

# Humanities Australia

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» MAJELLA FRANZMANN

» TOM GRIFFITHS

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» MICHAEL KIRBY

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Steels Creek Valley, Victoria, three months after the 'Black Saturday' fires (2009).

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We are delighted to introduce the very first issue of **Humanities Australia**, the new annual journal of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. The journal aims to showcase some of the most exciting current work of researchers in the humanities throughout Australia, and to provide a forum for scholarly discussion and debate.

The Australian Academy of the Humanities was founded by Royal Charter in 1969. It is one of Australia's four Learned Academies — the other three are the Academies of Science, Technological Sciences and Engineering, and Social Sciences — which advise Government on national research needs and activities. The Academy of the Humanities now has nearly five hundred Fellows elected for the distinction of their work in the domains of human and cultural knowledge.

**Humanities Australia** draws on the ideas and inspiration of these Academicians and others in the community with interests in the broad field of the humanities.

We hope you will enjoy the discussion presented here, which offers a brief glimpse of the range and quality of current research in the humanities in Australia, and why it deserves your encouragement and support. ¶

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IAN DONALDSON	JOSEPH LO BIANCO
President, Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2007-9	President, Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2009-
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# Editors' Introduction

» STEPHEN GARTON & ELIZABETH WEBBY

*HA* **Humanities Australia** provides a snapshot of the richness and variety of current work in a range of humanities disciplines, with a focus on the ways in which such scholarship can open up new avenues for investigating the human condition and the complex cultural forms through which we come to understand ourselves and the world around us. It is not a formal academic journal (in the sense of being

interdisciplinary teams to tackle the pressing questions of the day. Doctors and scientists talk of translational research that will create a chain of inquiry and experiment going from 'bench top to bedside'. But we know that the translation research chain actually extends much further – out into the wider society, negotiating human habits and behaviours, and on through social and cultural practices into

HUMANITIES AUSTRALIA PROVIDES A SNAPSHOT OF THE RICHNESS AND VARIETY OF CURRENT WORK IN A RANGE OF HUMANITIES DISCIPLINES.

peer reviewed and refereed) but rather offers both Fellows of the Academy, and members of the wider community, a selection of interesting essays — many published elsewhere in more extended forms — which illuminate the exciting research being undertaken in many areas of the humanities. We hope that these samples of what humanists offer will encourage readers to engage further with fields that are new to them.

The journal also seeks to demonstrate the importance of the humanities in understanding human culture, past and present. Contemporary discussion in research policy holds that the big breakthroughs of the future will be produced by researchers from diverse fields coming together in large

legislative chambers, and back again in the form of policies, laws and regulations. The history of technological and scientific advance is littered with inventions, therapies and innovations that were stillborn because they ran counter to how people in particular cultures and regions understood the world. If our innovation culture is to prosper, it needs to be embedded in a deep understanding of humanity and cultural differences. This is why the humanities are fundamental to human progress.

In this first issue of *Humanities Australia* we bring together articles of remarkable breadth and depth, on topics ranging all the way from ancient Manichaeon iconography to Twitter and contemporary social networking. This new journal is timely. In 2009, the

(above)  
Academy Secretariat,  
Canberra, Australia.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN  
ACADEMY OF THE  
HUMANITIES ARCHIVES.

Academy celebrated its fortieth anniversary and Graeme Davison provides an insightful account of the debates and efforts that led to its establishment. The year 2009 was also noteworthy as the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Darwin, and the sesquicentenary of the publication of his *On the Origin of Species*. So we include an article by Iain McCalman exploring the importance of voyages to Australia in the evolution of the theory of natural selection. Last year was also marked

the law adapt to changing circumstances.

Majella Franzmann's essay on women in Manichaeic iconography, a shortened version of her Trendall Lecture (delivered in 2007), challenges conventional stereotypes of women in ancient religions. Through a sensitive analysis of a range of Manichaeic texts, Franzmann uncovers complex and contradictory representations of women, some of which situate female spirituality in a far more positive light than previously imagined.

IF OUR INNOVATION CULTURE IS TO PROSPER IT NEEDS TO BE EMBEDDED IN A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANITY AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES.

by the tragedy of the devastating Victorian bushfires. Tom Griffiths places these events in a larger historical context, illuminating the broader environmental and human settlement patterns that have shaped such traumatic events over the last century. Moving into a very different area of scholarship, Antonia Finnane provides a fascinating insight into the ways dress and custom came to represent cultural difference: a means of delineating the shifting cultural borders between 'barbarians' and 'Chinese' in China since the Han dynasty.

Understanding other cultures is an integral part of humanities research. Peter Høj, in his 2009 Louis Triebel Lecture, outlines, with great insight, the perils of monolingualism and the significance of multilingualism in ensuring that future generations of Australians can function effectively in a global world. Values are also integral to understanding how cultures work, and Michael Kirby argues forcefully for the importance of a principle of diversity in the appointment of judges to final national courts. For Kirby, national courts, in facing challenging cases of major social significance, are better equipped to deal with complex legal issues and ensure that the law keeps abreast of community attitudes if judges reflect a diversity of views, rather than the experience and world view of a single social stratum. This is a cogent plea for the central role of judicial values in the administration of justice and the importance of appointment processes that foster a diversity of views and values: only through such means can

In a similar vein, although on a vastly different subject, Kate Crawford, the Academy's Crawford Medallist for 2008, analyses contemporary social network media, in such sites as Twitter, questioning some of the current stereotypes of users as socially alienated and the content as banal. Crawford investigates social media as marking a fundamental cultural shift from talk to listening as the primary mode of social bonding in contemporary culture. We are also delighted to feature a new poem by distinguished writer John Tranter, written during a recent residency in Italy.

These brief summaries cannot, of course, do justice to the richness of the research and interpretation in these essays. Nor does this selection of articles encompass the full range of disciplines in the Academy or humanities more generally. They do, however, offer excellent samples of humanities scholarship and the profound insights such work can offer into human cultures. ¶

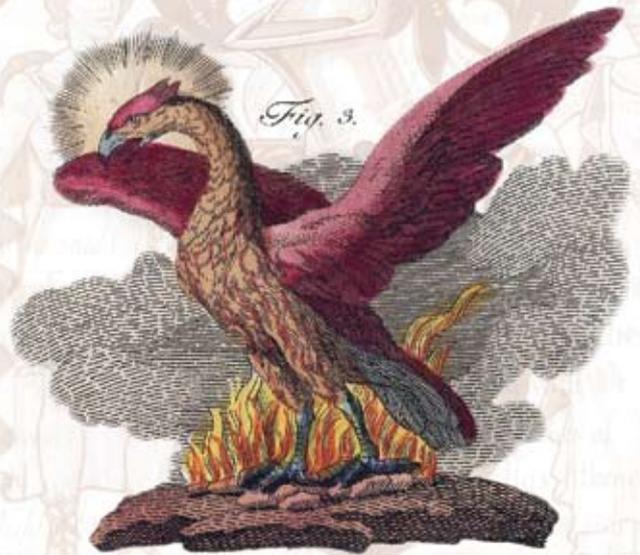
STEPHEN GARTON  
Editor, Australian  
Academy of the  
Humanities, 2007-2009

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

# PHOENIX RISING

## THE ACADEMY & THE HUMANITIES IN 1969<sup>1</sup>

» GRAEME DAVISON



*T*he Phoenix has now risen from its ashes, a lovelier bird and — what matters more — a livelier one’, the inaugural president of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Sir Keith Hancock, wrote exultantly to its political patron, Sir Robert Menzies, at the end of September 1969. ‘We have not only a new name but a new infusion of creative vigour’.<sup>2</sup> Since the foundation of the Australian Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in 1955, its founders had anticipated its transformation, in due course, into an Academy of Letters or, as it

Seventy-one year old Hancock and seventy-five year old Menzies were near-contemporaries, having both arrived at the University of Melbourne as scholarship boys in the years around World War One. Each man, in his way, had been imbued with ideals of academic and public service through their studies under the university’s influential Professor of Law, Harrison Moore.<sup>3</sup> Both were products of the liberal imperialism of their era, Hancock becoming the pre-eminent historian of the British Empire, and Menzies one of

‘THE PHOENIX HAS NOW RISEN FROM ITS ASHES, A LOVELIER BIRD AND — WHAT MATTERS MORE — A LIVELIER ONE’ — SIR KEITH HANCOCK IN A LETTER TO SIR ROBERT MENZIES, 1969.

turned out, an Academy of the Humanities.

The plumage of the new bird, with its royal charter and crest, was certainly more glorious than that of the old AHRC, but the bird itself was remarkably like the old one. As a wily old courtier, Hancock had sought to present the new body to the former Prime Minister in the most favourable light but, as he knew, not everyone, even among its fellows, believed it was without blemish. The Academy had not come into being without controversy, and the personalities, rivalries and divided opinions that surrounded its birth illuminate the changing character of the humanities as the post war expansion of the universities reached its apogee.

its most devoted political servants. While Hancock had won academic laurels in Oxford and London, returning to his homeland only towards the end of his career, Menzies had remained in Australia, but regularly visited England, craving recognition in what, according to Judith Brett, was always his spiritual home.<sup>4</sup>

Both men were also ‘university men of the old school’. According to his biographer Allan Martin, nothing in Menzies’s seventeen-year reign as Prime Minister gave him more pride than his role in the creation of the modern Australian university system.<sup>5</sup> In appointing the 1957 committee of inquiry led by the chairman of the British University

(above)

Detail from *Bilderbuch für Kinder*, 1806.

ENGRAVING BY FRIEDRICH JOHANN JUSTIN BERTUCH (1747–1822). SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA.

Grants Commission, Sir Keith Murray, Menzies was responding to a critical shortage of university places and to a vigorous campaign for the expansion of scientific and technological education. The publication of Murray's report had coincided with the appearance in Australian skies of the Russian sputnik and followed closely upon C. P. Snow's influential article in the *New Statesman* on 'The Two Cultures' (1956) with its lament for the growing divide between the sciences and the humanities (and subsequently the basis for his famous Rede Lecture of 1959). The Murray report itself was notable for the strong support it gave to the humanities.

It has been becoming more and more clearly and widely recognised of recent years that the world simply cannot afford that its highly specialised professional men, technologists and scientists should not be fully educated as rounded human beings. It sometimes seems that while we have been advancing at formidable speed in our knowledge of technical matters we have been if anything falling behind in our understanding and appreciation of human values. We can handle machines and physical nature beyond the dreams of previous generations, but we handle ourselves, our families and our fellow human beings in general no better, and perhaps less well, than our fathers did before us . . . The need for the study of the humanities is therefore greater and not less than in the past.<sup>6</sup>

In his Foreword to the AHRC's survey of *The Humanities in Australia*, published two years later in 1959, Menzies echoed these sentiments, even more sombrely. 'We live dangerously in the world of ideas just as we do in the world of international conflict', he began. 'If we are to escape this modern barbarism, humane studies must come back into their own, not as the enemies of science, but as its guides and philosophic friends. . . Wisdom, a sense of proportion, sanity of judgement, a faith in the capacity of man to rise to higher mental and spiritual levels; these were the ends to be served by the Humanities Council'.<sup>7</sup> Cold War fears and liberal-democratic hopes had

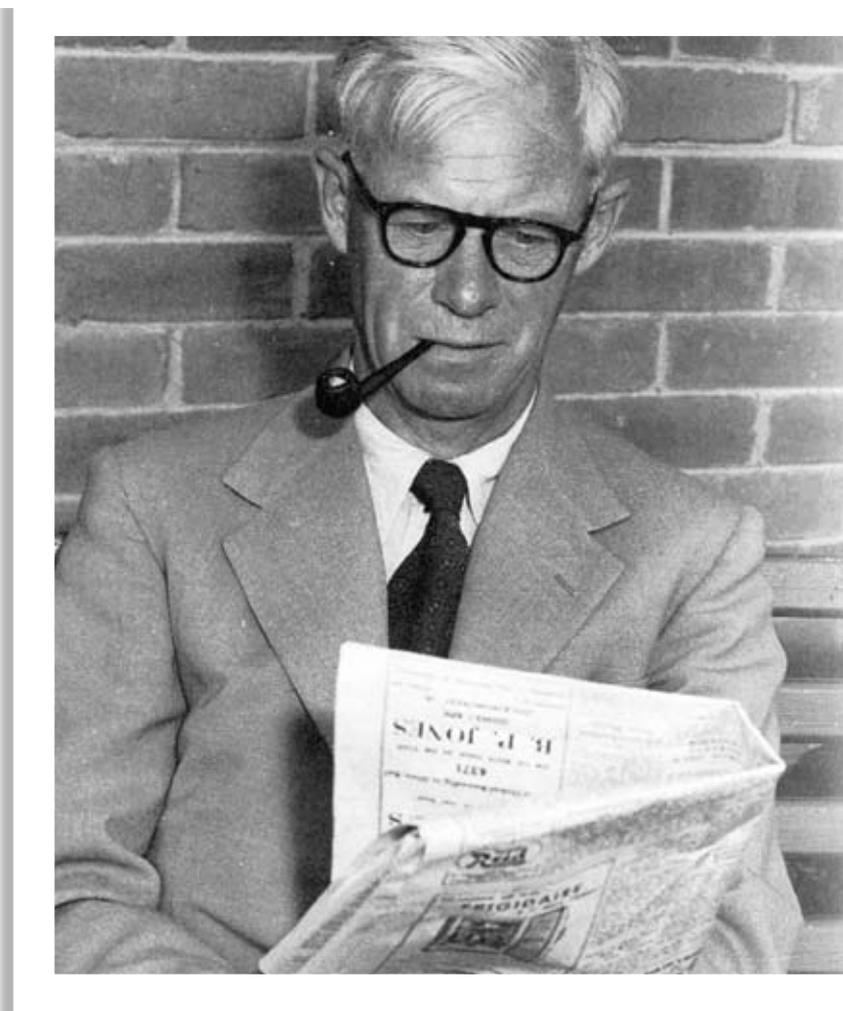
combined to fashion a new dispensation for the humanities. During the 1960s, when enrolments in arts outstripped even those in science and technology, the humanities were the beneficiaries of Menzies's confidence in their civilising mission. By 1969, however, as Chancellor of his *alma mater*, he was witnessing the first tremors of a student revolt, often led by arts students whose 'sanity of judgement' and 'sense of proportion' the old statesman may well have begun to question.

Keith Hancock had accepted the presidency of the new Academy at the invitation of his

(below)

Professor Sir  
Keith Hancock KBE,  
1898-1988.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN  
ACADEMY OF THE  
HUMANITIES ARCHIVES.



friend, the immediate past president of the AHRC, Max Crawford. During his term of office, Crawford had adroitly steered the council along the path towards Academy status. In February 1968, he had written to Prime Minister John Gorton proposing the incorporation of a new body under a royal charter. By creating 'a community of scholars where none existed before', the AHRC, he

argued, had ensured that the exercise of 'well-informed discretion' would enable the Academy to be established on a sound scholarly basis.<sup>8</sup> The academy idea, with its elitist assumptions, had a certain appeal to political conservatives; back in the 1930s Menzies had

England, although not without a backward glance. 'I would have gone to Melbourne if the opportunity had offered but the timing did not fit', he recalled in 1954. Ernest Scott had half-promised him the succession, but, he conceded, 'Melbourne might not have

HANCOCK AND CRAWFORD HAD MUCH IN COMMON: BOTH AUSTRALIAN-BORN HISTORIANS, BOTH BALLIOL MEN, BOTH CAPTIVATED, EARLY IN THEIR CAREERS, BY THE HISTORY OF ITALY.

launched a divisive and ill-fated plan to create an Australian Academy of Art.<sup>9</sup> Crawford may well have wanted to assure Gorton that this Academy was unlikely to create anything like the same furore.

As sponsors of the Academy, Hancock and Crawford had much in common: both Australian-born historians, both Balliol men, both captivated, early in their careers, by the history of Italy. But while Hancock had conquered the academic heights in Britain, becoming a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford professor, Fellow of the British Academy, and Knight of the realm, Crawford had devoted his life to the cultivation of historical studies in Australia. Since his appointment in 1937, he had made the

Melbourne School of History into perhaps the most successful humanities department in Australia.<sup>10</sup> Once, in the 1930s, the paths of the two men had almost crossed. Hancock had returned from Oxford in 1924, aged only 26, to become Professor of History in Adelaide, but by 1933 the boy professor had tired of the constrictions of life in the South Australian capital and resolved to return to

appointed me' (unlikely, since Melbourne had continued to pursue him even after he went to Birmingham<sup>11</sup>), and he doubted that 'I could have done such good work there as Crawford has done throughout these two decades.'<sup>12</sup>

This was generous praise, but, as Crawford well knew, when it came to scholarly achievement, Hancock was in a different league. By 1969 Crawford was tired, his eyesight was failing and he knew that, for all his services to the AHRC, the new Academy needed the prestige and diplomatic finesse that Hancock alone could offer it.<sup>13</sup>

Hancock himself was less certain about what he had let himself in for. 'I accepted nomination as your successor because you asked me to do so', he explained. This, as he came to realise, was a good reason, but not a sufficient one. 'My membership, up to now, has been perfunctory and — let me confess — joyless', he confessed. If he had found greater satisfaction in his membership of the British Academy, it was not because its members were more distinguished, but because they were more diverse. 'We, like the American Foundations, have drawn a sharp line between literacy and numeracy, between art and science. This line not only separates like-minded persons, but also, quite often, cuts the same person into halves. A good deal less than half of me has found a home in the Australian Academy', he added.<sup>14</sup>

Once he took the reins, however, Hancock applied his searching intelligence to the problems of the emerging Academy. In a letter to Crawford, he summarised his main concerns: the body's insufficient finances, its slender record of active support for the humanities, its uneven spread of disciplines, including the weak representation of scholars



(above)  
Professor Raymond  
Maxwell Crawford,  
1906-1991.

BY PERMISSION OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE ARCHIVES  
UMA/1/1954.

from Asian and Aboriginal Studies, and, most worrying of all, its ageing membership. Of its fifty-one members, he discovered, about half were over the age of sixty, thirteen over the age of sixty-five. 'Unless we take prompt action, senility will overtake us', he warned.<sup>15</sup>

Hancock's statistics revealed other patterns as well: eighteen of the fifty-one members were historians, two-thirds specialising in Australian history; eight came from modern languages and eight from English language and literature, five from philosophy and the rest, in ones and twos, from Greek and Roman studies, art history, Asian studies, Semitic studies and Aboriginal studies. 'We have to accept it as a fact of life that present-day Australia is a prolific breeder of historians, but a niggardly breeder of classicists', he observed. In future, he argued, some preference should be exercised in favour of historians from other fields, such as Italian and Indian history. The membership of the AHRC, his statistics showed, was also strongly concentrated in the Australian National University (ten members), the University of Sydney (eight members), Melbourne (seven members) and Adelaide (three members).<sup>16</sup> The few members from the new universities, like Flinders (two), Monash (one) and La



decisions that had created a sharp line of division between the humanities, as defined by the Academy's proposed constitution ('Language, Literature, History, Philosophy and the Fine Arts'), and the broader fields of learning, including the natural and social sciences. He acknowledged that an organic union between the two bodies was now unlikely, although there should be 'zones of

(above)

Professor Arthur Dale  
Trendall AC CMG,  
1909-1995.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN  
ACADEMY OF THE  
HUMANITIES ARCHIVES.

LOOKING BACK, HANCOCK REGRETTED THE DECISIONS THAT HAD CREATED A SHARP LINE OF DIVISION BETWEEN THE HUMANITIES...AND THE BROADER FIELDS OF LEARNING.

