrophically abandoned room.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF RUDY FRANK.

of heavy stone tools used for pounding and crushing slag were found in the same area as the small clay crucible and the casting mould. The latter two items can now be seen within a broader picture of the industrial process, here demonstrating later stages of work on slag produced elsewhere by smelting the copper ores.

And then there are a few other surprises: rewards, as it were for resuscitating this old excavation. The function of the so-called ‘plank-shaped’ figurines characteristic of the late Early and Middle Bronze Age in Cyprus has long been a matter of debate. Complete examples have most often been found in tombs. There are fragments from settlement excavations to indicate that they were also used, broken and discarded within the villages, but their functional context in settlements was quite unknown. Once again decades of debate would have taken a different course had the evidence found at Ambelikou been made available, for, just outside the doorway of the catastrophically abandoned potter’s workshop, beside the burnt stump of the door jamb, lay a large, complete and very handsome plank figurine. Its location suggests that it was attached to the door or doorpost. Of course this does not resolve questions of its meaning, function or significance, but we now at last have one piece of good contextual evidence to contribute to the constant flow of analyses and speculations.

Ambelikou, then, can be seen as far more than a simple miners’ village. The evidence of pottery manufacture, and of other crafts, such as spinning and weaving represented by other artefacts, fundamentally transforms understanding of the site. In exploring all facets of the site—despite the lack of detailed notes and the scrappy and unknown nature of some field procedures—a more complex picture emerges. The pottery also provides us with a closer estimate of the date of the site and duration of occupation. It was used within the first century of the Middle Bronze Age, and perhaps for as little as fifty years from about 2000 BCE. This allows another set of questions to be posed: why then and for so short a time? At about this time, after a period of relative isolation, Cyprus began to engage more fully

with surrounding lands—the Minoan cup from Karmi is one sign of this development. One incentive was economic, a growing external demand for copper. Entrepreneurial miners may have sought out the copper ores along the foothills of the Troodos Mountains, establishing mining communities linked into networks of exchange within the island which facilitated the distribution of copper and other goods. The more accessible ores at Ambelikou may have been fairly rapidly mined out (and even those harder to extract have proved uneconomic for modern miners). Mining then, as now, is dependent on the fine balance of costs of extraction and commodity values. As the Ambelikou lode ran out and other nearby sources maintained their productivity, this village, in an otherwise unattractive location, was abandoned.

#### MORAL

These two examples demonstrate that returning to unpublished sites excavated in previous generations is a valuable exercise, and the conservation and storage of finds and associated documentation is equally, if not more important. While fieldwork may not have been carried out in the way we would now choose, key evidence may have been missed, field notes lost and finds misplaced, there are still rich veins to be tapped. Unique sites are brought to view and there are surprise discoveries to be made on museum shelves. Re-working old excavations for full publication is therefore surely as important an activity as undertaking new excavations—while any shortcomings are a reminder to current excavators that timely, comprehensive publication of their work is both academically and ethically necessary. ¶

