



# Editor's Introduction

» ELIZABETH WEBBY

*W*elcome to the 2014 issue of *Humanities Australia*, which opens with the 2013 Sir Keith Hancock Lecture delivered at the Academy's 2013 Symposium, held in Brisbane last November. The Symposium theme of Environmental Humanities attracted a large audience, who responded enthusiastically to Thom van Dooren's eloquent and stunningly illustrated lecture 'Life at the Edge of Extinction: Spectral Crows, Haunted Landscapes and the Environmental Humanities'. We are especially grateful to Hawaiian artist Margaret Barnaby for allowing us to use some of her beautiful hand-carved woodblock prints on the cover of the journal and to illustrate the lecture.

The crow featured in the prints and lecture is no ordinary crow but a Hawaiian fruit-eating species that is now extinct in the wild. The lecture outlines plans to fence off part of a forest reserve, clear it of pigs, and then attempt to reintroduce the crow to the wild. All very good one might think, but not in the eyes of some native Hawaiians who see hunting pigs as a traditional practice and the fencing of part of the forest as another colonial land grab. In teasing out all the factors involved here, van Dooren provides an excellent demonstration of

the value of a multidisciplinary perspective on environmental issues.

As Thom van Dooren reminds us, Sir Keith Hancock played a significant role in the development of environmental history in Australia. He was also the first President of the Academy at its foundation in 1969, and left a bequest used to establish a lecture in his honour, given every four years by 'a young Australian scholar of excellence'. Another of the Academy's Foundation Fellows, A. D. Trendall, also left a generous bequest to the Academy which funds a lecture in the area of Classical Studies, given annually by either an Australian or an international scholar. The 2013 Trendall lecturer was the distinguished art historian Andrew Stewart, from the University of California, Berkeley, who gave a fascinating and also beautifully illustrated lecture on 'Individuality and Innovation in Greek Sculpture' that we are delighted to include here.

As well as these two lectures, the Academy also arranges an annual Academy Lecture by one of its Fellows. These are usually given at the annual Symposium, but the 2013 lecture was presented in Perth at the University of Western Australia, preceded by a reception for Western Australian Fellows. Given by Peter Hiscock on

(above)  
Academy  
Secretariat,  
Canberra, Australia.

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the topic 'Creators or Destroyers? The Burning Questions of Human Impact in Ancient Aboriginal Australia', it tests recent claims about Aboriginal use of fire in the light of the extended time scale provided by archaeological evidence.

If the impact of Aborigines on the Australian environment is still a matter of debate, there is no doubting the devastating impact on Aboriginal Australia of the arrival of British colonisers. Two contributors to this issue, both from Western Australia, draw attention to contemporary efforts to maintain and reclaim Indigenous languages, history and culture. In 'Fever in the Archive', Anna Haebich focuses on the archive of the West Australian Department of Indigenous Affairs. Its records of 'totalitarian control over Aboriginal people from 1898 to 1972' have, ironically, 'proved invaluable to Aboriginal people researching family and community histories' as well as inspiring 'Aboriginal writers who combined them with community memories to create major works of theatre, literature, history and film'.

One of these writers, prize-winning novelist Kim Scott, describes in 'A Whisper in Stone' how the recovery of Noongar language and stories can help to heal damaged lives. Beginning with an ironic quotation from one of the best-known pieces of colonial Australian literature, Banjo Paterson's 'Clancy of the Overflow', and an apology for what might seem his 'shameless boasting', Scott's piece focuses on one of his readers, a Noongar man who has spent much of his life in prison. This contemporary story is interposed with traditional and historical ones to stress the importance of sharing 'words of comfort not only across razor and steel-capped stone walls but also across the vast, yawning chasm that sometimes divides us'.

Another Western Australian contributor, Philip Mead, celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the journal *Australian Literary Studies*. The brainchild of two poets, critics and Academy Fellows, A. D. Hope and James McAuley, *ALS* was edited for most of these fifty years by another Fellow, Laurie Hergenhan. It has played a leading role in helping to transform the study of Australian literature

from an amateur to a professional activity. Congratulations, too, to Philip Mead on his recent appointment as Visiting Professor of Australian Studies at Harvard University.

A number of Academy Fellows have also been awarded Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowships in recognition of their distinguished, ongoing research contributions. Two of them have kindly contributed essays that offer perspectives on very different areas of politics. In "Add Women and Stir": A New History of International Politics', Glenda Sluga argues for the need to recognise the contributions made by women in an area often seen as exclusively male. She traces a female line from Germaine de Staël in the late eighteenth century through to Alva Myrdal after World War Two. Sluga, incidentally, was the 2009 Hancock Lecturer.

If women can be invisible in the world of 'high politics', people involved in community activism often fail to get onto the political radar at all. Tessa Morris-Suzuki's essay 'Invisible Politics' begins by noting the disillusion with traditional politics in recent decades, something certainly apparent in Australia, before going on to outline the concept of 'informal life politics' or 'survival politics'. She presents some fascinating examples from her research in East Asia, such as the Citizens' Radioactivity Measuring Stations set up after the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011.

Although he has now lived in Canberra for many years, the poetry in this issue provides another link with Western Australia, since Ian Templeman was the founder of Fremantle Arts Centre Press, the first to publish Kim Scott, among many others. He trained as a painter and has taken up the brush again in retirement, so we have another first here, poems illustrated by paintings by their author. ¶



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Editor, Australian Academy  
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