Trobe (one), often turned out to be recent migrants from the sandstones. Had he looked more closely, Hancock would have detected some other interesting characteristics: forty-two of the fifty-one members had overseas degrees, twenty-four of them from Oxford and Cambridge, but not one from an American university.<sup>17</sup> (This, by the way, was to change only slowly: in 1980, ninety-seven of the Academy's one hundred and twenty-two fellows had overseas degrees, fifty-seven from Oxford and Cambridge).<sup>18</sup> Finally, of the fifty-one members only three — Ursula Hoff, Kathleen Fitzpatrick and Marnie Bassett — were women, none of them still in an academic position.

Looking back, Hancock regretted the

interpenetration' between them, 'marcher country instead of a frontier', as he put it.<sup>19</sup>

Hancock sent copies of his letter to several other colleagues, including the classical archaeologist, Dale Trendall, one of the 'troika' who had originally proposed the foundation of the AHRC. A former Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge and Professor of Greek at Sydney University, New Zealand-born Trendall was the world authority on the Grecian pottery of Italy and Sicily. In 1968, he was elected to the British Academy, the only Australian resident other than Hancock to be so honoured. In the minds of many contemporaries, Trendall personified the refinement of taste, acuity of judgement and civility of manners of the



(above)

Professor  
Alec Derwent Hope  
AC OBE, 1907-2000.

PHOTOGRAPH: A.T. BOLTON,  
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NATIONAL LIBRARY OF  
AUSTRALIA, NLA P2192/138.

model humanist. When Hancock returned to Canberra in 1957, Trendall had greeted him as the founding Master of University House, an institution that Hancock considered had successfully transplanted the best of Oxbridge to the antipodes.<sup>20</sup> In 1969 he had just arrived at La Trobe University where he was to spend his retirement years as an honorary research fellow. Despite his founding role, however, Trendall had no wish to entrench the rights of its original members. 'This is the ideal moment for change and reform', he argued. 'What I should ultimately hope to see is the merging of the SSRC [Social Science Research Council] and the AHRC (now the Academy), and perhaps even with the Academy of Sciences, which in the best mythological tradition, could then become tricorporate'.<sup>21</sup>

Hancock had realised, too late, that such a broader vision of the Academy was incompatible with the new Constitution about to be ratified by royal charter. The AHRC had been limited to fifty members. Crawford had proposed that the new body should be gradually increased to eighty fellows by 1980. (It would actually reach one hundred and twenty-two by that date). Current members of the AHRC would automatically become fellows of the Academy, which would also elect

the new fellows to be recruited as old fellows retired or died, new talent appeared and the universities expanded. Politically, it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, to prevent members of the AHRC becoming fellows of the new Academy but, as the poet Alec Hope observed, there was a risk that, if they all did so, 'the superannuated should be in control'. In constituting the AHRC, its founders had relied largely upon nominations from the universities, a concession to the principle of representation that some now considered inconsistent with the scholarly distinction that should be the only criterion for election. Speaking for his other ANU colleagues, John La Nauze and George Russell, Hope condemned the Academy proposal as 'both premature and pretentious'.

I feel ashamed, in my own subject, to hold a seat on the Humanities Council when brilliant young scholars with a fine list of publications to their name do not [ . . . ] Unless we do something soon, most of the council will soon be a chorus of ancient frogs singing the praises of the past [ . . . ] I cannot see the wisdom, nor indeed the honesty of the present AHRC turning itself into an Academy. For one thing, it has in it too many members, like myself, who were nominated by their universities rather than elected by the Council.<sup>22</sup>

But it was easier, as Hope conceded, to see the flaws in the proposed constitution than to suggest a practical alternative. By creating a class of emeritus fellows, who would not be required to take part in the ordinary business of the Academy, Hancock had sought to keep the threat of 'senectitude' at bay.<sup>23</sup> And with these assurances, the threatened revolt collapsed. At Easter 1969 Hope wrote a graceful letter of surrender from New York, complimenting Hancock on 'the combination of tact, critical acumen and [ . . . ] authority' he had exercised in resolving the issue. 'I am particularly pleased that there is a place provided for those who wish to sit like old men at Troy on the walls to watch the battles and to praise the beauty of Helen without having to take any action about either', he added, in a flourish perhaps inspired by his

temporary residence in the Algonquin Hotel, the famous gathering place of New York's *literati*.<sup>24</sup>

While the revolt of the middle-aged Turks had been quelled, the fear that 'the superannuated should be in control' of the new Academy hinted at a deeper issue, the widening gap between the experience and outlook of the older generation of humanists, like Crawford and Hope, who had gained their chairs in the 1930s and 40s, and the younger cohort of

criterion, many of Monash's academic founders would today not even make the short list for a lectureship. The foundation professor of English, for example, had published only three or four journal articles, in *English Studies* and *Notes and Queries*, during his twenty years at the University of Melbourne. A professor was expected, in the parlance of the time, to have a 'first-class mind', but its excellence was more apparent in the public lectures he

THE NEW ACADEMY HINTED AT A DEEPER ISSUE, THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN THE OLDER GENERATION OF HUMANISTS, LIKE CRAWFORD AND HOPE, AND THE YOUNGER COHORT...

scholars who reached the senior ranks of the universities in the 1950s and 60s. Between 1954, the birthday of the AHRC, and 1969, the birthday of the Academy of Humanities, the number of students in Australian universities had trebled from just under 30,000 to 109,000. The proportion of the whole student cohort enrolled in arts degrees had increased from around thirty percent to around thirty-seven percent, largely as a result of the strong demand for secondary teachers to educate the post war baby boom. The numbers of full-time university teaching staff had meanwhile risen from 1841 in 1954 to around 8000 in 1969. Whole new humanities faculties had sprung into existence at Monash, Macquarie, La Trobe and Flinders. Most of this growth, of course, was concentrated in the junior ranks of tutors, lecturers and senior lecturers rather than in the professoriate, but the rapidly increasing numbers of appointments at the reader and associate professor level substantiated Alec Hope's concern for the influx of 'brilliant young scholars with a fine list of publications to their name'.<sup>25</sup>

Until the mid-1960s, when the PhD became the normal gateway to academic life, and jet travel, xerography and new sources of research funding began to overcome the tyranny of academic distance, relatively few Australians, even among the professoriate, made a sustained contribution to international scholarship. Recently, as I began work on a history of Monash University, I read the applications and CVs of the university's foundation professors. If scholarly publications alone were the

gave, the references he wrote, and the sage or witty contributions he made to common-room conversation than in the occasional articles he published in scholarly journals.

Most humanities academics would have described themselves as scholars rather than researchers. 'Research is what will help the scholar in his tasks', the classicist Harold Hunt observed in his contribution to the Council's 1959 survey of *The Humanities in Australia*. 'It will help him to win respect for his accomplishments, to preserve his keenness for his subject — to keep his mind lively and his influence vital'.<sup>26</sup> The inference was clear: research was not an end in itself, but a means to the primary ends of scholarship: teaching and public activity. Hunt himself personified this conception of the humanist's role: in his twenty-two years as a member of the Melbourne University Classics department he had produced two short monographs, one a published version of his doctoral thesis on the *Humanism of Cicero* and the other a primer on *Training through Latin*, both published locally. But he was a popular lecturer, renowned for his 'droll sense of humour, displayed with deadpan face and immaculate timing' and his rousing renditions of songs from popular musicals in his own Latin translations.<sup>27</sup>

The humanities often seemed fated to a kind of intellectual exile. 'The scholar in the humanities in Australia [. . .] must maintain his grasp of an intellectual inheritance whose main centres of learning are remote, in lands which he can visit only at long intervals', Hunt observed. The utilitarian bent of Australian

society, he believed, was also hostile to scholarly pursuits and students seemed more intent on just qualifying than in becoming scholars themselves. Like missionaries on a desert island, awaiting the next furlough, arts academics longed for their next sabbatical when they would again pack up their families, embark on a P&O liner and head back to Oxford or Cambridge. There, according to Hunt, they would again find ‘time free for independent thinking’, the opportunity to meet with colleagues, visit libraries and archives, and distil their ideas in books and journal articles.<sup>28</sup>

For thirty years, Max Crawford had aspired to build a School of History founded upon research. But, as he admitted, the humanities in Australia had been less successful in sponsoring research within Australia than in training young scholars to achieve scholarly success elsewhere. ‘We were, and still are, better known for our pupils than for our books’. By 1965, when he surveyed the state of the humanities

it was not until the 1970s that they became commonplace. The new generation of arts academics appearing in the 1960s often held to a different conception of their professional role than their academic elders. They expected to advance on the basis of their research publications, as well as teaching and public service. Thanks largely to the declining costs of international air travel, they were more likely to remain closely linked to the international networks of research in their field than their predecessors. In my observation, it was they who often first challenged the amateurism and cronyism that still bedevilled local professional associations and journals, by introducing more rigorous standards of refereeing and peer assessment. These changes in the recruitment of art academics coincided, of course, with a time of growing ideological conflict as radical critiques of society spilled over into an interrogation of the value-systems and purposes of the university itself. Generally,

THE CURRENTS OF FEMINISM, MARXISM, ENVIRONMENTALISM, AND POST-COLONIALISM WOULD LEAVE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON THE HUMANITIES AND EVENTUALLY ITS ACADEMY.

in a report for the Martin Commission, Crawford acknowledged that the conditions for humanities researchers had begun to improve. Rapid expansion — ‘the crisis of the bulge’ as Crawford called it — had improved library resources and there was more money for research, but the growth of the system had increased the demands upon academics even faster. ‘We are, in short, professors apart, better off and less satisfied’, he concluded.<sup>29</sup>

It was probably not until the early 1970s, when growth began to level off, and a new cohort of scholars, often trained in the United States, arrived in Australia, that the balance began to shift. In 1971 the first Qantas Boeing 747 arrived, opening up the prospect of cheaper and more frequent travel to Europe and the United States. As early as 1961, the AHRC had commissioned a report on the potential of new forms of electronic copying, the use of microfilm combined with ‘copyflo xerography’, to transform the working conditions of scholars dependent on the resources in distant libraries and archives, but

arts faculties and arts academics were at the forefront of these debates. In time, the student revolts of 1968 and 1969, and the currents of feminism, Marxism, environmentalism, and post-colonialism they unleashed, would leave an indelible mark on the humanities and eventually its Academy. But there was hardly a hint, in the civilised exchanges between Crawford, Hancock and Trendall, of the winds of change that, even then, were blowing through the corridors of the universities.

But to return to my narrative: the rebels, led by Alec Hope, had finally agreed to support the Academy, but only on condition that a deliberate effort was made to renew its membership. ‘He has given me the strong impression that he will remain with us, as long as our change of skin is accompanied by a comparable change of the snake inside the skin’, Hancock reported to Crawford. The first test of the new Academy’s resolve would be its success in rejuvenating its fellowship by the election of new foundation fellows. The membership sub-committee chaired by Crawford decided to invite its

members to submit lists sorted into three categories: those worthy of immediate election; those worthy of election within a few years; and those who might be considered in the more distant future. Of course, everyone, including even the magisterial Hancock, immediately began to advance the claims of local favourites, so that the sub-committee eventually was left with a list of one hundred and thirty names, thirty of them in the first category of candidates who should be elected immediately. This was rather more rejuvenation than the committee had bargained on, so by an undisclosed process — probably straw votes modified by discussion — the thirty were at last reduced to sixteen. They included the historians Geoffrey Blainey, Robin Gollan, Ken Inglis and Hugh Stretton, the prehistorian John Mulvaney, the literary critics and writers, Vincent Buckley, Sam Goldberg and James McAuley, the philosophers Hector Munro and Percy Partridge, the art historian Franz Philipp, the geographer Oskar Spate, the orientalist J.D. Frodsham, the French scholar Richard Coe, the Iranian historian Saiyid Rizvi and a lone woman, the poet Judith Wright.

They were, by any reckoning, an impressive bunch, even more impressive now that we can tally their achievements over the next four decades. Hancock had achieved at least some of his objectives. The average age of the new fellows was forty-seven, with the biggest cluster in the low forties. With the election of Mulvaney, Frodsham and Rizvi, the Academy had signalled its interest in ‘new’ fields, such as Aboriginal and Asian studies, while with Spate’s it reached tentatively into the ‘marches’ between the humanities and social sciences. That Buckley and McAuley were poets as well as critics reinforced the implication of Judith Wright’s election: that the Academy wished to embrace creative and scholarly endeavours. Could the Academy have elected more women? In the B list of scholars ‘worthy of consideration within a few years’, there were two outstanding women — Leonie Kramer and Isabel McBryde — who would later be elected, but there is no evidence in the papers of the committee that anyone considered gender a matter to be taken into account.

Even so, the outstanding calibre of those who were elected did promise a ‘new infusion

of creative vigour’ and went far towards assuring the Academy’s critics that it could live up to the promise of its new title.

Hancock’s phoenix may have been a figure of hyperbole, but the snake — to use his other metaphor — had begun to change even while it was shedding its skin.

When the new Academy held its inaugural meeting, forty years ago, in December 1969, its most strenuous advocate, Max Crawford, was absent. Shortly afterwards, he wrote from the shores of Lake Bellagio to congratulate its new President: ‘I am delighted that after all the fume and fret — necessary and useful, I know — the Academy has come into existence so smoothly and so soundly’. He had been reading Hugh Stretton’s *The Political Sciences*, a vindication in print of the confidence he had long invested in his favourite student. And in the delightful surrounds of the villa, he was making steady progress on his own research. ‘At last the end of my book on Arnold Wood is in sight, and what better place for the conclusion of a twenty years labour — or rather, of a labour too often pushed aside during twenty years’. Much of that distracting activity had been devoted to securing the conditions for other scholars to prosper. As Crawford well knew, however, in founding the Academy he was not only opening the door to a new era of prosperity in the humanities, he was also closing the door on a time when, as his own career illustrates, it had been possible to be revered as a scholar without a lengthy list of publications. All told, it was a change for the better, but not perhaps as much as we think. ¶



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1. This paper was presented by the author at the 2009 Symposium of the Australian Academy of Humanities, *The Humanities in Australia: Taking Stock*, on 19 November 2009.

2. Sir Keith Hancock to Sir Robert Menzies, 29 September 1969, Australian Academy of the Humanities, Academy Offices, Canberra. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Academy's archivist, Janet Hadley Williams, in guiding me to material for this paper, and the historian of the Academy of Social Sciences, Stuart Macintyre FAHA FASSA, for comments on an earlier draft.
3. A.W. Martin, *Robert Menzies: A Life*, vol. 1 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p. 20; W.K. Hancock, *Country and Calling* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 69-70.
4. Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 129-155.
5. A.W. Martin, *Robert Menzies: A Life*, vol 2, p. 390.
6. Murray Committee, *Report of the Committee on Australian Universities* (Canberra: AGPS, September 1957), pp. 8-9.
7. A. Grenfell Price (ed.), *The Humanities in Australia: A Survey with Special Reference to the Universities* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson for the Australian Humanities Research Council, 1959), pp. xi-xii.
8. Australian Academy of the Humanities Archives, Foundation of the Academy 1967-1970, Record Series 69/3, R.M. Crawford to Hon. J.G. Gorton, 22 February 1968.
9. Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1788-1970* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 215-218.
10. A judgement perhaps influenced by the School's own well-cultivated opinion of itself: Fay Anderson, *An Historian's Life: Max Crawford and the Politics of Academic Freedom* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005); Stuart Macintyre and Peter McPhee (eds.), *Max Crawford's School of History* (Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2000); Fay Anderson and Stuart Macintyre, *The Life of the Past: The Discipline of History at the University of Melbourne* (Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2006).
11. See Stuart Macintyre, *History for a Nation: Ernest Scott and the Making of Australian History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994), pp. 198-200.
12. Hancock, *Country and Calling*, p. 126.
13. Through an odd circumstance I gained some personal insight into Crawford's outlook at this time. In 1967, when I was a PhD student at the ANU, Max and his wife Ruth came to Canberra for a meeting of the AHRC. His eyesight was now so poor that Ruth had driven the big Mercedes up the Hume Highway. While they were there, she was obliged to fly back to Melbourne to attend a family crisis, so Max and the Mercedes were marooned in Canberra. Knowing that I had a fiancée in Melbourne, my supervisor John La Nauze asked if I would be prepared to drive Crawford back to Melbourne. So for eight and half hours I shared the car, and the thoughts of my old professor, as he pondered his career and offered assessments of the younger men he had taught and mentored. In 1969, I applied for a job in Crawford's Department and was surprised to be appointed without an interview. Only later did I realise that the interview had actually occurred two years earlier on the Hume Highway.
14. AAHA, 69/6, Keith Hancock to R.M. Crawford, 17 February 1969.
15. Ibid.
16. AAHA, 69/6, Membership of the AHRC, Paper circulated by Chairman, March [1969].
17. Calculated from list of members in Australian Humanities Research Council, *Annual Report*, number 13, 1968-1969.
18. Calculated from list of Fellows in Australian Academy of the Humanities, *Proceedings 1980-81* (Canberra, 1982), pp. 11-27.
19. AAHA, 69/6, Keith Hancock to R.M. Crawford, 17 February 1969.
20. W.K Hancock, *Professing History* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), pp. 29-30.
21. AAHA, 69/6, Dale Trendall to Keith Hancock, 24 February 1969.
22. AAHA, 69/6, A.D. Hope to Keith Hancock, 18 March [1969].
23. 'Senectitude' was Crawford's word: see his letter to Hancock, 6 March 1969. The proposal to create a special class of 'emeritus fellows' with limited voting rights was eventually dropped, partly because it could have disenfranchised the Academy's President. As Crawford noted, 'We did not want to deprive ourselves of the chance of using people like you by keeping the age limit as it is'. Crawford to Hancock, 19 May 1969.
24. AAHA, 69/6, A.D. Hope to Keith Hancock, Good Friday [4 April] 1969.
25. Based on statistics in David S. Macmillan, *Australian Universities: A Descriptive Sketch* (Sydney: Sydney University Press for Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 1968), pp. 74-90.
26. H.A.K. Hunt, 'University Research' in *The Humanities in Australia*, pp. 128-9.
27. K. J. McKay, 'Hunt, Harold Arthur Kinross', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 14, 1940-1980 (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1996), pp. 520-521.
28. Hunt, 'Factors Affecting Research' in *The Humanities in Australia*, pp. 171-172.
29. J. McManners and R.M. Crawford, *The Future of the Humanities in the Australian Universities* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press on behalf of The Australian Humanities Research Council, Occasional Paper no. 8, 1965), pp.14-15.

evolution (ev-ol-ú'shun, ú-vo-lú'shun) n.



coral (kú-ú'l) n. a hard fleshy substance growing on the bottom of tropical seas, and composed of the skeletons of polyps; the commonest variety is reddish, either a few or numerous heads of coral, or, most common, made of coral—usually from a cylindrical oval—usually a coral reef; consisting of coral, or a light-red colour; a pinkish seaweed (lit. scum).

*Charles Darwin*



# A Laboratory of Islands

## CHARLES DARWIN'S PACIFIC PROJECT

» IAIN McCALMAN



stoll (stú-ú'l, ú-tú'l) n. a ring-shaped coral reef surrounding a lagoon [Na'ive].