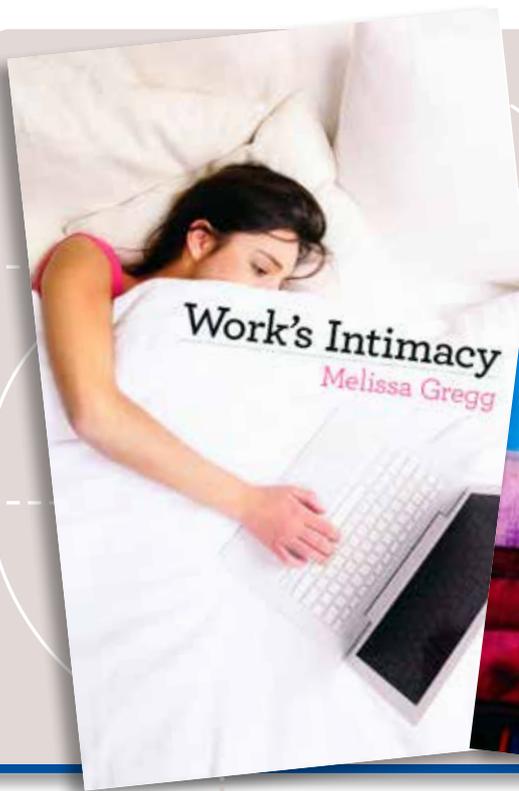


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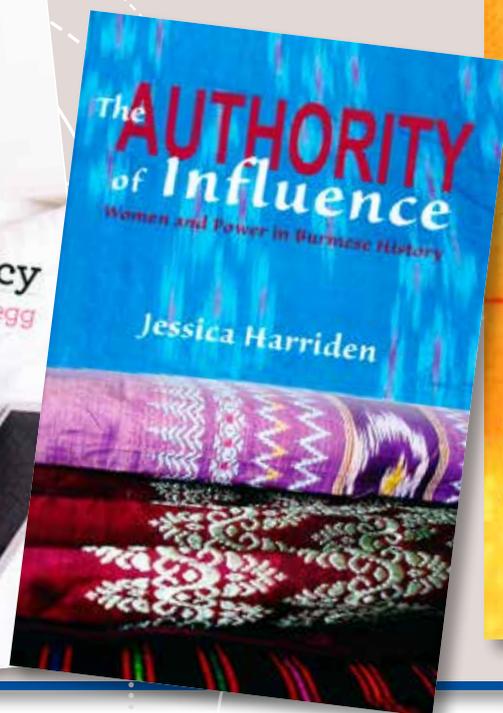
1. Martin Carver, *Archaeological Investigation* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 324.
2. Brian Fagan, 'Archaeology's dirty secret', in *Archaeological Ethics*, ed. by K. D. Vitelli and C. Colwell-Chanthaphonh, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2000), pp. 201–205; see also *The Problem of Unpublished Excavations*, ed. by Sophocles Hadjisavvas and Vassos Karageorghis (Nicosia: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, 2000); Raz Kletter and Alon De-Groot, 'Excavating to Excess? Implications of the Last Decade of Archaeology in Israel', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 14 (2001), 76–85; *Archaeology's Publication Problem*, ed. by Hershel Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1996).
3. An often repeated reference to Mortimer Wheeler's 'All excavation is destruction. Excavation without publication is wanton destruction', *Archaeology from the Earth* (Oxford: Penguin, 1954) p. 2.
4. The fourth and last volume was recently published as James R. Stewart, *Corpus of Cypriot Artefacts of the Early Bronze Age 4*, ed. by Jennifer M. Webb and David Frankel (Uppsala: Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology III.4, 2012).
5. James R. Stewart, 'The Tomb of the Seafarer at Karmi', *Opuscula Atheniensia* 4 (1962), 197–204.
6. Letter from J. R. Stewart to A. Dugan, 27 April 1961. (A copy of this letter is held in the Karmi Excavation Archive, Nicholson Museum, The University of Sydney.)
7. Responsibility for the publication of the Karmi excavations fell initially to Stewart's widow, Mrs D. E. (Eve) Stewart who undertook the laborious task of mending and documenting the pottery and other finds. Basil Hennessy FAHA later, assumed responsibility for the publication. He subsequently brought Kathryn Eriksson into the project. In 2008 Jenny Webb and I were invited to complete the comprehensive report on Karmi *Lapatsa* and *Palealona*, which appeared in 2009 as Jennifer M. Webb, David Frankel, Kathryn O. Eriksson and J. Basil Hennessy, *The Bronze Age Cemeteries at Karmi Palealona and Lapatsa in Cyprus: Excavations by J. R. B. Stewart* (Sävedalen: Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology CXXXVI, 2009).
8. The antiquities legislation in Cyprus that allowed such a dispersal of excavated material was amended in 1962, so that exports of this kind are no longer possible.
9. Jennifer M. Webb and David Frankel, 'Social Strategies, Ritual and Cosmology in Early Bronze Age Cyprus: An Investigation of Burial Data from the North Coast' *Levant* 42 (2010), 185–209. See also Jennifer M. Webb and David Frankel, 'Fine Ware Ceramics, Consumption and Commensality: Mechanisms of Horizontal and Vertical Integration in Early Bronze Age Cyprus', in *Dais: The Aegean Feast; Proceedings of the 12th International Aegean Conference, University of Melbourne, Centre for Classics and Archaeology, 25–29 March 2008*, ed. by Louise Hitchcock, Robert Laffineur and Janice Crowley (Liège, Aegaeum 29, Annales d'archéologie égéenne de l'Université de Liège, 2008), pp. 287–295.
10. James Stewart, 'Decorated Tomb Façades, Cyprus,' *Antiquity* 13 (1939), 461–463.
11. Eleanor Stewart and James Stewart, *Vounous 1937–38: Field Report of the Excavations Sponsored by the British School at Athens* (Lund: Skrifter Utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Rom 14, 1950); James Stewart, 'The Early Cypriote Bronze Age', in *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition Volume IV, Part IA* (Lund, 1962); J. Basil Hennessy, Kathryn Eriksson and Ina Kehrberg, *Ayia Paraskevi and Vasilia: Excavations by J. R. B. Stewart* (Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology LXXXII, Göteborg, 1988).
12. Jennifer M. Webb and David Frankel, 'Social Strategies, Ritual and Cosmology in Early Bronze Age Cyprus: An Investigation of Burial Data from the North Coast', *Levant* 42 (2010), 185–209.
13. Jennifer M. Webb and David Frankel, 'Cultural Regionalism and Divergent Social Trajectories in Early Bronze Age Cyprus', *American Journal of Archaeology* 117:1 (2013), 59–81.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Porphyrios Dikaios, 'A New Chapter in the Long Island Story of Cyprus: Wartime Discoveries in the Earliest Copper Age', *Illustrated London News*, 2 March 1946, pp. 244–245.
16. In the early 1980s Dr Robert Merrillees FAHA was given permission by the Cyprus Department of Antiquities to publish the Ambelikou excavations. In 1984 he produced a report on the topography and history of the site and the discoveries in the mines. Some twenty years later he made his documentation available to Dr Anne Dunn-Vaturi, as a starting point for preparing the report. After some years, personal circumstances prevented her from continuing and, in 2010, Jenny Webb and I took over this task from her. The resulting book will be published in 2013 as Jennifer M. Webb and David Frankel, *Ambelikou Aletri: Metallurgy and Pottery Production in Middle Bronze Age Cyprus* (Uppsala: Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology CXXXVIII, 2013).
17. David Frankel and Jennifer M. Webb, 'Pottery Production and Distribution in Prehistoric Bronze Age Cyprus: An application of pXRF analysis', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39:5 (2012), 1380–1387.