The prospect of leaving the Pacific coast of South America at the end of 1835 darkened Charles Darwin's mood. Now he would be unable to take long inland excursions to escape chronic seasickness. Confronted with the vastness of the Pacific on the *Beagle's* final leg, he felt homesick. His body had been weakened by a mysterious illness at Valparaiso and the Pacific swell somersaulted his delicate stomach. He felt irritated by 'the want of room, of seclusion, of rest — the jading feeling of constant hurry — the privation of small luxuries, the comforts of civilization, [and] domestic society [...]'. The Pacific Ocean loomed like 'a tedious waste, a desert of water'.<sup>1</sup>

This fatigue would taint Darwin's aesthetic appreciation of some of the Pacific and Indian Ocean lands he was to visit — just as it has dulled the evaluations of some historians. With the exception of Darwin's visit to the Galapagos Islands in October 1835, which is often misunderstood, it is frequently assumed that his achievements were over once the *Beagle* headed south for Tahiti. Yet in a letter to his naturalist cousin Henry Fox, Darwin anticipated visiting the Galapagos, Tahiti and Sydney 'with more interest than anything in the whole voyage'. He expected important new insights to come among the islands and island continents of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and he was right. The Galapagos proved to be the preamble to an integrated sequence of explorations that opened up new

horizons of knowledge and speculation. He knew that the Indo-Pacific islands would be good to study because of their manageable size, their recent origin as landforms, habitats and societies, and their fascinating organic relationships with continental neighbours.

In this short essay I'd like to survey the Indo-Pacific component of Darwin's voyage, outlining a key set of problems he set out to analyse, and the results of his experience. I argue that the Pacific laboratory set him on a path to developing his theory of evolution by natural selection and his associated understandings of the operations of the 'natural economy' — what we today call ecology.

Two thinkers had furnished Darwin with a new set of methodologies and theories for exploring the lands of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Alexander von Humboldt's massive South American survey, *Personal Narrative of a Journal to the Equinoctial regions of the new Continent* (1799-1804), had taught him that the aesthetic pleasures of the Romantic traveller and the intellectual satisfactions of the empirical scientist were complementary. Humboldt believed that the intuitive 'inner sense' of a sympathetic cultivated mind might grasp the unity hidden beneath nature's physical and organic diversity. To Humboldt, nature functioned as a harmonious and integrated system within which man shared a sympathetic place. Conflict and violence had little or no part to play.



(above)  
Cocos Keeling Crab.

COURTESY OF  
KIM MCKENZIE.  
MONTAGE ENGRAVING  
SOURCES: WIKIMEDIA  
AND PICTURE BOOK  
OF EVOLUTION,  
C.M. BEADNELL (1932)  
WATTS & CO., LONDON.



(left)

The first page of a letter written by Charles Darwin to his friend Charles Whitley from Valparaiso, 23 July 1834, one of the hundreds of letters that Darwin wrote onboard the **Beagle** – his only form of communication with friends and family back home.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, MS4260.

Humboldt also believed the naturalist should train himself in analytical methods so as to map the geographical and environmental conditions that shaped how plants, animals and humans lived. Conditions of soil and climate created

a Lyellian geologist, he said, ‘altered the whole tone of one’s mind, and therefore [...] when seeing a thing never seen by Lyell, one yet saw it partially through his eyes.’<sup>2</sup> Through these eyes, Darwin had come to see geological change as a gradual but ceaseless historical process. Even geologists who discounted the earth’s Biblical time-span of four thousand years tended to assume that continents had been shaped relatively quickly by cataclysmic supernatural events like the Flood. Lyell argued, however, that the same slow everyday forces of wind, rain, ice and sun ‘now in operation’ had sculpted the earth’s form over eons of time.

Lyell believed that divine creation had triggered this machinery of geological change, but he insisted that geologists must use only observable natural laws to explain how these

[DARWIN] EXPECTED IMPORTANT NEW INSIGHTS TO COME AMONG THE ISLANDS AND ISLAND CONTINENTS OF THE PACIFIC AND INDIAN OCEANS, AND HE WAS RIGHT.

(below)

Portrait of Charles Darwin.

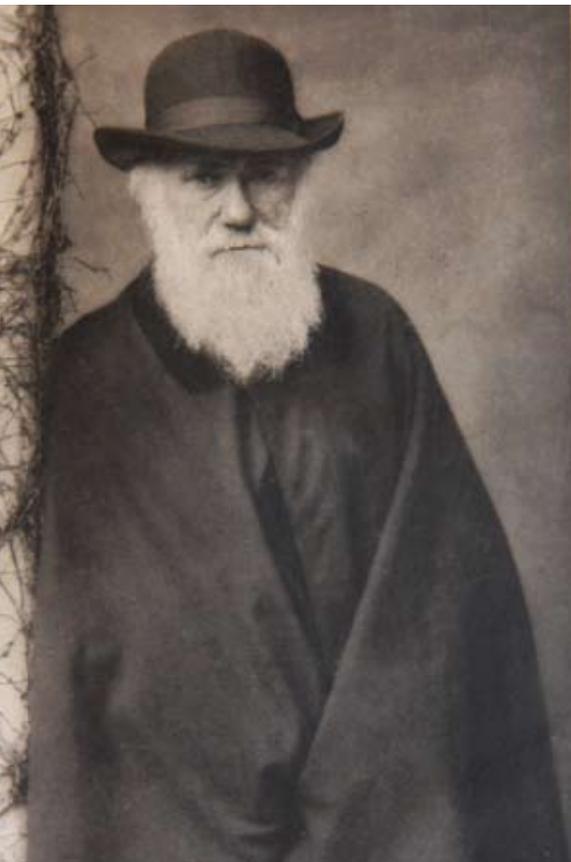
distinct, interdependent, environmental regions across the globe. These regional features could be measured with objective instruments like barometers and clinometers and then mapped using mathematical techniques such as vertical and horizontal grids. Comparing the resulting data would produce a global picture. When the intuitive Romantic evaluation was combined with these objective empirical measurements a holistic understanding of the natural economy was possible.

At the same time Darwin was devouring Charles Lyell’s brilliant *Principles of Geology* (1831-33). Becoming

changes operated in the world. To do otherwise was unscientific. The vast age of the earth had, for example, enabled slow persistent movements of the earth’s crust through volcanic eruptions or earthquake fractures to produce successive rises or falls in the height of surrounding land.<sup>3</sup> ‘[T]he solid earth’, Darwin wrote excitedly in his diary, ‘considered from our earliest childhood as the very type of solidity has oscillated like a thin crust beneath our feet.’<sup>4</sup>

Along with Lyell, Darwin still believed that nothing could alter the fixed biological character of species, which remained essentially immutable from their moment of divine creation. True, alterations in physical environments might cause some species to perish or to move to new habitats. Here, too, the latter might develop slight variations of structure or behaviour in response to new conditions. But Lyell stressed that these changes could never produce permanent transmutations. Variations would disappear over time as a result of inter-breeding among wild populations.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time Lyell introduced Darwin to the idea that nature was ‘a struggle for existence’, not only between predators and their prey, but also between individuals within a species. This view would later be reinforced



by reading Thomas Malthus on the tendency of populations to outstrip resources and so to generate a perpetual struggle in the social world. Furthermore, Darwin understood from Lyell that man could be a violent and disruptive agent within nature's economy — albeit on a small scale when compared with geological forces.

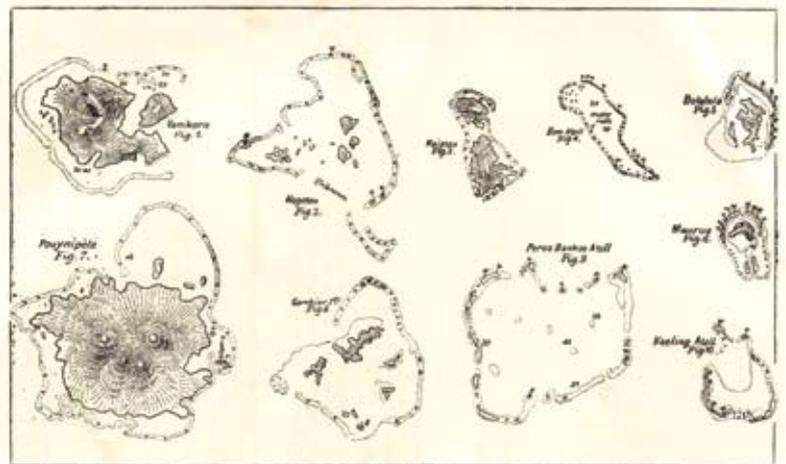
This Lyellian view of nature as struggle clearly clashed with Humboldt's conception of nature's harmony; and for some time Darwin oscillated between these conflicting positions. Even so, the two thinkers gave him a loose collective agenda for his investigations in the Southern Oceans. Indo-Pacific islands, with their confined habitats, would, he believed, simplify the task of collecting comprehensive biotas and mapping plant, bird and animal interactions. The 'uniformitarian' insights and methods of a Lyellian geologist would enable him to investigate both the physical origins of islands and the ways that new land masses could become populated by invasive species, which in turn generated new networks of flora and fauna by adapting to local climatic and soil conditions.

As well — and here Darwin's agenda was as much influenced by his assessments of Fuegian natives in Patagonia — he would explore how these processes of migration, dispersal and adaptation could influence human populations and societies. In particular, he'd observe how new influxes of peoples, or 'invasive species', often from 'civilized' northern centres such as Britain, had influenced the original 'primitive' inhabitants of southern islands or continents and reshaped their natural environments.

Finally, Lyell had set Darwin thinking about how coral reefs were formed. Knowing that corals could survive only in shallow water, Lyell thought that their polypi grew on top of underwater volcanos elevated from the sea bottom. But Darwin thought this theory failed to explain the different forms of the three prevalent coral reef types: barrier reefs that arose some distance from the shore; fringing reefs that grew around volcanic islands; and atoll reefs that formed a ring or horseshoe shape, with a lagoon nestling inside and drifts of sand and dead coral forming a new 'coral island'.<sup>6</sup> While observing the vast land elevations on the west coast of South America, Darwin had wondered if there could be a

corresponding subsidence elsewhere on the seabed. Might this explain the variety of coral reefs and islands that studded the Pacific and Indian Oceans?

In short, the *Beagle's* leg of voyaging among the islands, archipelagos and island continents of Oceania offered Darwin a set of unique living laboratories for testing his emerging knowledge and skills as a theorist of geology, zoology and ethnography. And,



though he did not know it at the time, the results of these island investigations would push him several steps closer to a theory he would one day call 'modification by descent through natural selection'.

When the *Beagle* arrived at the Galapagos Archipelago on 15 September 1835, after sailing some six hundred miles west of Ecuador, Darwin decided that it resembled 'a new creation',<sup>7</sup> but of a strangely infernal kind. At Chatham Island, the blackened coast reminded him both of industrial Wolverhampton and of Milton's *Pandemonium*. The beach and hinterland were littered with broken lava heaps and scorched boulders. Scraggy plants struggled like weeds among the clinkers. Volcanic craters pitted the ground at every point — more than two thousand of them.<sup>8</sup>

Despite all that he'd read Darwin had not expected organic life on the Galapagos to be so bizarre that it appeared to come from another planet. He couldn't imagine what centre of divine creation could have produced such a diabolical array. Some birds and plants he recognised as having South American affinities, but what were penguins doing among the overgrown lizards in this tropical habitat?

(above)

A cross-section of coral reefs used to illustrate Darwin's coral reef theory. From *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* by Charles Darwin, 1842.

COURTESY OF PETER FULLAGAR.

And why had the creator, whose exquisite designs Archbishop Paley had outlined in his Cambridge textbook, chosen to create a paradise for reptiles? There were tortoises that needed eight men to carry them, and ‘disgusting clumsy lizards’, or iguanas, that Darwin called ‘imps of darkness’. One species of iguana fed off the land; the other grazed on underwater seaweed — as he proved when he dissected its stinking guts on the poop-room table. In the interests of science he repeatedly threw a sea-going specimen into the water to find out whether its instinct was to return to land. Sure enough, the creature patiently clambered back on shore each time, implying that it had adapted itself to finding aquatic food. Darwin could see that these Galapagos reptiles were fulfilling the role of mammals in other parts of the world, but why?

The strangeness of the plant and animal life galvanised him into a collecting frenzy.

that mockingbirds on Chatham, Charles and James Islands were each ‘consonant with its own island’.<sup>10</sup> Even so, these observations were perfectly compatible with creationist beliefs that small, temporary variations could arise from local adaptations. All in all, when the *Beagle* set sail for Tahiti on the 18 October 1835, Darwin’s satisfaction came less from any fresh natural history insights, than from the volume of his collections.

For the next twenty-five days the *Beagle* surfed ‘the boundless ocean’ until, on Sunday 15 November, they came in sight of Tahiti, ‘an island’, Darwin noted, ‘which must forever remain as classical to the Voyager in the South Sea’.<sup>11</sup> Darwin didn’t expect to find many new specimens either here or in New Zealand or Australia: his time on land would be short, and these three places had already been worked over by earlier naturalists. No matter. Darwin told his sister Caroline that he intended to

#### WHY HAD THE CREATOR, WHOSE EXQUISITE DESIGNS ARCHBISHOP PALEY HAD OUTLINED IN HIS CAMBRIDGE TEXTBOOK, CHOSEN TO CREATE A PARADISE FOR REPTILES?

On each island visited, he and his helpers shot, cut down, dug up, gathered, fished and trapped specimens from every branch of natural history. Yet they were collecting almost indiscriminately. Darwin was more interested in obtaining coverage than in recording where he found particular specimens. This oversight was to make the whole sample useless for scientific citation.<sup>9</sup> He thought, for example, that several hundred plant specimens he’d gathered were duplicates of each other, not realising they were distinct species. Neither did he know that the numerous little birds he shot — today reverently called ‘Darwin’s finches’ — were finches at all, let alone more than twenty different species of the genus. Though he noticed some differences in their beaks, he thought these to be insignificant deviations within a single large population.

Two anomalous pieces of information did make his notebooks, though he was too busy to consider their implications. Locals could apparently tell from the shape of the tortoise shells which particular island they had come from. He thought it ‘singular’, too,

write ‘much about the missionaries’ and their charges.<sup>12</sup> This focus was opportunist, but not trivial. Having seen Captain FitzRoy’s Fuegian mission collapse when the Christian Jemmy Button returned to his ‘savage’ ways, Darwin was eager to explore the further impact of missionaries on native peoples. He proposed to undertake comparative investigations of how agents of English ‘civilization’ — settlers and missionaries — were influencing the original ‘primitive’ inhabitants of each island and creating new local environments. Having shifted his inquiries from rocks to animals at the Galapagos, Darwin was now moving to people in order to test the social and ecological impact of human ‘invasive species’.

In the fortnight that the *Beagle* spent in Tahiti, Darwin launched his ethnographic-centred inquiry. He found the Tahitians as socially and aesthetically impressive as voyager accounts had claimed. The men, in particular, showed a mild, gentle intelligence that suggested advanced civilisation. Their brown athletic bodies shamed the white men, making them seem bleached and insipid. He loved the



way their tattooed bodies were ‘ornamented like the trunk of a tree by a delicate creeper’.<sup>13</sup>

Neither did he see any signs that Christianity had crushed the natives’ spirits. The missionaries struck Darwin as more practical than pious. They and their native allies seemed to have eliminated the vices of kava drinking, alcohol, infanticide, warfare and cannibalism. The people’s traditional food sources also appeared undamaged: lush tropical fruits and vegetables still grew with wild abundance and were cooked in the delicious local manner reported by all voyagers. When the *Beagle* left on 26 November, Darwin could only add his quantum of praise ‘for the island to which every traveller has offered up his tribute of admiration’.<sup>14</sup>

Darwin spent only a few weeks at their next destination, New Zealand’s north island, where they arrived on 21 December 1835. Beginning in the Bay of Islands, he visited the nearby town of Kororareka and the missionary settlements of Pahia and Waimate. Again he concentrated almost exclusively on investigating the European impact on the Maori, but his observations here showed the effects of marked missionary bias, leading him to compare the Maori adversely to the Tahitian. The eyes of Maori warriors were ferocious, their figures bulky, their houses filthy. He could see no principle of government among and between the tribes other than violence: ‘the love of War was the one and lasting spring of every action’.<sup>15</sup> Informants told him that polygamy was common and cannibalism not yet extirpated. Overall, he placed Maoris on the scale of savagery only just above the Fuegians.

Darwin did concede, however, that missionaries had often relied on Maori people

for protection against the far worse violence of European settlers, many of them ex-convicts from Australia, who were ‘the very refuse of society, completely addicted to drunkenness and vice’. He noted, too, that settlers had razed Kauri forests for pasture and introduced devastating pests such as rats, wild leek, common dock and other weeds. Only the missionary establishments, with their English flora and manners, softened what for him was ‘not a pleasant place’, and from which he gladly departed on the 30 December.<sup>16</sup>

Just under two weeks later, on 12 January 1836, the *Beagle* entered Port Jackson and anchored at Sydney Cove. Darwin was itching to assess the character and impact of a unique convict-based British society, an invasive species like no other. Everything he saw, however, outraged his gentry sensibilities. Ex-convicts had become some of Sydney’s wealthiest men: they rode in gilt carriages and built extravagant houses. Darwin feared that the gross and sensual manners of convict servants would warp future generations and lead to an overall moral decline. It seemed an unpromising basis for a future society.

However, Darwin was deeply impressed by the indigenous inhabitants he encountered. On an excursion to the Blue Mountains, he bumped into a small party of young Aboriginal men, who with their ‘good humoured and pleasant’ countenances, and acute observations ‘appeared far from such utterly degraded beings as usually represented’.<sup>17</sup> Even so, he worried about their survival. Disease, intertribal warfare, high infant mortality and exposure to

(above left)  
**Entrance of the Bay of Islands, New Zealand.**  
 Watercolour by Augustus Earle, 1827.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, NLA.PIC-AN2820777.

(above right)  
**Detail of The Residence of Shulitea chief of Kororadika [ie. Kororareka], Bay of Islands, New Zealand.**  
 Watercolour by Augustus Earle, c. 1827.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, NLA.PIC-AN2820827.

European spirits were taking their toll. On top of this, the extinction of Aboriginal habitats by European guns, dogs and land policies had led to a struggle for existence that appeared unequal: 'when the difficulty in procuring food is increased, of course the population must be repressed in a manner almost instantaneous as compared to what takes place in civilized life'.<sup>18</sup> Though Darwin did not yet think to transfer to the zoological world these ideas of population decline through struggle, he was laying down the elements of a future

from the English water rat, whose role in the economy of nature it replicated?

A few hours earlier he'd been resting on a sunny bank, ruminating on 'the strange character of the Animals of this country as compared to the rest of the world'. At the time he'd been thinking particularly about parrots — birds so strikingly unlike any in England. On the other hand he'd also seen Australian crows and magpies that closely resembled their English counterparts. What did all these contradictions mean? Seeing an ant-lion similar, though smaller than its northern hemisphere counterpart, he imagined a dialogue between two opposing viewpoints. One hypothesised separate creators in each hemisphere. The other, 'an unbeliever in anything except his own reason', contended that Australian and English ant-lions must have come from a single mind, though Darwin did not specify whether it was a divine or natural one. True, either viewpoint could have come from a Christian creationist, but Darwin's dialogue suggests he was beginning to test such creationist theories and to find them wanting. None, it seems, satisfactorily answered



theory of the survival of the fittest.<sup>19</sup> In this sense social Darwinism actually preceded zoological Darwinism. His language also suggests an awareness of the Malthusian thesis, though he is supposed not to have read Malthus's text until a year or two later.

And, as in the Galapagos, Darwin was puzzled by the weird appearance of many Australian animals, which yet often behaved like northern hemisphere equivalents. On 19 January, he openly speculated on the dangerous new subject of the origin of species. At no other time on the *Beagle* voyage did Darwin raise this question, which he would then deal with in secret for a further twenty years. Early that morning he'd shot a platypus. While swimming in the creek, it had looked and behaved like a commonplace English water rat.<sup>20</sup> Why then, he pondered, was this animal so different

the problems posed by Australian species.

Darwin's rumination also reflected his strengthening interest in the functioning and behaviour of species within the earth's overall ecology. Australian birds and animals might look different, but they shared the same 'office' or 'place' within the interdependent 'economy of nature'.<sup>21</sup> Where no closely resembling species existed to perform such 'offices', these could be fulfilled by very different substitutes, such as the reptiles of the Galapagos or the monotremes, marsupials and parrots of Australia. But why and how such species were driven to fill these vacant offices remained unclear. Ecological puzzles of this kind were insensibly edging Darwin towards an evolutionary hypothesis.

On 1 April 1836, the *Beagle* reached the isolated archipelago of Cocos-Keeling Islands in the East Indian Ocean, halfway between

(above)  
View of the Heads, Port Jackson. Watercolour, gouache, gum, scraping out on paper by Conrad Martens, 1853, 54.2 x 76.2cm.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DIANA PANNUCIO. PURCHASED WITH ASSISTANCE FROM OVERSEAS CONTAINERS AUSTRALIA LTD 1986. ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

Australia and Africa and now administered by Australia. Darwin had persuaded FitzRoy to make this visit so he could test a theory that had been buzzing around in his mind for six months.<sup>22</sup> He speculated that a series of slow subsidences had taken place in various parts of the Pacific with which coral growth had kept pace, thus enabling the coral to be continually immersed in shallow water where it had enough light to grow. Live coral thus rested on layered ramparts of dead coral unable to survive in the inky deep water.

Over the next ten days Darwin waded in the lagoon shallows to collect the delicate corals of the inner reef and vaulted with a pole to reach the outer reef's margins where waves crashed violently. Here, as he'd hoped, exposed coral cells had died from the effects of the sun, but those bathed by the sea were living. He and FitzRoy also took soundings immediately outside the atolls using a 7200-foot line that found no bottom. This suggested that the reef had formed a vast submarine mountain with sides steeper than a volcanic cone.<sup>23</sup> It followed, as Darwin explained in his diary, that a fringing and barrier reef could become an atoll: 'In time the central land would sink beneath the level of the sea and disappear, but the coral would have completed its circular wall. Should we not then have a Lagoon Island? Under this view, we must look at a Lagoon Island as a monument raised by myriads of tiny architects, to mark the spot where a former land lies buried in the depths of the ocean'.<sup>24</sup>

When the *Beagle* sailed out of the lagoon on 12 April 1836, Darwin was elated: 'I am glad we have visited these Islands; such formations surely rank high amongst the wonderful objects of the world. It is not a wonder which at first strikes the eye of the body, but rather after reflection, the eye of reason'.<sup>25</sup> That invisible eye had generated a unique body of evidence about the ecological functioning of atolls that was to prove hardly less significant for his future theory of evolution than his earlier Galapagos visit. He saw how organisms had influenced the environment and vice versa. Tiny coral polypi had fashioned landforms on which new organic networks developed. Unlike in the Galapagos, moreover, he described exactly where he found each specimen of plant, fish, insect or bird. This

time he could test whether isolation on separate islands had produced unique variations.

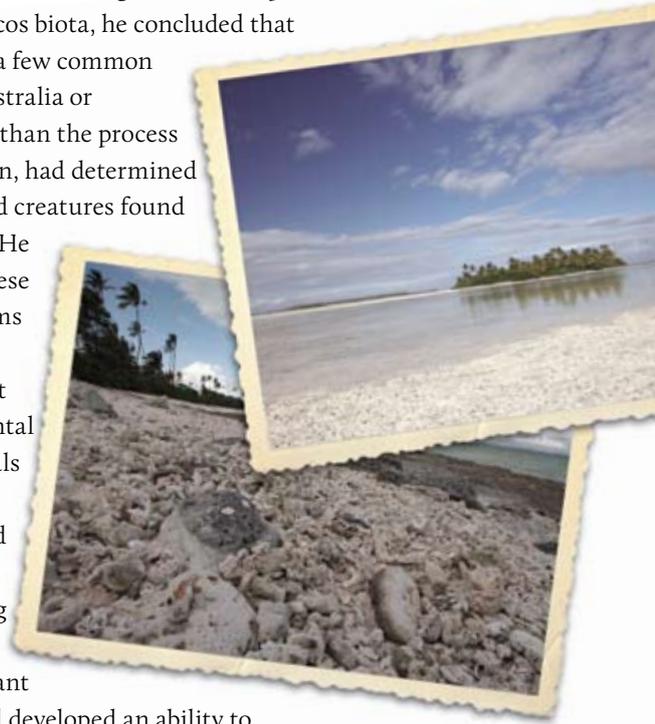
Having made what he thought was a complete collection of Cocos biota, he concluded that

the dispersal of a few common species from Australia or Sumatra, rather than the process of divine creation, had determined which plants and creatures found their way there. He saw, too, that these refugee organisms adapted their behaviour to suit new environmental conditions. Corals had checked their growth and altered their shapes according to the strength

of the waves. Giant robber crabs had developed an ability to crack open the nuts with fierce claws.

Above all, Darwin began to use metaphors of struggle to describe the perpetual battle between sea and coral: 'the ocean throwing its water over the broad reef appears an invincible enemy, yet we see it resisted and even conquered by means which would have been judged most weak and inefficient'.<sup>26</sup> All in all he had traced the process whereby a tiny organism, by purely natural means, managed to bring about a 'new creation' based on locally-adapted species that had arrived by chance at these sandy 'refuges for the destitute'. At least in this instance, no divine creator had been necessary.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see how closely Darwin's coral reef hypothesis anticipated his later theory of evolution by natural selection. Two years before he supposedly read Malthus's book on population struggle, Darwin had already drafted the idea that populations of corals were limited by an intense struggle with forces and organisms, such as the sun, the sea, water temperature and coral-eating fishes. He was arguing, too, that physical geology, together with population growth and environmental struggle, could explain major facts of long-term geographical distribution,<sup>27</sup> a process — in



(above)  
Cocos (Keeling)  
Islands.

COURTESY OF  
KIM MCKENZIE.

the words of another modern authority — ‘of sequential and irreversible change of form through time’.<sup>28</sup> We call this evolution.

Finally, as the *Beagle* headed for home after calling briefly at Mauritius and Cape-town, he took stock of his Southern Ocean experiences. He reviewed his notes, cross-referenced key points and made comparisons between the islands and continents he’d visited. Now he could see the archipelagos of the Indo-Pacific as an integrated and interconnected phenomenon, grasping their origins, adaptations and ecological functioning in a way he’d never been able to do in the Atlantic. New connections fired in his mind. He thought about the dispersal of species to remote islands, the effects of isolation, the pressures of environmental change, and the possibilities of varieties becoming species. Now, too, he suddenly glimpsed the significance of the fact that Galapagos tortoises and mockingbirds might be different on each island. Could they have descended from a common ancestor, then diverged? ‘If there is the slightest foundation in these remarks’, he scribbled portentously in his shipboard notes, ‘the Zoology of Archipelagos will be well worth examining; for such facts would undermine the stability of species’.<sup>29</sup> One would have to believe in some sort of theory of evolution; and Charles Darwin now did. ¶



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Calignee  
Flowerdale  
Kilmore  
Kinglake  
Kinglake West  
Margsville  
Strathewen  
St Andrews  
Steels Creek

## WE HAVE *still* NOT LIVED LONG ENOUGH

### BLACK FRIDAY & BLACK SATURDAY

» TOM GRIFFITHS

*W*e should have seen this coming. We *did* see this coming. Yet we failed to save lives. We have still not lived long enough.

'They had not lived long enough' were the words Judge Leonard Stretton used to describe the people who lived and worked in the forests of south-eastern Australia when they were engulfed by a holocaust wildfire on 'Black Friday', 1939. He wrote:

Men who had lived their lives in the bush went their ways in the shadow of dread expectancy. But though they felt the imminence of danger they could not tell that it was to be far greater than they could imagine. They had not lived long enough. The experience of the past could not guide them to an understanding of what might, and did, happen.<sup>1</sup>

the fragility and brevity of a human lifetime in forests where life cycles and fire regimes had the periodicity and ferocity of centuries. He was indicting a whole society.

In 1939 Australians were deeply shocked by what had happened in their own backyard. Rampant flame had scourged a country that considered itself civilised. As well as shock, people sensed something sinister about the tragedy and its causes. Judge Stretton tried to find the words for it in his fearless report. Of the loss of life at one sawmill settlement, he wrote: 'The full story of the killing of this small community is one of unpreparedness, because of apathy and ignorance and perhaps of something worse'. The 'something worse' that he tried to define was an active, half-conscious denial of the danger of fire, and a kind of community complicity in the deferral of responsibility.

WHEN THE 1939 FIRES RAGED THROUGH THE FORESTS OF MOUNTAIN ASH, SETTLERS DID NOT EVEN KNOW HOW SUCH A DOMINANT AND IMPORTANT TREE REGENERATED.

The judge, who conducted an immediate Royal Commission into the causes of the fires, was not commenting on the youthfulness of the dead: he was lamenting the environmental knowledge of both victims and survivors. He was pitying the innocence of European immigrants in a land whose natural rhythms they did not yet understand. He was depicting

There is something sinister also about the dreadful tragedy of 'Black Saturday' in 2009, although the character of it is different. Those of us who know and love these forests and the people who live in or near them are especially haunted. In 1939, some of the ignorance and innocence was forgivable, perhaps. 'Black Friday' was a late, rude awakening from the colonial

(all images)  
Steels Creek valley, Victoria, in May 2009, three months after the 'Black Saturday' fires.

COURTESY OF  
TOM GRIFFITHS.



era of forest exploitation and careless fire use, and it demanded that people confront and reform their whole relationship with the bush. When the 1939 fires raged through the forests

calls ‘the fire flume’.<sup>4</sup> It is the most distinctive fire region of Australia and the most dangerous in the world. When a high pressure system stalls in the Tasman Sea, hot northerly winds flow relentlessly down from central Australia across the densely vegetated south-east of the continent. This fiery ‘flume’ brews a deadly chemistry of air and fuel. The mountain topography of steep slopes, ridges and valleys accelerate and channel the hot air, temperatures climb to searing extremes in January and February, and humidity evaporates such that the air crackles. Lightning attacks the land ahead of the delayed cold front and a dramatic southerly change turns the raging fire suddenly upon its victims.

There is a further ingredient to the chemistry of the fire flume. Across Australia,

WE NOW HAVE FEWER EXCUSES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INNOCENCE. WE KNEW THIS TERRIBLE DAY WOULD COME. WHY, THEN, WAS THERE SUCH AN APPALLING LOSS OF LIFE?

of valuable mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), settlers did not even know how such a dominant and important tree regenerated. Sawmillers had been exploiting the mountain ash intensively for half a century, it had become ‘probably the most important forest tree’ in Victoria in terms of its economic potential, and people had been living at its feet and working under its canopy all their lives, yet humans did not yet know how to grow it.<sup>2</sup> In the seventy years since 1939, we have lived through a revolution in scientific research and environmental understanding, we have developed the beginnings of an ecological consciousness, we have ‘prried into the personal life of *Eucalyptus regnans*’ (as one botanist put it), and we have come to a clearer understanding of the peculiar history and fire ecology of these forests.<sup>3</sup> We now have fewer excuses for environmental innocence. We knew this terrible day would come. Why, then, was there such an appalling loss of life?

\* \* \*

**Victorians live entirely within** what the international fire historian Stephen Pyne

eucalypts are highly adapted to fire. Over millions of years these trees have turned this fragment of Gondwana into the fire continent. But in the south-eastern corner — especially in the forests of the Victorian ranges and Tasmania — a distinctive type of eucalypt has evolved. The mountain ash is a tree of wonder, the tallest flowering plant in the world. Colonists cut it down to measure its height. The trunk of the mountain ash is a smooth white or greenish grey and it sheds long ribbons of bark. At its base clings a rough fibrous stocking. It is a very rapid grower and can reach a height of forty metres in twenty years. Eventually it grows to a hundred metres and it lives for centuries. At its feet, amongst the heavy leaf litter, there move puny people whose lifetimes are a sixth of that of the trees. Here is the fatal mismatch between the biographies of the people and the biographies of the trees they aspire to manage.

Ash-type eucalypts (the mountain and alpine ash) have developed a different means of regeneration. Although they do produce epicormic shoots from their branches after fire,

drought or insect damage, they do not develop ligno-tubers under the ground from which they can renew themselves, and mountain ash and alpine ash rarely coppice (that is, grow new shoots from a cut stump). For their survival, therefore, they are unusually dependent on their seed supply. Mountain ash dies out unless fire periodically sweeps the forest, for it is principally fire that releases the seed from the tree's hard capsules. However, the tree is also unusually sensitive to fire. Its bark is thin, and mature trees are easily killed by fire. Furthermore, if a second fire comes before the regrowth has developed its own viable seed, a whole forest can be wiped out.

This apparently paradoxical relationship between ash and fire results in a crucial 'miracle of timing' that is essential to regeneration.<sup>5</sup> Mountain ash generally occurs in even-aged stands. That, and the persistence of soil charcoal, are evidence of past catastrophic fires. Mountain ash is very sensitive to light surface fires, but it seeds prolifically in intense crown fires. In fact, it possesses features that seem to promote such fires: a heavy fall of inflammable leaf litter (two or three times that of other eucalypts), particularly in dry seasons, hanging streamers of bark that take the flames up to the

create a 'miracle of timing' for this tall eucalypt are the very same ones that conjure a firestorm from hell for any humans in its path.

So these great forests of ash renew themselves *en masse*. These magnificent trees have evolved to commit mass suicide once every few hundred years — and in European times, more frequently. The very existence of mature ash forests such as those found by Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century is testimony to a fire regime of very occasional widespread but



THE CONDITIONS THAT CREATE A 'MIRACLE OF TIMING' FOR THIS TALL EUCALYPT ARE THE VERY SAME ONES THAT CONJURE A FIRESTORM FROM HELL FOR ANY HUMANS IN ITS PATH.

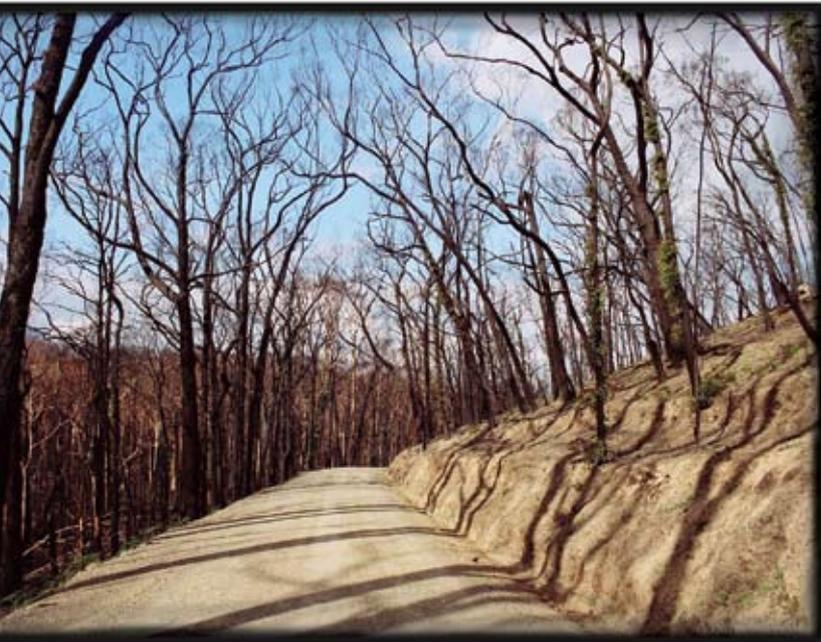
canopy and become firebrands hurled by the wind in advance of the flame, and open crowns whose pendulous foliage encourages updrafts. And how do these precious seeds survive the intense heat they indubitably need? The well-named botanist, David Ashton, suggested that perhaps it is the very flammability of the crown that protects the seed in its capsule — just long enough. In the crown of the tree ahead of the fire front, the heat is brief and explosive and, some observers say, is followed by cool updrafts of air before the arrival of the surface fire. This fragile and complex circumstance certainly works. At Noojee after the 1939 fires, forester A. H. Beetham found that nearly two-and-a-half million seedlings per hectare of mountain ash germinated.<sup>6</sup> The magnificent mountain ash is actually a fire weed. The conditions that

intense conflagrations. Not all the communities that were incinerated in 1939 and 2009 were in or near the forests of ash, but many were, and the peculiar fire ecology of the trees is another deadly dimension of this distinctive fire environment. These are wet mountain forests that only burn on rare days at the end of long droughts, after prolonged heatwaves, and when the flume is in full gear. And when they do burn, they do so with atomic power.

\* \* \*

**But even holocaust fire** has cultural dimensions — Black Friday and Black Saturday were both intriguing artefacts of nature and

history, they were cultural exaggerations of a natural rhythm. Even as we discover their ecological depth, we are reminded of their historical specificity. They were distinct products not just of their region's ecology, but also of their particular social eras — of intensive forest-based sawmilling in 1939, and of uncontrolled urban expansion into bushland in 2009. And now there is the added cultural factor of human-induced global warming.



knowledge that we still have not come to terms with what we have already experienced.

The Bureau of Meteorology predicted the conditions superbly. The Victorian Premier, John Brumby, issued a general warning. Fire experts knew that people would die that day. History repeated itself with uncanny precision. Yet the shock was, and still is, immense. It is the death toll, and not the weather, which makes the event truly unprecedented.

The Victorian Emergency Services Commissioner, Bruce Esplin, woke at 6 am on Black Saturday with, as he put it, 'this feeling of dread'.<sup>7</sup> It was probably no accident that he used that word 'dread', the same one Leonard Stretton used to describe the feelings of bush workers in the summer of 1938-39 as the dry undergrowth crunched ominously under their boots. Esplin conducted the inquiry into the 2002-03 Victorian fires and spoke then of his keen sense that Judge Stretton was looking over his shoulder. While writing his own report, Esplin had read Stretton's Royal Commission summary again and again and he knew very well Stretton's portentous prose. Every Victorian with some knowledge of fire history has for years been fearing that 1939 could happen again. We thought it might have come

FOR THOSE OF US WHO KNOW THE HISTORY, THE MOST HAUNTING ASPECT OF THIS TRAGEDY IS ITS FAMILIARITY.

The 2009 fires were 'unprecedented', as many commentators have said. They erupted at the end of a record heatwave and there seems little doubt this was a fire exacerbated by climate change. But it is the recurrent realities that are more striking. For those of us who know the history, the most haunting aspect of this tragedy is its familiarity. The 2009 bushfires were 1939 all over again, laced with 1983... the same images, the same stories, the same words and phrases, and the same frightening and awesome natural force that we find so hard to remember and perhaps unconsciously strive to forget. It is a recurrent nightmare. We know this phenomenon, we know the specific contours of the event, and we even know how people live and how people die. The climate change scenario is frightening. But even worse is the

in the summer of 2002-03. In the late spring of that fire season, after a long dry winter, I toured the Victorian forest communities that had been devastated by Black Friday, giving talks about the fire history of the region. In village halls and Rotary Clubs on unseasonably warm evenings, people came out to talk about the past, but really to rehearse the future. History revealed itself as a kind of public therapy. By talking about 1939, bush residents could voice their fears about 2003. I talked and listened to people preparing for another horror summer. There was that air of 'dread expectancy'. And a great fire did kindle and erupt, a vast alpine fire that burned for two months and also roared into Canberra. But the 2003 fire, although it burnt roughly the same area as the 1939 fire, miraculously took few lives. The central

Victorian communities north and east of Melbourne were spared, thus the nightmare of 1939 still stalked us. And so Bruce Esplin woke with dread that morning of Black Saturday.