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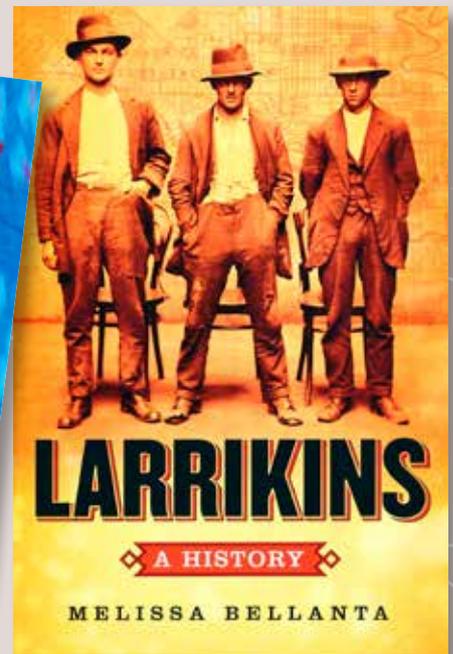
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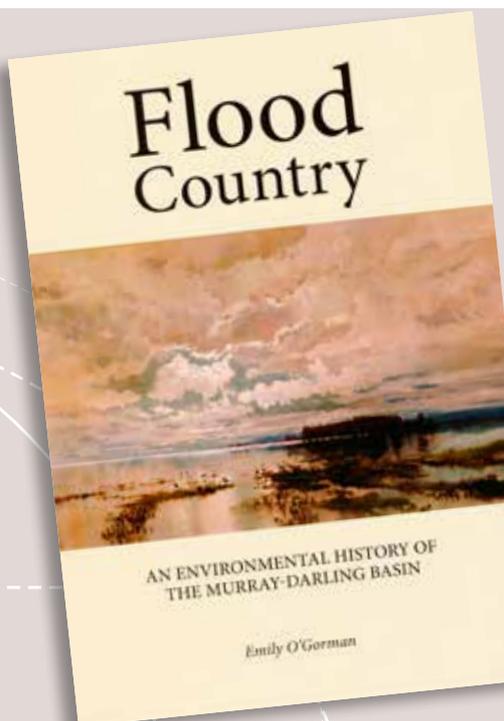


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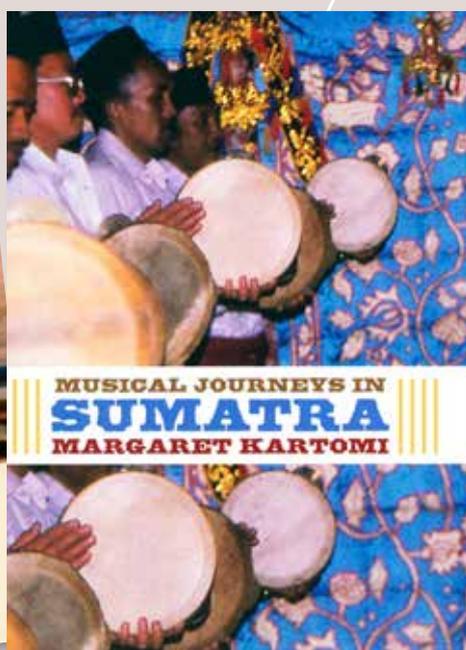


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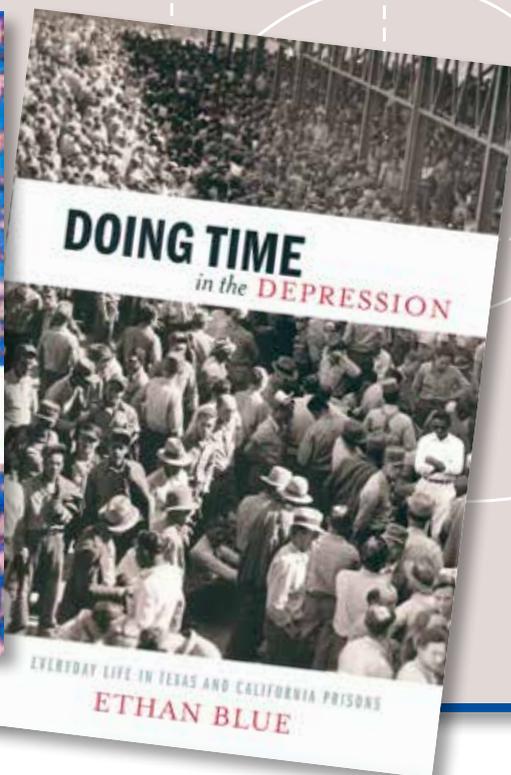
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