On that morning, an hour's drive to the north of Melbourne, thousands of families awoke to a fierce day and instinctively stayed indoors. Most had probably heard the warnings the day before. Many knew that, in the event of fire, if they were not going to stay and defend their homes, then they should leave early. But when, exactly, was *early*? It was still too early for most that Saturday morning — there were no reports of fires close by, and anyway it was better to stay at home than to travel in such conditions. 'Everyone was fatigued by the hot days', recalled one survivor who lost his home. 'It produced complacency. The whole family was having a siesta. Tarps were strung up on the windows, the air-con was on. The tarps were flapping, I couldn't sleep'. Later that day, without time for any further decisions, people with fire plans were ambushed by a monster. 'Many times before we've seen smoke', they remembered. Another recalled: 'We've stood on our front lawn and watched fires on the ridge. This was not a fire, but a tsunami, a wave of gas not so much of flames'. 'Normally you see a cloud', observed a survivor. 'This one was so hot it was white — like a giant cumulus. We never saw flames. It was incandescent'. At Woods Point in 1939, old residents initially ignored the huge pall of smoke coming over the north-eastern hill; they had seen it often enough. Within an hour their town was incinerated. At Marysville in 2009, tourists were innocently captivated by a photogenic magenta 'thundercloud' billowing above the town; it was about to descend on the settlement 'like an atomic bomb'. The survivors spoke constantly of the immense speed and noise of the fires. 'No-one could have stopped it', they said.<sup>8</sup>

Emergency Service chiefs in what was called 'the war room' in Melbourne, equipped with the best communication technology, were also overtaken by the speed and ferocity of the event. By early afternoon on that Saturday, fire



authorities in that 'war room' were anxious but buoyant. So far as they knew, fire activity was limited. Yet the Kilmore fire was already alight and rampaging. Dozens of people died in the next two hours. Esplin recalled: 'We were sure that the fires were taking houses at that stage but we had no idea they were taking lives'. The close association in this fire between houses and death had not yet been made. Kinglake West was consumed, then Strathewen, St Andrews, Kinglake, Steels Creek, Calignee and Flowerdale, all were incinerated. By 6 pm, with the southerly change sweeping across central Victoria, there was still no confirmation in the 'war room' that any lives had been lost. Driven by the new southerly winds, fire bore down on Marysville and vaporised it. Esplin heard the news six hours later. When he went to bed at 1.30 am the official death toll stood at 14.

In a recent article in *The Monthly*, Robert Manne, who survived the fire in Cottlesbridge due to 'a mere fluke of wind', analysed the evidence so far presented to the Teague Royal Commission in an attempt to understand why so few warnings were issued by authorities on the day.<sup>9</sup> He was perplexed and angry that people in the path of the fire were not given the benefit of the latest information about the fire-front. One shares his dismay — yet it is also consistent with the logic of the 'leave early or stay and defend' policy that such warnings would not be issued, not out of incompetence or carelessness or bureaucratic paralysis, but because of a conviction that late warnings would precipitate late departures and that people are most vulnerable when in panicked flight — and also that they are safest, if well prepared, in their own homes.



It is this assumption — that people could hope to defend their homes in the fire flume on a forty-something degree day of high winds after a prolonged heatwave and a long drought — that demands scrutiny. The ratio between homes lost and lives lost seems to be much higher in these fires than any other; in other words, people stayed at home, were stranded from information, and died. And those who

The ‘leave early or stay and defend’ policy has developed and hardened over those two decades and in many areas it has demonstrably saved lives and homes. Now, suddenly and dreadfully, it has become the problem. In this distinctively deadly fire region it misled people to believe that they could defend an ordinary home in the face of an unimaginable force, and it constrained authorities from informing the public of the movements of the fire-front on the fatal day.

A ‘stay and defend’ option is only realistic in such places and conditions if every property has a secure fire refuge or bunker. A bunker at the shire hall or at the end of the street is not good enough — people will die getting to it. I welcome the Prime Minister’s promise to rebuild these communities ‘brick by brick’ — and I would like him to add: ‘and bunker by

WE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND AN UNDIFFERENTIATED, COLONIAL SENSE OF ‘THE BUSH’  
AS AN AMORPHOUS SAMENESS WITH WHICH WE DO BATTLE.

died fleeing did so at the very last minute when they realised with horror that there was no identifiable ‘early’ on such a day in such a place, and that the fire plan they had carefully nurtured over years had never had the remotest chance of working. The recommended survival strategy of ‘leave early or stay and defend your home’ was a death sentence in these Victorian mountain communities in such conditions.

We can understand why this policy has evolved and it has much to recommend it. It is libertarian; it recognises the reality that people prefer to stay in their own homes and defend them if they can; it seeks to minimise late evacuation which is so often fatal; and it encourages sensible planning and preparation. It will continue to guide people well in most areas of Australia. For the last twenty-five years since the horrific Ash Wednesday fires, we have been able to tell ourselves a story that even though feral fire seemed to be escalating, we were learning better how to survive it.

bunker’. Many people built bunkers in their backyards in the second world war and most, thankfully, were not used. But we know for certain that any secure bunkers built in these Victorian forest towns *will* be used in the next generation, and they will save lives. This is an appropriate challenge to the design and construction industries of the fire continent.

We need to abandon the idea of a *national* fire plan and develop ecologically sensitive, bioregional fire survival strategies. We need to move beyond an undifferentiated, colonial sense of ‘the bush’ as an amorphous sameness with which we do battle, and instead empower local residents and their knowledge of local ecologies. The quest for national guidelines was fatal for the residents of these Victorian mountain communities on such a day; it worked insidiously to blunt their sense of local history and ecological distinctiveness. Clearing the backyard, cleaning the gutters and installing a better water pump cannot save an ordinary

home in the path of a surging torrent of explosive gas in the fire flume.

\* \* \*

**In 1989, I was involved** in a historic sites survey of these forests.<sup>10</sup> Some of the grimmest and most moving relics of intensive sawmilling we identified were old dugouts built in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. In those days, dugouts should have been provided at all sawmills. They were trenches in the ground or in the side of embankments, generally supported with corrugated iron sheeting and timber props heaped over with earth. They had one narrow opening, which could be shielded with a blanket that was to be kept constantly wet during a fire. Water, food and first aid equipment were to be stored inside. All too often, however, no dugouts were provided for workers and their families at sawmills. The dugout that saved the lives of workers in the Ada forest had been built only over the opposition of the manager, who believed that fire would never invade the cool, moist southern side of the range. In spite of the tragedies and loss of life in the 1926 and 1932 fires in these same forests, there were still many sawmills without dugouts. They were the sawmiller's responsibility. They were to be built and stocked at the sawmiller's expense. Many didn't bother.

So when the fire bore down upon them, timber workers buried their belongings and tried to bury themselves. Some burrowed into the sawdust heaps and made themselves an awful, suffocating tomb. Some jumped into water tanks and were boiled. The few who did survive without well-equipped dugouts were near big, broad creeks in which they could immerse themselves, or else they were able to find a large cleared area, in the centre of which they lay down, wrapped themselves in wet blankets and kept their nerve. The trauma of Black Friday drove some people off the edge of sanity for the rest of their lives. When the survivors tried to walk out to civilisation after the fire had passed, they found themselves lost. It was a different landscape. All familiar things had gone. The matchstick trees were no guide to where they were.

It took courage and desperation to climb underground 'like a wombat' and stay there. Even where dugouts existed, many bushworkers did not trust them. At the Ruoak No. 3 mill in the Rubicon forest, workers crammed the dugout with their furniture and fled. The four slowest died. But their furniture survived. Some of it can still be found there today, 'embedded in the collapsed remains of the dugout'.<sup>11</sup>

Ruby Lorkin survived the fire in a dugout at the Ada No. 2 mill near Powelltown. In 1984, she recalled her ordeal:



I had only walked a few yards down the wooden tramline to the mill, when a torch of burning bark fell at my feet and set the line alight. My husband called 'Run, run for your life into the dug-out'. I dropped the tea billies and food and ran. The men were still frantically soaking the mill. When they saw it was no use they were forced to come into the dug-out. How we lived through that dreadful inferno I shall never know.

It was 113 degrees in Melbourne so you can imagine how awfully hot it was there as the worst fires in Australian history swept over us, sweeping sawmill, houses, horses, everything before it. I think, maybe, because it went so quickly, fanned by a terrific north wind behind it was the reason we survived. We two women were told to lie down on the ground whilst water was thrown over us, until the water reached boiling point and we could not drink it. Four men at a time stood at the small opening of the dug-out holding up soaking blankets until the blankets dried, caught alight and were swept from their hands in a few moments, then another four went forward to take their place. The Engineer went berserk and tried to take his wife outside and had to be quietened by knocking him unconscious to save his life. The next morning, when the fire had gone taking our homes and all our possessions, we crawled out although our clothes were riddled by sparks which fell down through the small funnel the men had put in for a chimney and the men's hands were badly scorched by holding up the blankets. Strangely, no one was badly burned.<sup>12</sup>

Research by historian Peter Evans has shown that, although sheltering in a dugout was often deeply traumatic in the way Ruby Lorkin described, dozens of people did survive the fire by going underground. Only three people died in a dugout in 1939. That unfortunate trio were the mill owner and his wife — Ben and Dorothy Saxton — and a young timber worker Michael Gorey. A small distance away, thirty sawmill employees survived in the big dugout that Saxton had wisely built at his Tanjil Bren sawmill. But when the extreme crisis came, Ben Saxton, as mill owner, possibly felt the need to segregate himself from his own men,

to maintain a certain social distance even in an emergency. The alternate dugout in which he took refuge was too small and it collapsed.<sup>13</sup>

The fire refuge dugout was a distinctive cultural response to the history of fire in these tall Victorian forests. Few dugouts were built in other forest regions. It is a clue to the emerging bush wisdom of the inhabitants of these distinctive forests. There are hardly any official dugouts in this region today — many of the old forest refuges have collapsed or decayed and many were deliberately destroyed because they were seen to be unsafe. The original reason for them being put there appeared to have been forgotten.

\* \* \*

**There is a perennial question** in human affairs that is given real edge and urgency by fire: *do we learn from history?* Testimony from the 1939 and 2009 fires suggests that there is one thing we never seem to learn from history. That is, that nature can overwhelm culture. That some of the fires that roar out of the Australian bush are unstoppable. As fire manager, Mike Leonard, puts it, 'there are times when you have to step out of the way and acknowledge that nature has got the steering wheel at the moment'.<sup>14</sup> It seems to go against the grain of our humanity to admit that fact, no matter how severe are the lessons of history.

Managers and scholars of bushfire have observed that our society experiences a heightened awareness of the danger of fire immediately after a tragic event such as Black Saturday, but that complacency sets in as the years pass and the memory of the horror dims. But there is another psychological pattern which is more troubling and that we can observe at work in our midst right now. The forgetting of the recurrent power of nature is immediately and insidiously embedded in the ways we describe and respond to great fires in their aftermath. Our sympathy for the victims of bushfire, the surge of public financial support and the political imperative to rebuild as swiftly as possible conspire to constrain cultural adaptation. Such sacrifice of life cries out for meaning and for a kind of unbending resolution in the face of nature. There is often an emotional need, as people return and rebuild, to deny the 'naturalness'

and therefore the inevitable recurrence of the event. Black Saturday, we tell ourselves, was unique, it was unprecedented, it was ‘unnatural’ and it was a ‘disaster’. Culture can — and *will* — triumph over nature.

There is an irresistible tendency to use language that describes fire almost wholly in terms of tragedy and destruction. Not only do we talk in crisis-language, we also use military metaphors and comparisons — partly because, in the face of an awesome natural force, they offer some comforting human agency. We refer (as I have above) to the authorities bunkered down in the Melbourne ‘war room’. We revere the heroism of the firefighters and compare them to Anzacs. At the national memorial service, the Prime Minister spoke of ‘a new army of heroes where the yellow helmet evokes the same reverence as the slouch hat of old’. We describe forests as *destroyed* even if they are highly evolved to burn. We yearn to send out better technology to suppress the fire front. We bomb the flames with water. We talk of hitting the fires hard and hitting them fast. Arsonists, it seems, are actually ‘terrorists’. The fires, we tell one another, are ‘a threat to national security’.

We all have to learn better when to retreat — and we have to find another word than ‘retreat’.

Right now in Victoria, as bereaved folk return to their country and renew their communities, our fellow Australians are conducting the most intriguing and important experiment. These bushfire towns — where the material legacy of the past can never survive for long — need to work harder than most to renew their local historical consciousness. There is a dangerous mismatch between the cyclic nature of fire



THERE ARE EMOTIONAL AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS TO ADAPTATION.  
THE GREATEST CHALLENGE IN FIRE RESEARCH IS CULTURAL.

But the military metaphors, however apt and enabling, make us believe that we can beat fire, somehow. They define heroism as staying and fighting. Leaving early, in such a culture, might be seen to be cowardly. At the moving national memorial service to the victims of Black Saturday, many speakers, in honouring the dead and their heroism, were also unwittingly cornering another generation. ‘Courage’, declared Kevin Rudd, ‘is a firefighter standing before the gates of hell unflinching, unyielding with eyes of steel saying, “Here I stand, I can do no other”’. Yet one of the triumphs of this recent tragedy is that not one firefighter died on Black Saturday, although an ACT firefighter did tragically die in the aftermath. On the day itself, fire officers knew when to retreat. It must have been a shocking decision to make, but it was the right one, or the death toll would have been much higher.

and the short-term memory of communities. There are emotional and political constraints to adaptation. The greatest challenge in fire research is cultural.

There will be more Black Fridays and Saturdays, and they’re not all black. We have to accept them and plan for them, like drought and flood. We should aim to survive them even if we can’t hope to prevent or control them. And we should celebrate, as I think we are already beginning to do, the stimulus that such fires give to community.<sup>15</sup> Modern Australian society, like Australian nature and like Aboriginal civilisation, will learn to see the positives about fire. We cherish the green growth that returns so quickly. We can feel pride that key concepts of fire ecology and models of bushfire behaviour were developed in Australia, that landscape-scale prescribed burning has been pioneered here as a method of bushfire management, and

that ‘the Australian Strategy’ contrasts with the more ‘muscle-bound, paramilitary response’ to fire in North America.<sup>16</sup> These innovations grew from a realisation that fire was so much a part of the Australian landscape and character that it could never be eliminated or suppressed. It had to be accepted and used. Perhaps we can even, sometimes, learn to see a fired landscape (of the right intensity and frequency) as beautiful, as ‘clean’, as Aboriginal people do.

Let me finish by returning to Leonard Stretton’s haunting words. There was another meaning to his declaration that ‘they had not lived long enough’. He was saying that lived experience alone, however vivid and traumatic, was never going to be enough to guide people in such circumstances. They also needed history. They needed — and we need it too — the distilled wisdom of past, inherited, learned experience. And not just of the recent human past, but of the ancient human past, and also of the deep biological past of the communities of trees. For in those histories lie the intractable patterns of our future. 🍷



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This is an extended version of my analysis of the Black Saturday fires which first appeared on 16 February 2009 in *Inside Story* (ed. Peter Browne) at <<http://inside.org.au/we-have-still-not-lived-long-enough/>>. I have also drawn on my article ‘“An unnatural disaster”?: Remembering and forgetting bushfire’ in *History Australia*, 6 (2), December 2009: 35-1-35-7.

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光緒庚辰嘉  
平吉旦山陰  
任明領年  
首序於春申甫

# BARBARIAN & CHINESE

## DRESS AS DIFFERENCE IN CHINESE ART<sup>1</sup>

» ANTONIA FINANNE

### PROLOGUE

In the early 1970s, the then Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney had a student organisation called SUCSA, a.k.a. Sydney University Chinese Studies Association. A pivotal figure in the association was Kam Louie, later to serve as Professor of Chinese at The Australian National University before taking up an appointment as Dean of Arts in the University of Hong Kong. Born in China, the future Dean was a local source of cultural knowledge about the People's Republic and the inspiration behind SUCSA's musical career. For a period roughly coterminous with the first Whitlam government, SUCSA regularly contributed choral items at Chinese community events in Dixon Street, especially on 1 October, China's National Day.

Our repertoire consisted largely of revolutionary songs, which typically had lines such as 'The People's Liberation Army's production is very great' and 'the American imperialists and their running dogs are increasingly isolated'. Most SUCSA members went on to study in China, where singing revolutionary songs was an established part of life, so learning these songs was a very useful aspect of our early Chinese education. Once in China, however, we also discovered that there were songs in our repertoire which could not be performed in public. Among these was *Su Wu tending sheep* (*Su Wu mu yang*), a song about a Han Dynasty official called Su Wu (140 – 60 BCE), who was detained by the Xiongnu 'barbarians' (*hu*)

(previous page)

FIG. 1. Ren Bonian, *Su Wu mu yang* (Su Wu tending sheep). Dated 1880. Beijing Palace Museum.

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on the frontier and forced to live among them for nineteen years. Innocents abroad, we took a while to understand why a song about a man living in exile in the first century BCE could be politically sensitive in the 1970s.

Three decades later, in the early years of the twenty-first century, auction houses in China were doing well out of paintings of Su Wu tending sheep (the latter always look more like goats, despite the standard English translation). Ren Bonian (1840-1896), a painter popular in his day and much acclaimed since, produced a number of paintings on this theme (fig.1, previous page)<sup>2</sup> and the best now

Su Wu's restoration to the position of national cultural icon does not alter the implications of the song, which projects a view of Chinese territory and the Chinese people at odds with the ideal of national unity. This is why, in the politically difficult years of the Cultural Revolution, it could not be sung. The territory once occupied by the Xiongnu now belongs to China, and the minority peoples who live in China's border regions are, like the Han Chinese majority, all regarded as part of a greater social grouping known as 'the Chinese people'. *Su Wu tending sheep* was frowned on in the pre-reform era both because it was an



(above)

FIG. 2. Unidentified artist (active early fifteenth century). *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Story of Lady Wenji, Episode 5: Encampment by a Stream.*

© METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. ACCESSION NO. 1973.120.3.

command prices of hundreds of thousands of yuan. Since the 1970s, of course, China had passed through a process of reform, and Su Wu had been rehabilitated. A memorial museum incorporating his tomb is now a tourist attraction in his home town, Wugong, in Shaanxi province. A statue in front of the museum shows a bearded figure buffeted by the wind. He carries a tufted staff, the symbol of his office and of Han imperial authority, and is accompanied by two goats. The composition was probably based on impressions derived from the many paintings of Su Wu executed by Ren Bonian, and like those paintings evokes the traditional song of the same name.

'old' song about a non-progressive force in history and because it presented the Han and the Xiongnu as inhabiting different lands and embracing different values. In its emphasis on difference, it is consistent with a long tradition of representations of the frontier in Chinese history. Clothing was one of the details used by graphic artists to depict the difference.

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Frederick Turner's partial definition of the frontier as 'the meeting ground between savagery and civilization' is applicable to the frontier in Chinese history, a shifting zone in geographical terms but one where 'this culture

of ours<sup>3</sup> always meets its opposite, a way of life and a set of rituals that distinguish barbarians from Chinese. In Su Wu's time, the frontier was the meeting ground between Xiongnu and Han, terms which connoted savagery and civilisation. In contemporary Chinese society, 'Han' denotes the major ethnic group, accounting for more than ninety percent of the population of China, but at that time it was a reference to subjects of the Han dynasty. 'Xiongnu' (literally 'ferocious slave') was its antonym, and referred to the mainly nomadic subjects of a great but unstable empire that abutted the Han empire in the north-west. The final line of the song *Su Wu tending sheep*, 'zhong jiao Xiongnu xinjing dansui gongfu Han de wei' bluntly juxtaposes Xiongnu and Han. The line can be translated roughly as: 'finally [Su Wu] made the Xiongnu tremble in awe at his demonstration of Han virtue'.

From the graphically depicted differences between the Han and the Xiongnu in narrative paintings of the frontier, it can be surmised that the Chinese sense of self was strongly informed by a consciousness of the alien, horse-riding, warlike peoples who populated the frontier. Mark Edward Lewis has neatly summarised the early Han-dynasty view of material life in the contrasting cultural spheres which constituted the known world: 'the nomads ate meat and drank milk; the Chinese ate grain. The Xiongnu wore skins and furs; the Chinese wore hemp and silk. The Chinese had walled towns, fields, and houses; the Xiongnu [supposedly] [...] had none'.<sup>4</sup> Virtually all of these paired opposites are graphically represented in one of the most famous treatments of the Han-Xiongnu encounter, the Song Dynasty (960-1279) illustrations to an eighth-century song cycle known as *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Tale of Lady Wenji*.<sup>5</sup>

The Xiongnu are thought by some to be identical with the Huns who appeared in Europe in the fourth century. Although the evidence is not strong, the parallel is analytically suggestive. The idea of Attila the Hun in Europe is comparable to the idea of the Xiongnu in China, and indeed there are similar stories about the Hun and the Xiongnu, barbarians in the West and East respectively. In Europe, the legend of St Ursula tells of the martyrdom of a princess who refused to



marry a Hun chieftain, putatively in the fourth century. In China the legend of Cai Wenji (b. 177 CE), tells of a well-born woman's return to her parents after twelve years of enforced marriage to a Xiongnu prince. In both cases, an encounter with the barbarians provides a way of articulating a value central to the civilised or cultured society: virginity in Christendom, filial piety in Confucianism.

Both legends have inspired numerous paintings, which again are worth comparing. The illustrations to *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Tale of Lady Wenji* exist in various forms, of which the most complete (although by no means the finest) is a late version owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 2). This handscroll, copy of an original tentatively attributed to Li Tang (c. 1050-1130),<sup>6</sup> is in most respects quite unlike the legend of St Ursula as depicted by Hans Memling (c. 1430-1494) on the shrine in St John's Hospital in Bruges (fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> Yet each of these works is a series of illustrations of a legend featuring a barbarian prince, the one Hun and the other Xiongnu. The artists came to comparable conclusions as to how to represent this figure. Memling, painting at a time that the Ottoman Empire was rapidly expanding, depicted the Hun as



(above)  
 FIG. 3. Hans Memling, *The Reliquary of St Ursula*, Panel 6. Dated 1489.

© MEMLING MUSEUM, ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL, BRUGES.

a Turk, or at least in a turban. The Chinese handscroll shows the Xiongnu prince dressed in the style of the Khitans, founders of the Liao Dynasty (916-1125). This dynasty, presiding over an empire on China's northern frontier in the tenth century, coexisted with the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), which controlled the greater part of the terrain occupied by Han Chinese. The Khitans developed a written language that looked like Chinese (the subject of pioneering research by Macquarie University's Professor Daniel Kane),<sup>8</sup> and left a rich visual record of themselves, particularly in the form of tomb murals. Like the Ottomans in Europe, they were long visible on the horizon of the known, cultured world, posing both a threat and a puzzle to the Song Chinese.

can be recognised in popular story cycles, but they were normatively suppressed in favour of civil, literary values, especially during the Song Dynasty.<sup>11</sup> To the extent that the frontier was a 'meeting ground between savagery and civilization', it was best represented by horse-riding, armed barbarians confronting gown-wearing Chinese.

Variations in this configuration show that the frontier was also a place of cultural negotiation, 'a place of reversal', as Jean Franco writes, '[...] where the civilized may become barbarian and the barbarian civilized.'<sup>12</sup> In the fourth century BCE, King Wu Ling of Zhao attained ascendancy over the Xiongnu by 'changing into barbarian dress, and shooting from horseback'.<sup>13</sup> In the twelfth century, a

THE FRONTIER WAS A PLACE OF CULTURAL NEGOTIATION, 'A PLACE OF REVERSAL', AS JEAN FRANCO WRITES, '[...] WHERE THE CIVILIZED MAY BECOME BARBARIAN AND THE BARBARIAN CIVILIZED.'

The capacity of each of these legends to delineate contrasting 'cultural spheres' is also evident from paintings. Two paintings of St Ursula in the Hotel de Clûny impressed Anna Brownwell Jameson for just this reason. 'The artist', she observed, 'has taken great pains to distinguish the heathen and barbarous court of England from the civilized and Christian court of Brittany'.<sup>9</sup> Correspondingly, the opening and closing scenes of *Eighteen Songs* provide a sharp contrast between the warlike barbarians engaged in sacking the city, and the peaceable Chinese going about their business in the same city after the cessation of conflict. The barbarians wear armour and carry weapons. The Chinese wear long garments or short, according to their social status, and pay their respects to each other with hands folded beneath sleeves, all in accordance with sentiments articulated in the concluding stanza of the poem:

I return home and see my kin [...]
 As I hold towel and comb, I rediscover the
 good rituals and etiquette.
 Touching the qin again enables me to live or
 die without regret.<sup>10</sup>

Here we reach the limits of comparison. The chivalric code and martial values of European societies were not entirely alien to China and

commentary on barbarian people entering into the Chinese orbit described them as 'unfastening the silk cap-strings [on their armor], submitting and paying respects [to the emperor]; putting away their weapons, and receiving the calendar'.<sup>14</sup> Such accommodations illustrate the norm, which was a juxtaposition of barbarian and Chinese as hunter and farmer, warrior and scribe, the one dressed in skins and the other in silks.

\* \* \*

**What is the relationship** between clothes in works of art and the actual garments worn by people in history? In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Anne Hollander investigated 'how clothes in works of art are connected with clothes in real life', concluding that a systematic relationship exists between painting and fashion in European history. A similar relationship may have pertained in China: that is, fashion burgeoned in Chinese cities synchronously with the proliferation of illustrated books for women and the expansion of the art market in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. But this is to consider the relationship from the perspective of people who wore clothes. How painters decided to depict clothes in the first instance is another matter, particularly if their subject was historical.

One source of information for painters working on frontier themes was descriptions in historical works. In the case of the Xiongnu, educated people in imperial China must have had some impression of what clothing was worn because standard reading matter included works such as the official histories of the Han dynasty, and the *Historical Records (Shi ji)* by Sima Qian (145?-86 BCE). From these it could be ascertained that the barbarians ‘wore their hair down and fastened their clothing on the left’, and ‘dressed in clothes made of skins, and used furs as quilts.’<sup>15</sup> Furs, skins, and a left-hand fastening accordingly feature in barbarian dress as depicted in Chinese painting. Of these features, the left-hand fastening had canonical status. Confucius himself said: ‘But for Guan Zhong, we should now be wearing our hair unbound, and the lappets of our coats buttoning on the left side.’<sup>16</sup>

These classical references were echoed in later texts. Liu Shang (fl. 773 CE) drew on them in *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*, in which he told the story of Lady Wenji. Forced into a barbarian marriage, living in a tent on the steppe far from kith and kin, the disconsolate Wenji laments:

I clean my hair with mutton fat, but it is  
seldom combed  
The collar of my lambskin robe is buttoned  
on the left;  
The fox lapels and badger sleeves are  
rank-smelling  
By day I wear these clothes, by night I sleep  
in them.<sup>17</sup> (Rorex, 5)

The Song-dynasty illustrations to the songs accordingly show Xiongnu men in fur-trimmed hats, as well as carrying quivers of leopard skin and wearing gowns fastened on the left-hand side. For some reason the artist chose to depict the women, including Lady Wenji, in right-fastening gowns. This may have been an assertion on his part of Wenji’s cultural influence on barbarian society.

Another resource for the painter of historical events was other paintings. In the Palace Museum’s *Zhuo xie tu* (Respite), a handscroll painting of a Khitan hunting party taking a break, Khitan artist Hu Gui (fl. tenth century) portrays figures which, taken individually,

are almost identical to those who people *Eighteen Songs*, right down to the leopard-skin quivers. The distinctive hairstyles of Khitan men, featuring two pigtailed hanging from the temples and sometimes a shaven head, are well-known from tomb murals and appear in both these paintings. Likewise, every Khitan (or Xiongnu) man is shown wearing boots, in pointed contrast to the Chinese men in *Eighteen Songs*, all of whom wear shoes.<sup>18</sup> The one significant difference in terms of costume is that the women in Hu Gui’s painting wear their gowns fastened on the left. The men in both paintings have the elongated torso and slender hips that Angela Falco Howard finds characteristic of Liao (Khitan) statuary.<sup>19</sup> In brief, there is little to distinguish the Khitan painting of contemporary Khitans from the presumably Han Chinese painting of the ancient Xiongnu.

Given this similarity, the question of how the Xiongnu were to be depicted by the painter of *Eighteen Songs* might perhaps be rephrased as a question about how the *Khitan* were to be depicted. In other words, the theme of the painting may well have been secondary to the subject matter, which is for the most part Khitan land, Khitan material culture, Khitan people. In the analysis of Robert Rorex and Wen Fong, ‘to the early Southern Song viewer the [painting] *Eighteen Songs* represented no mere historical romance but a real, all-pervading national trauma’,<sup>20</sup> a reference to the constant threat of and actual invasions by peoples who were referred to as *hu* or *fan*, i.e. barbarian. But Irene Leung finds in the painting evidence that the painters were respectfully recognising the culture of their non-Chinese neighbours — or at least of the Khitan — and coming to terms with it in a way consistent with the Song’s status as a lesser empire. Comparing this handscroll and its look-alike predecessors with a sixteenth-century handscroll painting by You Qiu (fl. 1553-1591+), lends weight to Leung’s conclusion. The subject of You Qiu’s painting is not Lady Wenji but a slightly earlier historical figure, Wang Zhaojun (fl. first century BCE), but the two have much in common (fig. 4).

\* \* \*

**Wang Zhaojun was a palace lady** in the court of Emperor Han Yuandi (r. 48-33 BCE) and



(above)

FIG. 4. You Qiu, *Zhaojun chusai tujuan* (Zhaojun’s Departure for the Frontier), detail. Dated 1554. Shanghai Museum.

PUBLISHED SHANGHAI BOWUGUAN AND LIANGNINGSHENG BOWUGUAN, (EDS), SHIMAO FENGGUO: *ZHONGGUO GUDAI RENWU HUA JINGPINJI* (ENGLISH TITLE: HIGHLIGHTS OF ANCIENT CHINESE FIGURE PAINTINGS FROM THE LIAONING PROVINCIAL MUSEUM AND THE SHANGHAI MUSEUM), EX.CAT. (SHANGHAI: SHIJI CHUBAN GUFEN YOUXIAN GONGSI AND SHANGHAI GUJI CHUBANSHE, 2008), VOL. 2, p. 411.

was offered in marriage to the Xiongnu Khan (*shanyu*) as part of a peace settlement. Unlike Cai Wenji and Su Wu, she never returned to Han territory, but like them she became a legendary figure, the subject of poems, dramas, and paintings. Painting history shows that to some degree her legend became entwined and confused with Wenji's. 'The Return of Wenji' (*Wenji gui Han*) and 'Zhaozhun's departure for the Frontier' (*Zhaojun chusai*)<sup>21</sup> are titles that could be indiscriminately applied to a number of frontier paintings, as demonstrated by two almost identical works held by the Jilin Provincial Museum and the Osaka Municipal museum respectively. The former depicts Wenji's return, the latter Zhaojun's departure.<sup>22</sup> The major difference between the two is the addition in the latter of a maid carrying a *pipa*, or Chinese lute. The *pipa* is steadily associated with the legend of Wang Zhaojun, who is said

The beginning of the handscroll shows the wintry scene of a river that the party has already crossed. The men depicted riding on the further side appear to be Mongols. With facial hair, hooked noses, heavy faces, wearing trousers and boots, they present a forbidding appearance. Two timid-looking women are riding in their midst. They wear what appear to be barbarian hats (*hu mao*), but their gowns, worn over pleated skirts and tied with knotted girdles, are in the Chinese style familiar from Ming figure paintings, and provide a striking contrast to the clothes of the barbarians.

Rendered in black and white 'outline style' (*baimiao*), this unusually dark painting projects a view of frontier relations consistent with the actual history of Ming-Mongol contact, which was marked by the conspicuous absence of marriage alliances.<sup>27</sup> The contrast between the barbarian men and the Chinese women is

THE CLOTHING OF ALL THE PARTY BUT PARTICULARLY OF WENJI  
IS RENDERED WITH EXTRAORDINARY ATTENTION TO DETAIL.

to have played it to 'soothe her longing for home'.<sup>23</sup> Wenji's instrument, as indicated in the verse cited above, is the *qin*, or Chinese zither.

The legend of Wang Zhaojun has taken various forms over time. A ninth-century version associated with Dunhuang presents a sympathetic picture of the Khan and includes detailed descriptions of Zhaojun's life 'among the barbarians'.<sup>24</sup> This version brings to mind Irene Leung's reading of the *Eighteen Songs* and is consistent with the marriage alliance policy that characterised frontier relations during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). By contrast, the early seventeenth-century edition of the play *Autumn in the Han Palace* fails even to get Zhaojun across the border. Instead of proceeding to married life among the Xiongnu, she flings herself into the river demarcating Chinese and barbarian territory.<sup>25</sup>

You Qiu does not portray a suicide, but his is a grim painting. The date of its execution, 1554, suggests a response on his part to contemporary border problems posed by pirates on the coast and Mongols on the northern frontier. You Qiu is known as a painter of 'fair ladies' (*meiren*),<sup>26</sup> but in 1554 he produced a painting full of movement and violence.

in keeping with the lines of the play *Autumn in the Han Palace*, where aspects of Han and *hu* culture are constantly juxtaposed.<sup>28</sup> The contrary is the case in *Eighteen Songs*, where the painter's treatment of the contrast is gentler than the lines of the poem he purports to illustrate: the fur hats are few, skins are not apparent in actual clothing, and the mien of the barbarians is gentle. In commenting on the clothing depicted in the earlier scroll, Rorex and Fong in fact found it difficult to distinguish between Chinese and Khitan.<sup>29</sup>

How might these frontier tales have been viewed on the other side of the border? Surprisingly, there does exist a painting that enables us to reflect on a 'barbarian' view of these encounters: Zhang Yu's *Return of Wenji* (fig. 5), executed in the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). The Jin was founded by the Jurchen people and was effectively a successor to the Liao although eventually extending over a much greater area of China. Unlike the Khitans, the Jurchen left few reminders of how they looked. For this reason, Zhang Yu's painting is frequently published in books of costume history. By comparing textual evidence with the painting, costume historians have

identified the following items of Wenji's dress as characteristic of Jin Dynasty clothing: the marten-fur hat, long-legged boots with pointed toes, and cloud cape, as well as her hairstyle, consisting of long pigtails at the side of the face.<sup>30</sup> A Chinese envoy accompanies the party, distinguished by his official hat and fan. The remaining horsemen are all 'barbarian', although it is worth noting that the Jin Dynasty forbade the use of this term (*fan*, not *hu*) in 1191.<sup>31</sup>

The painting is difficult to read in terms of the cultural politics of Jin-Song relations,



but clearly the artist has made some decisions different from those of the *Eighteen Songs* painter. The painting is of the return rather than the forward journey. Wenji looks steadfast, rather than timid, unhappy, or irresolute. The clothing of all the party but particularly of Wenji is rendered with extraordinary attention to detail, the overall effect being of a rather assertive display of Jurchen culture.<sup>32</sup> It can be concluded that if tribute was being paid to the Southern Song, as suggested by the focus on the return among other things, it was being offered by an equal.

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In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the frontier was tamed and incorporated into a vast empire ruled by the Manchus in association with their increasingly loyal Chinese servants — the scholar-officials of the empire. The Manchus liked to think of themselves as descendants of the Jurchen. They cultivated a strong historical genealogy to legitimate their possession of the throne. They endeavoured to retain a martial ethos, manifest in their dress, with its close fitting gown, narrow sleeves, horse-shoe cuffs, horse-riding jacket — all markedly different from the

extravagant robes of the Ming gentleman. Chinese scholar-officials were forced to adopt both the Manchu gown, and Manchu hairstyle, which they saw as barbarian and by which they were initially appalled.

The Manchus hated talk of 'barbarians' and were watchful of any references to the border peoples. From this perspective, Hua Yan's eighteenth-century portrayal of Zhaojun's departure for the frontier poses a slight conundrum

except insofar as Zhaojun had lost some of her Ming-dynasty intransigence. Hua Yan (1682-1756) was a southern painter, born in Fujian but active in Hangzhou and occasionally Yangzhou, leading to his occasional inclusion among the so-called 'eccentric' (*guai*) artists of Yangzhou. He was widely travelled, including in the north-east, and his oeuvre is marked by an interest in the frontier uncommon in his circle.<sup>33</sup> At least three paintings of Zhaojun are attributed to Hua Yan, along with one of Wenji, all of them showing a rather fragile-looking young woman holding a pipa as she is led away on either a horse or a camel by her captor (fig. 6, following page). She wears a 'sleeping rabbit' (*wotu*) fur

(left)

FIG. 5. Zhang Yu, *Wenji gui Han tu* (The return of Lady Wenji). Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), detail. Jilin Provincial Museum.

PUBLISHED IN WANG RONGQIANG, *RENWUHUA BIMO JIFA XIANGJIE* (EXPLAINING THE BRUSH AND INK TECHNIQUE IN FIGURE PAINTING) NANNING: GUANGXI MEISHU CHUBANSHE, 2001, p. 114.

我本漢家子將適單于庭辭訣未及終前驅  
 已抗旌葆御涕流離輟馬悲且鳴哀鬱傷五內  
 涕淚霑珠纓行日已遠遂過匈奴城送我於穹  
 廬加我閩氏名殊類非所安雖貴非所榮父子見  
 陵辱對之慙且驚我自良不易默以苟生苟生  
 亦何聊積思常憤盈願假飛鴻翼乘之遊征飛  
 鴻不我顧佇立以屏營昔為匣中玉今為冀上  
 英朝華不足歡甘與秋草并傳語後世人遠  
 嫁難為情  
 新羅人寫并錄石字倫句



cap of the sort frequently depicted in winter scenes of this period, and a fur-lined jacket, but the folds of her clothing and the delicacy of the figure bring to mind the sing-song girls of places like Suzhou and Yangzhou. Indeed we know that these girls posed for artists. The version held by the Shanghai Museum, along with one established forgery, carries a poem by Shi Chong (249-300), the first of many written about Zhaojun in the course of China's literary history. The opening lines establish the captive's identification with her Han origins, and the trauma of going into exile:

I am a child of the Han, deemed suitable for  
 the household of the Khan.  
 Before the farewells are over, the advance  
 carriage raises the banner.  
 High and low, all are weeping; the horse in  
 harness whinnies in sorrow.  
 My belly is knotted in grief, my tears are  
 ribbons of pearls.<sup>34</sup>

Another of these paintings carries a poem by Du Fu (712-770), which concludes with lines even more challenging: 'For a thousand years the lute speaks a Tartar[hu] tongue / We make out grief and hatred expressed within the tune'.<sup>35</sup>

While the poems place these paintings unambiguously in the tradition of Han-*hu* confrontations, a number of factors suggest they should be considered as part of a rapidly expanding genre of 'fair lady' or 'beauty' (*meiren*) paintings, which existed in the Ming but experienced a boom in the Qing.<sup>36</sup> These factors include Hua Yan's social position as a professional painter, the simple composition and modest dimensions of the paintings (around 125 centimetres long), together with their hanging-scroll format — suitable for middle-range buyers in the art market; and the existence of numerous other decorative hanging scroll paintings of Zhaojun, all of which show her as elegantly dressed, sometimes strikingly so. It should be noted that comparable portrayals

(left)

FIG. 6. Hua Yan, *Ming Fei chu sai* (The Bright Consort departs for the frontier). Eighteenth century. Shanghai Museum.

PUBLISHED IN YANGZHOU HUAPAI SHUHUA QUANJI: HUA YAN  
 (CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTING BY THE YANGZHOU PAINTING CIRCLE)  
 (TIANJIN: TIANJIN RENMIN CHUBANSHE, 1998), pp. 183-4.

exist of Wenji, although she did not have quite Zhaojun's status as a 'beauty'.<sup>37</sup>

Commenting on the somewhat later frontier paintings executed by Ren Bonian, Yu-chih Lai remarked on this artist's attention to sartorial detail: he 'adorns his Su Wu in a fur-trimmed coat and a robe with long, elegant sleeves and an ornamental blue ribbon hanging almost to the ground', presenting a figure of 'unprecedented youthfulness and handsome charm'.<sup>38</sup> Lai explains Ren's novel approach to this hallowed subject in terms of the art market in Shanghai. As a Treaty Port and a rapidly expanding centre of international trade, Shanghai was home to an increasingly materialist society with a concern for appearances that was reflected in consumer choices. In brief, people in Shanghai liked pretty pictures. Yet Hua Yan was painting for a market that has been described in comparable terms.<sup>39</sup> Considered alongside earlier paintings of Zhaojun and Wenji as 'beauties', Ren Bonian's painting of Su Wu looking resplendent rather than tattered seems consistent with developments in the art market and trends in taste before that time.

The most striking aspect of Ren Bonian's frontier paintings lies not in Su Wu's sartorial splendor, but rather in the barbarians, who are conspicuous by their absence. This leaves the impression that the north-west frontier had ceased to loom large in the Chinese imagination, and indeed Lai analyses Ren's frontier paintings in terms of a 'new frontier': the coast. The barbarians whom Ren Bonian chose not to paint were thus not the Manchus (whom he could not anyway have painted for political reasons), or even the Xiongnu, but rather the Westerners, who like the Khitan, the Jurchen and the Mongols for some earlier painters were very much part of Ren's present.

\* \* \*

In the early twentieth century, Chinese dress styles began to change in response both to the cosmopolitanism of the Treaty Ports and to political change, which finally resulted in the collapse of the Qing empire in 1911 and a corresponding collapse of Manchu dress codes. Curiously, Chinese men were left with a choice of barbarian clothes to wear: on the one side was the Western suit, strongly favoured in the

early years of the Republic; on the other side was the Manchu gown (fig. 7). The gown won out in the short term: it was seen, for want of anything better, as more Chinese than the suit. Just as curiously, Chinese women ended up



wearing a garment that evolved from various elements in Chinese, western and Manchu dress, but that came to be known as the *qipao*, which in effect means the Manchu gown. This has survived as the main form of Han Chinese ethnic dress, replacing the loose jacket and pleated skirt (*aoqun*) that defined Han women's dress under Manchu rule.

In recent years there has been a movement in China to revive an indigenous form of dress for Han Chinese. Adherents of this movement, the *Hanfu* movement, are seeking to popularise ancient forms of dress for ceremonial occasions. An occasional eccentric has been known to don this sort of clothing even for daily wear. Avoiding the fusion styles of the Tang dynasty onwards, *Hanfu* adherents have gone back to a time when the difference between Han and Xiongnu, Chinese and barbarian, was arguably unambiguous.



(above)  
FIG. 7. Alternative forms of semi-formal wear decreed by the new Republican government in 1912. *Zhonghua minzu fuzhitu* (National dress of China) (Nanjing: Gohuo weichihui, 1912).

The Chinese government likes the patriotism evinced by this sort of movement, but has to counter the implications of the thinking behind it, particularly in light of troublesome ethnic relations in Tibet and Xinjiang. In the summer of 2009, as the country prepared to celebrate sixty years of rule by the Communist Party, the frontier was the subject of massive propaganda campaigns in which Han and non-Han were pictured shoulder to shoulder, cheek to cheek, in demonstrations of ethnic harmony, national unity, and a spirit of economic development. Myths that used to be about separation, suffering and longing for home had long since been rewritten as myths about intercultural marriage and the merging of cultures to form the Chinese nation.

Su Wu and Wenji have a relatively modest place in this new frontier, but Zhaojun, brought to the stage in 1978 and to the television screen in 2008, has a prominent position. Visitors to Zhaojun's tomb in Inner Mongolia can there contemplate an entirely new set of images of her, most notably a bronze statue showing her riding companionably alongside the Khan, and a large bas-relief sculpture, showing her face alongside his in a style familiar from revolutionary posters of workers, soldiers and peasants. Unlike in earlier centuries, when both Han bride and barbarian groom were usually shown in the dress styles of the time, these figures are presented in the gowns and cloaks of a rather unspecific past. They gesture only in a generic way to a difference that is no longer supposed to matter. ❀



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1. An earlier version of this paper was presented as a lecture in the New South Wales Art Gallery 2009 Arts of Asia series 'Decoding Dress', coordinated by Ann Macarthur, Senior Coordinator of Asian Programs. My thanks to Dr Freda Murck, of the Palace Museum, Beijing, for commenting on the revised and expanded paper.

2. See Yu-chih Lai, 'Remapping Borders: Ren Bonian's Frontier Paintings and Urban Life in 1880s Shanghai', *Art Bulletin*, 86, 3 (Sept 2004), pp. 550-72.
3. A reference to the translation of *si wen* in Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
4. Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qing and Han* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 2007), p. 133.
5. Robert A. Rorex and Wen Fong, *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Story of Lady Wen-chi* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974).
6. Julia K. Murray, *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 81.
7. This is one of a series of miniatures rendered for the Shrine of St Ursula, held in the Memling Museum, at St John's Hospital in Bruges. According to Mrs. [Anna] Jameson (*Sacred and Legendary Art*, Vol. 2 [London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857], p. 516), 'There is a good set of engravings (coloured after the originals) in the British Museum'.
8. Daniel Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
9. Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, p. 516.
10. Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, verse 18, n.p.n. Romanisation adapted. On this 'happily-ever-after' conclusion, see Dore J. Levy, 'Transforming Archetypes in Chinese Poetry and Painting: The Case of Ts'ai Yen', *Asia Major*, Third Series, VI, 2 (1993): pp. 147-68. My thanks to Freda Murck for this reference.
11. See John King Fairbank's discussion of 'the symbiosis of wen and wu' in Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 108-112.
12. Jean Franco, *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*, ed. by Mary Louise Pratt and Katherine Elizabeth Newman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 330.
13. Dai Ping, *Zhongguo minzu fushi wenhua yanjiu* (Studies in the clothing culture of the peoples of China), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), p. 182.
14. Adapted from Irene S. Leung, 'The Frontier Imaginary in the Song Dynasty: Revisiting Cai Yan's "Barbarian Captivity" and Return' (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2001), p. 10.
15. Zhang Ruili and Zhao Bin, 'Qin Han Xiongnu fuzhuang xingzhi tanxi' [Exploratory analysis of the design of Xiongnu clothing in the Qin and Han dynasties], *Xiyu yanjiu* [Research on Western China] 2 (2008), pp. 62-7.

16. James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), p. 282. Book 14, Hsien Wan, Chapter. XVIII, 2. Guan Zhong (725-645 bce) was a statesman in the state of Qi.
17. Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, verse 5, n.p.n.
18. This description applies also to figures in a set of four album leaves in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which are painted in slightly more detail than figures in the handscroll. A view of one leaf is available on the museum website, under the title 'Wenji and her family' (accession no. 12.898).
19. Angela Falco Howard, 'Buddhist Sculptures of the Liao Dynasty: A Reassessment of Osvold Siren's Study', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 56 (1984), p. 6.
20. Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, Introduction, n.p.n. Romanisation adapted.
21. I follow here the translation of the title of You Qiu's painting used by Shanghai Museum. *Shimao fengqing: Zhongguo gudai renwu huajing pinji* (English title: Highlights of Ancient Chinese Figure Painting from the Liaoning Provincial Museum and the Shanghai Museum), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), Vol. 2, (Exhibit 60), p. 410. 'Zhaojun passing through the frontier' would seem a more accurate translation, particularly for this painting, which shows her already on the other side of the river that constitutes the border.
22. Susan Bush, 'Five Paintings of Animal Subjects or Narrative Themes and Their Relevance to Chin Culture', in *China Under Jurchen Rule: Essays on Chin Intellectual and Cultural History*, ed. by Hoyt Cleveland Tilleman and Stephen H. West (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 195-6.
23. John Myers, *The Way of the Pipa* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1992), p. 8.
24. Eugene Eoyang, 'The Wang Chao-chun Legend: Configurations of the Classis', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 4, 1 (Jan. 1982), p. 4.
25. Kimberley Besio, 'Gender, Loyalty, and the Reproduction of the Wang Zhaojun Legend: Some Social Ramifications of Drama in the Late Ming', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 40, 2 (1997), p. 263.
26. Ren Daobin, 'Mingdai Jiangnan shinütu mianxiang moshihua tan wei' [The routinisation of painting of female faces in Ming Jiangnan], *Meishu shilun* [Fine Arts History] (2009), p. 9.
27. Ning Chia, 'Women in China's Frontier Politics: Heqin', in *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition*, ed. by Sherry J. Mou (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), p. 44.
28. Besio, 'Gender, Loyalty, and the Reproduction of the Wang Zhaojun', p. 263.
29. See Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, commentary on verse 13. Wenji's hat is obviously Khitan, but the gown is fastened on the right; her husband wears a gown that is elsewhere clearly depicted as fastened on the left.
30. Hua Mei, *Fushi yu Zhongguo wenhua* [Dress and Chinese culture] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2001), pp. 290-1; Zhou Xidai, *Zhongguo gudai fushi shi* [History of Chinese clothing before modern times] (Taipei: Nantian shuju, 1989), p. 369.
31. Susan Bush, 'Five Paintings of Animal Subjects', p. 195.
32. See detailed discussion in Bush, 'Five Paintings of Animal Subjects'.
33. See Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü, 'Traveling to the Frontier: Hua Yan's *Camel in the Snow*', in *Lifestyle and Entertainment in Yangzhou*, ed. by Lucie Olivová and Vibeke Børdahl (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2009), pp. 347-75.
34. Han Xin, 'Hua Yan zhi Liang fu "Zhaojun chusai tu"' [A study of the two Hua Yan paintings of 'Zhaojun departs for the frontier'], in *Hua Yan yanjiu* [Studies of Hua Yan], (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2003), pp. 256-9.
35. See Paul F. Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 194.
36. Shen Yizheng, 'Lidai meiren huaxuan: xu' [Preface to 'selected paintings of fair ladies'], in *Lidai meiren huaxuan* [English title: Selected Paintings of Beauties Through the Ages], ed. by He Gongshang (Taipei: Yishu tushu gongsi, 1999), p. 7.
37. An example is *Cai Yan xiang* [Portrait of Cai Wenji] by Jin Tingbiao (d. 1767). Published in He Gongshang (ed.), *Lidai meiren huaxuan*, plate 110. Provenance not given.
38. Yu-chih Lai, 'Remapping Borders', p. 565.
39. See Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü, *A Bushel of Pearls: Painting for Sale in Eighteenth-Century Yangchow*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

# Can We Afford to be Without Multilingualism?

## *A Scientist's Lay Perspective<sup>1</sup>*

» PETER HØJ

### (1) A PERSONAL LANGUAGE JOURNEY: DEFINING MOMENTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

*L*anguages have played a crucial role in my life, and while I am here today as a lay commentator, I am also delighted to have received a 'courageous' invitation from the Academy's Language Studies Committee to share with you my simple views on the need for improved linguistic competence in Australia, a country of rich but arguably unrealised language potential. I will seemingly jump from a traditional use of the term 'language', for example English and Chinese, to a broader

tongue has directly contributed to the success I have enjoyed in both my working and personal lives. In a small way it has also allowed me to inform and be informed by important policy debates in this country from an Australian and Scandinavian perspective.

Despite this perceived advantage, my language journey has not always been easy. In fact, I encountered my first obstacle at the age of seven. I had been held back from starting school at the age of six because of my difficulties in enunciation.

Intensive lessons with a speech pathologist eventually resolved the problem, though I continued to struggle with articulating the

WHILE THE REST OF THE WORLD GOES ABOUT HONING THEIR ENGLISH FLUENCY,  
MONOGLOT AUSTRALIANS ARE FAILING TO RECIPROCATE.

use and introduce the concept of disciplinary monolingualism. I hope it will make sense as I try to synthesise those concepts.

Let me begin by reflecting on my own unremarkable but nevertheless illustrative language journey. It is true to say I would not be where I am today without the advantages of bilingualism. Nor would I have had the meaningful cultural exchanges that have enriched my life and opened up doors of opportunity that would have otherwise remained closed. For me, being able to think, dream and express myself in more than one

meaning of the material I was reading in class. I hazard a guess that I understood the reading material perfectly well, but due to an inability to communicate this understanding, I was not able to have an effective exchange with my teacher and was marked accordingly. The lesson this experience taught me, and the disadvantage of not being understood and excluded from meaningful engagement, has stayed with me for the rest of my life.

Growing up in Denmark certainly had particular advantages. As a small country of only five million people, it has always

(above)

Montage background:  
**Lost Camel Patterns**  
by Maureen Keogh.

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understood the considerable risk of its citizens not being able to communicate in languages other than their own mother tongue. As a matter of course we were taught English and German as core subjects in the middle years of school and compulsory French for three years in senior high school. Latin was also offered as an option in high school, but was mandatory for entry into Medicine. And this was just the minimum language requirement: students who wished to commence their language education earlier or continue it for longer could certainly do so.

Extensive language tuition has benefited me hugely later in life, but was also a valued asset during my younger years as a Eurail-tripper around the continent. Despite some minor language indiscretions along the way, I have generally found that the attempt to speak to locals in their native language has brought about both tangible and intangible benefits, one being the cultural capital accrued for 'having a go' at linguistic competence.

What I have discovered since leaving school is that my fortunes have only grown with my increasing ability to communicate in the language of my audience. This language is not necessarily English, German or Danish or any other *lingua franca*, but instead a particular *cultural* language that is spoken within a specific disciplinary or contextual setting. For example, the ability to communicate in a relatively sophisticated research language while touring the Riverland in South Australia and enjoying the offer of home-stays with research levy-paying grape growers in mixed farming enterprises as a Foundation Professor in Viticultural Science at Adelaide University springs to mind. As such it is not always the particular language that is important, but the overriding ability to communicate with meta-awareness that is key. It is this skill that has unique and powerful advantages in international, multicultural and cross-disciplinary contexts.

## (2) POSITIONING STATEMENT: THE RISK OF MONOLINGUALISM

We are living in an era of 'Global English'. In his report titled *English Next*,<sup>2</sup> British linguist David Graddol estimates that in the near

future around two billion people will be fluent in English, with this figure climbing to three billion in the next forty years. The proliferation of English across world cultures is astonishing. It is therefore vital for Australia's cultural and economic wellbeing that our citizens are accomplished users and vectors of English: our ability to understand one another and be understood internationally depends on it.

However, the mass spread of global English comes with a warning. As the ability to communicate in English becomes a standard skill for millions of educated people, there is a risk that English will lose its privileged status and become commonplace in many parts of the world. Those who can speak only English, as is the case for a large fraction of Australians,

(below)

Peter Høj meeting Chinese Premier Wen Jia Bao in 2006 on the occasion of celebrating the Chinese National Science Foundation's twenty-year anniversary.

AUTHOR'S OWN PHOTOGRAPH.



will lose their linguistic advantage to those who can speak English *and* one or more other international tongue(s).<sup>3</sup>

English is already being rivalled by Hindi and Spanish for the number of speakers, though Mandarin continues to dominate with the largest number of speakers of any mother-tongue language. This I believe will have some inevitable consequences.

We can, in my view, not afford to be complacent and put all our faith in the enduring relevance of English alone. While

the rest of the world goes about honing their English fluency, monoglot Australians are failing to reciprocate by learning the languages of our major cultural and trading partners. By putting all of our eggs into the English-only basket, we may run a risk of relative cultural and economic isolation.

In the words of the University of Melbourne's Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, 'It is a disadvantage to not know English, and it is a disadvantage to know only English'.<sup>4</sup>

### (3) DISCLAIMER 1

**Before proceeding any further,** I would like to pause and offer two important disclaimers.

The first is that I am a biochemist and not a humanities researcher. I do not come from a scholarly background in linguistics and I make no claim to being an authority on language strategy. I am merely here as an advocate for

speaking nations on that list represent seventy-six percent of the total Australian wine exports. What is especially noteworthy is that Germany is the biggest importer of wine in the world by a good margin, and yet our exports to both the UK and the USA are each more than tenfold those to Germany. I hypothesise that the skewed nature of our exports can to a large extent be attributed to the comfort we take in dealing with countries for which English is the shared and official language.

Similar disadvantages seem to be reflected in the ongoing debate about how best to organise and fund Australia's higher education system. Australia traditionally benchmarks the performance of its higher education and innovation systems against those in the USA and UK. However, there are countries with smaller but strong economies such as Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, which clearly outperform the USA and the UK

'IT IS A DISADVANTAGE TO NOT KNOW ENGLISH, AND IT IS A DISADVANTAGE TO KNOW ONLY ENGLISH'. - PROFESSOR JOSEPH LO BIANCO

the breaking down of language and discipline barriers, a cause the Academy has actively engaged in by inviting me to deliver the seventh Louis Triebel Lecture.

I have, however, spent almost three years as the CEO of the Australian Research Council and during that time I came to appreciate the enormous contributions humanities scholars can make to society. At the same time I also realised that such scholars can suffer disadvantage if they fail to use the language most appropriate to a broader target audience.

In my former life as Managing Director of the Australian Wine Research Institute, I saw first-hand how language, or the limitations of language, may have dictated the kind of international trade relationships the wine industry pursued and the kind of export opportunities that were subsequently missed.

Australia's wine exports in 2007/8 were worth \$2.66 billion and the major export markets were, in descending order, the UK, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark, China and Germany, with the vast majority of exports going to the UK, the USA and Canada. Indeed, the English-

in publications and citations per capita and which, in the views of many, have superior economic, cultural and social performance characteristics. Interestingly, these countries do not have universities in the top twenty on the Jiao Tong World University Rankings. Yet we still seem to chase the dream of individual institutional USA and UK type glory rather than having overall 'systems excellence' as the key national driver. Do you really believe that a Nobel Prize won in 1914 tells us a lot about institutional capacity in 2009?

Additionally, the 2008 Boyer Lecture on Education, delivered by Rupert Murdoch, held up countries like Korea and Finland, but then concentrated entirely on what could be learnt from educational models in New York. I continue to suspect that our outlook is limited by language capability.

### (4) DISCLAIMER 2:

**The second disclaimer** I would like to offer is that the struggle for improved English literacy and the need for second language acquisition should not be an 'either/or' argument. The

two are not mutually exclusive, and should be made to co-exist and 'mutually inform' in our national curriculum.

As we extol the virtues of multilingualism in Australia, we must also remind ourselves of the necessity of English as our shared official language and a major multinational tongue. As David Crystal reports in his book, *English as a Global Language*, there are now over seventy countries in which English is either the major language, or the official tongue of major institutions, or the primary second language alongside the official lingua franca.<sup>5</sup> The labour market has internationalised, and we cannot undervalue the strategic importance of being fluent in a language of such global cultural and economic reach.

So while second language acquisition should be prioritised in our schools and workplaces, we must simultaneously ensure that all Australian citizens are given the opportunity to become fluent in our national language.

Without this basic right and imperative we will have many citizens who can be neither national nor international citizens, when they should be given every opportunity to be both.

#### (5) WHY MULTILINGUALISM IS IMPORTANT FOR A 'GLOBAL AUSTRALIA'

In 1974, **Al Grassby**, the then Federal Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, and the creator of one of Australia's first bilingual radio programs, painted a vision of the post-modern Australian. He imagined a citizenry that was global in outlook and that was cognisant of Australia's place in the world, and in particular, the Asia-Pacific region. These Australians would speak more than one language, have access to the richness of the world's offerings, and have a strong sense of self and the identity of their nation.<sup>6</sup>

Inherent in Grassby's vision is the importance of second language acquisition in this country, some of which I will exemplify.

#### Diplomacy

When Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered himself as a zhengyou, or 'straight-talking' friend, to President Hu Jintao in fluent Mandarin, a significant message was sent. Personal accounts of this exchange indicate

the impact of Rudd's linguistic aptitude. To speak in the native tongue of your economic and cultural 'neighbours' is a powerful symbol, and should not be taken lightly. At a personal level, I recall all too well how Danes fall over themselves to congratulate individuals who have learned to master Danish, while dismissing those who fail to do so.

In his address to the Australian Principals Association in 2002, General Peter Cosgrove, former head of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), recounted that a crucial inadequacy in Australia's peace-keeping and nation-building capabilities in East Timor in the late 1990s was the lack of language skills at every level. General Cosgrove stated that the ADF simply required more trained linguists to negotiate with Australia's Coalition partners, which comprised twenty nations that between them spoke seven different languages. Without sufficient language training, there were more misunderstandings based on cultural differences than anyone could have expected.

#### Personal expression

The argument for language acquisition, I would suggest, should not be limited to the worlds of trade, defence, and homeland security.

Language is more than a commodity to be transacted at a diplomatic level: it is also an important vector to human understanding. A shared language is a symbol of commonality and relatedness; it is a means of identifying, respecting and expressing empathy with

(below)

Australian peace-keeping and nation-building capabilities rely on communication skills between different cultures. **Australian Peacekeeper speaking with local youths in East Timor.**

COURTESY OF UN PEACEKEEPING FORCES IN EAST TIMOR.



(below)

Malaysian performers at an alumni event of the University of South Australia in Kuala Lumpur, 2009.

AUTHOR'S OWN PHOTOGRAPH.





other personal or cultural standpoints. Importantly, multilingualism enables us to communicate in more than one cultural paradigm, to express multiple identities and to think in ways other than those set by the structure of our first language. It allows us to build bridges of knowledge that otherwise would not exist, and to form bonds with

others from different ethnic contexts. In this way, our worldview is broadened, and our cultural capital is enriched.

(above)

Australian multilingualism at play.

IMAGE COURTESY OF FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA.

### International innovation

Perhaps a less obvious but important argument for language competence is the volume of research and technological intelligence published in the major languages of trade and innovation, such as Japanese, Chinese, Korean, German and French. Notwithstanding modern translation technology, knowledge of the local language still appears to be necessary to tap into global knowledge systems.

Some may argue that with most academic publications being written in English, it is the non-English speaking countries that are at a disadvantage, not necessarily having the native English proficiency needed to understand the relevant research literature. There may also be a belief that the best research will always be published in English, so knowledge of other languages is not essential.

However, both statements are misleading.

There are academic disciplines in which significant amounts of research are published in languages other than English. For example, much wine research is published in French, Italian and Spanish, and much of the twentieth-century critical theory was published in French and German, as exemplified by Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous,

Martin Heidegger and Jürgen Habermas. This means that the total pool of knowledge in, for example, wine research and critical theory research is practically only available to speakers of more than one language.<sup>7</sup>

### Cultural access

I recall being invited to a meeting in Berlin during the nineties, when I was a member of the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation's International Trade Committee and Australia was having difficulty entering the European wine market. Dr Reiner Wittkowski, Chair of the German Committee for the technical regulation of winemaking in Germany, was eager to bridge the gap between European and Australian positions in these decade-long international negotiations. Given my skills in German, Dr Wittkowski asked me to attend a meeting of his all-German steering committee, in the hope of advancing consensus. The meeting was of course conducted in German. As such, my attendance was perceived by some to have been a risky move. However, I believe it paid off: I could not have gained certain key insights and strengthened mutual respect had I not been multilingual. I certainly would not have had an opportunity to express my views at such a crucial forum without being able to speak the language of my international peers. For me this is an enduring example of the bridges that can be built and the cultural access that can be gained from language competence, and the ability to communicate with your chosen audience.

### (6) THE ARGUMENT AGAINST MULTILINGUALISM

Of course some will argue that multilingualism is not necessary for Australia or indeed the world. Translation technologies are advancing rapidly and may one day be able to translate quicker and more accurately than second languages learners. The concept of a Babel fish, or portable language interpreter, is artfully conjured by Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. A number of modern-day technologies have evolved along these lines, most notably the online translation site likewise named 'Babel Fish' (a direct reference to Adams's vision). We have also seen the development

of speech recognition software and hand-held translators such as the 'Speechalator'.<sup>8</sup>

Can such technologies replace free-flowing conversation, or the power, creativity or intimacy of one-on-one dialogue? In my view: No. My hypothesis is that multilingualism will continue to play an irrefutable and irreplaceable part in our social, cultural and economic prosperity.

### (7) MYTHS ABOUT LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

**With this in mind,** I recognise the challenge confronted by policy-makers and teachers when attempting to prioritise English alongside other languages in the school curriculum. It is a complex issue that demands ambitious outcomes, and I certainly do not claim to hold the answers to this dilemma.

But I would like to point to the local and international literature that shows that the literacy skills gained in one language can be transferred to a second language, even if their alphabets are different.<sup>9</sup>

There is further evidence to suggest that second-language acquisition at an early age can actually *improve* English skills. As such, we

boundaries and act as important cultural brokers between their cultures and that of Anglo-Australia. They are in a powerful position to contribute as interlocutors, policy-makers and cultural mediators of Australia's future.

This is exemplified by South Australia's Lieutenant Governor Hieu Van Le. One of the first Vietnamese people to arrive in Australia by boat in 1977, Lieutenant Governor Van Le has since gone on to win the Centenary of Federation Medal for the advancement of multiculturalism, and become the first Asian to chair the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission. He is a tireless advocate for increased educational linkages between Australia and Vietnam, and assists South Australian universities in their efforts to engage with relevant educational stakeholders in Vietnam.

While we can and should derive benefit from the language skills introduced to this country through consecutive waves of immigration, this alone is in my view not a viable foundation for a single, overarching language strategy.

We need a sustainable and enduring language infrastructure that is not subject

MANY BILINGUAL AUSTRALIANS HAVE THE GIFT OF BEING ABLE TO TRANSCEND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES AND ACT AS IMPORTANT CULTURAL BROKERS.

have a responsibility to challenge the crowded curriculum argument and find ways to ensure that second-language learning and teaching is not inadvertently marginalised in order to focus on English literacy alone.<sup>10</sup>

### (8) BILINGUAL AUSTRALIANS AS CULTURAL VECTORS: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

**According to 2006 Census data,** over three million Australian adults speak a community language at home. The 'big six' are Mandarin, Italian, Arabic, Greek, Cantonese and Vietnamese, and we are seeing increases in the use of Hindi, Korean and Filipino.<sup>11</sup>

Many would therefore argue that Australia has a hidden resource in its bi/multilingual population, who have important language skills that may be under-utilised in our schools and workplaces. Many bilingual Australians have the gift of being able to transcend cultural

to changes in immigration patterns and, potentially, policy. We can't teach every language to the same high standard but we can make some strategic choices about the language curriculum, and focus on achieving genuine fluency in a tactical range of languages. Of course there will be many tensions associated with this choice, and I recognise these as significant practical and policy challenges, especially given that only about thirteen percent of year twelve students in Australia are now studying a second language at school.<sup>12</sup> It will be a challenge for scholars and decision makers to engage in this debate in a way that probably needs to recognise the imperative of tough calls.

Notwithstanding the magnitude of such challenges, Australia should be significantly assisted in this quest by the many languages that are already spoken here in large numbers. These languages form a defining part of

Australia's cultural mix, and almost certainly have strong power as inter-cultural currency in Asia and Europe.

#### (9) A WAY FORWARD (1): TEACHING LANGUAGES COOPERATIVELY

One way that Australia may be able to better utilise its language resources and achieve greater language competence is through further enhancement of existing cooperative approaches operated at a national level. Through such approaches the language expertise of our educational institutions is pooled and shared. This would alleviate the pressure for schools and universities to develop expertise across a broad range of languages, and instead allow them to specialise. I believe that humanities scholars can and should play

up the agendas. It does not matter who is in government, there are certain groupings that always will get a strong hearing and it is rarely a bunch of Vice-Chancellors!

Serious engagement with groupings that are so different from, for example, the Australian Academy of the Humanities, requires the development of another form of 'multilingualism' akin to the example I gave earlier about touring the Riverland.

Multilingualism, and ability to change in order to communicate with one's audience, always starts at home. I implore the humanities to further expand language beyond their own disciplinary tongue in order to effectively communicate to those outside their sphere, who are crucial to the implementation of humanities research. Not to be able to speak in non-scholarly contexts quarantines

I IMPLORER THE HUMANITIES TO FURTHER EXPAND LANGUAGE BEYOND THEIR OWN DISCIPLINARY TONGUE IN ORDER TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE TO THOSE OUTSIDE THEIR SPHERE.

a strong role in working collaboratively to implement practical measures to achieve those aims, with a greater emphasis on the national good, even in the face of pressures to put institutional interests at the fore.

#### (10) A WAY FORWARD (2): THE ROLE OF THE HUMANITIES IN IMPROVED LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND THE NEED FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Humanities scholars have a significant opportunity to play a larger and more influential role in the language competence of our country, and to dramatically turn around our relative monolingual condition. However, to get significant traction in this area and to substantially influence policy makers, I also believe they must engage with other stakeholder groups including the business community through peak bodies such as the Building Council of Australia, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Australian Industry Group. We have recently seen how the BCA in particular has engaged in the educational and school debate — do not ignore this opportunity — take advantage of the interest from the big end of town and link

knowledge, and leads to a form of disciplinary monolingualism to which I will refer in more detail later. I hasten to say that this of course is not a 'curse' unique to humanities scholars; nevertheless, my experience at the ARC clearly indicates that failure to address this issue can put the humanities more at risk than most other disciplines.

#### (11) INHIBITORS TO LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

##### The Australian school curriculum

As a nation we have traditionally been resistant to the idea of enforcing second-language learning as a long-term, compulsory component of our educational curriculum. Second languages are frequently deemed to be supplementary to the program, and not a vital part of our children's development as global citizens in a multilingual world. Though most people do not question mathematics, science and history as core subjects, we have not always prioritised, or taken seriously enough, the importance of second language acquisition. Although I do note Deputy Prime Minister Gillard's media release of today on the issue of Asian languages and the 2020 target to double

the number of year twelve students with fluency in Chinese, Indian, Japanese or Korean.<sup>13</sup>

Though the idea of ‘mandating’ anything often inspires ill-feeling, I propose that until languages are made compulsory in the school curriculum from reception to high school, we will never achieve the kind of language competence necessary to allow us to interact most effectively at an international level, or achieve the deep cultural understanding required to gain access to the motivations and agendas of our neighbours and trading partners. The challenge for scholars and policy makers, I suspect, will be to make hard choices: will the scholars be able to do so — even if their ‘home’ discipline misses out? Will scholars be able to link up with powerful partners such as the BCA? I believe they must!

## (12) DISCIPLINARY MONOLINGUALISM

**Monolingualism does not only** relate to the languages we speak in daily life, but also to the languages we speak in our academic and professional worlds. As mentioned earlier, disciplinary monolingualism, or the encoded and often impenetrable tongue of our academic towers, can be every bit as debilitating as traditional monolingualism, although in different contexts.

Much important research occurring both in the humanities and sciences is not being effectively communicated to the public or to other disciplinary areas, limiting essential cross-fertilisation of ideas and the implementation of crucial environmental, social and technological solutions to the challenges facing today’s society.

The creation of knowledge citadels, or ‘islands’ of research that do not transcend their disciplinary walls, places grave limitations on us economically and culturally.

When research discoveries do not transcend their discipline, innovation is held hostage. We end up living in a world of discovery, and not of linkage. This is a position we as a nation can ill afford.

It is interesting to note that a content analysis undertaken of the submissions to the Cutler Review of our National Innovation System is said to highlight a significant degree of disciplinary monolingualism. The analysis

indicates that not only did different groups, such as government, business, research organisations and individuals, have somewhat different concerns, but that they used different language to discuss their most pressing concerns. Professor Dodgson reported that this showed an ‘absence of a shared language to build common understanding, and [that this in turn] may reveal some worrying disconnections’.<sup>14</sup>

## Examples of successful multidisciplinary collaborations

There are of course many examples of where a multidisciplinary approach to technical problems has led to groundbreaking invention. Look at the Apple iPod, which was developed in under a year by a multidisciplinary team of hardware engineers, software developers, industrial designers, manufacturers and marketing specialists. The importance of the iPod story lies in the fact that Apple looked *outside* of its own headquarters and ‘information silo’ to source innovation from independent inventors and small businesses.

If we look at the iPod design process, we see that Apple moved across sectors to source as many outside ideas and new technologies as possible, and then blended this with their own knowledge and vision. As reported in *Wired* magazine, the technology for the iPod hard drive was sourced from Toshiba; the iPod battery came from Sony; the music library program that runs iTunes was sourced from a local software developer; the iPod’s operating system came from an independent company called Pixo; the scroll wheel was suggested by Apple’s Head of Marketing; the iPod interface was mocked up by an in-house interactive designer; and the iPod name was offered up by a freelance copywriter who had joined Apple on a temporary basis.

The Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences has drawn attention to the issue of disciplinary monolingualism in its report entitled *Collaborating across the Sectors*.<sup>15</sup> The report points to the social, economic and environmental risks of impeding cross-sectoral activities. The report also highlights some of the innovations that were emerging as the result of multidisciplinary collaboration.

### Causes of disciplinary monolingualism

While I recognise the imperative to retain deep disciplinary expertise in our teaching and research establishments, disciplinary monolingualism is in my view a threat to Australia's social, cultural, environmental and economic prosperity. As such, we need to establish channels for engagement between the disciplines, as well as attractive opportunities for the humanities, arts and social sciences to understand and collaborate with researchers in science, technology, engineering and medicine and *vice versa*. It is often only through such collaboration that the big issues can be addressed. And these collaborations are mediated through 'languages' and 'open minds'. By the way, I would not be surprised if such cross-disciplinary openness could be facilitated by engaging in learning languages other than your mother tongue!

### The need for corrective actions to enhance the importance and impact of humanities research outside the discipline

Humanities researchers, like researchers in other fields, strive to be recognised for their excellence by global peers and a very dominant gold standard is the publication of the sole-authored book. I hazard a guess that this worthwhile activity, on average, is conducted with less evidence of international collaboration than commonly witnessed for the science-based disciplines. While the merits of this approach to discovery and to demonstrating individual excellence are widely accepted, it necessitates some corrective action to ensure that the ability to work in multidisciplinary teams is not compromised. From a purely selfish view this skill must be maintained in order to secure funding for research at a time where significant funding appears directed towards international teams of multidisciplinary capacity. Much more importantly though — vigilance is required because participation in such activities across discipline language barriers will demonstrate the broader potential and value of humanities research. Failure to do so will in my view put not only the humanities at a disadvantage, but indeed society.

As mentioned earlier, I had the great privilege of leading the Australian Research Council for almost three years from 2004 to

2007. It is now on public record that Minister Nelson elected to decline funding a number of grants the ARC had recommended for funding. Many researchers were quite understandably disturbed by the Minister's exercising his prerogative to do this. Despite this widespread concern, I was very pleased to see that senior humanities scholars took a responsible course of action that not only led to discontinuation of the practice but also gained them widespread respect. Could all this have been avoided? It is my view that it could, if the languages and modes of expression from the parties involved had been mutually cognisant of the different contexts at play — in my view another example of the diminished outcomes that result from inability to communicate in different modes and with full contextual awareness.

### (13) CONCLUSION

It is my hypothesis and near conviction that Australia cannot afford the risk of monolingualism on any level despite our having English as our mother tongue.

My argument is not for one cultural dialect over another, but rather for an enhanced ability to communicate across boundaries. We cannot grow as individuals or as a nation if we are confined to a single cultural context. Without the capacity to understand cultural and disciplinary filters, we lose access to each other and to worlds of understanding and innovation in the broadest sense. This is important not only for our economic and political advancement, but also for our quality of life and the improvement of the human condition.

I have argued for advanced language competence at a national level, a *sine qua non* to further Australia's interests across geo-cultural borders and in order to contribute to global solutions. Without a national language capacity, we endanger our ability to gain deep access to the decision-makers who will have influence over the future of our position in the world. Australia has a rich language pool from which to draw, and this should not be overlooked: however, there is significant scope for a more tactical and consolidated approach to language strategy. This should be underpinned by a recognition that while English fluency is an imperative, having English skills alone will prove

a disadvantage for our citizens moving forward. I have argued that humanities scholars must make tough decisions and form alliances with unlikely partners in order to move on this front. In my view it is a risk not to do so.

I have also argued for 'multilingualism' at a broader, disciplinary level. Given the complexity of the social, environmental and technological challenges we face in the twenty-first century, there has never been a more urgent need for cross-disciplinary collaboration and the ability to communicate ideas, methods and invention between different disciplinary hubs. Our biggest issues in, for example, security, environmental sustainability, water management, indigenous education and aged care cannot be successfully addressed with a mono-disciplinary approach ignorant of the global context. Channels of engagement must be forged and barriers created by funding, discipline esteem and evaluation procedures need to be overcome. I have travelled a long way in the past few years in my discovery of disciplines other than my own. My greatest discovery has been the power of disciplinary crosstalk and the pivotal importance of the humanities in such talks. While it is important to continue to advance deep disciplinary knowledge, there are times when it is right to fill gaps in capabilities that are required to address societal opportunities rather than filling gaps in the literature! 🍷



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\* \* \*

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7. Even though a lot of works are translated into English, it is argued that there is no substitution for reading texts in the original language as exemplified by the scholars who have gone to the trouble of learning Danish to access Søren Kierkegaard's original texts.
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12. This figure is widely cited across language commentary, including Michael Clyne, *Australia's Unrecognized Resources Boom*; and Joseph Lo Bianco, 'Tapping the Reservoir: Languages at School'.
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» JOHN TRANTER



(above)

Lower Manhattan

PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
JOHN BYRON.



JOHN TRANTER FAHA has published more than twenty collections of verse, which have won many literary awards. His next book will be **Starlight: 150 Poems** (UQP, 2010). He was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Academy in 2005.

# Albatross

— after Charles Baudelaire

Sometimes, to amuse themselves, the authorities  
bring to heel corporate high-flyers — those  
clever executives, men of many devices,  
who play exuberantly with Other People's Money  
and heap themselves with salaries none could  
ever spend in a lifetime of profligacy —  
and arraign them in the dock.

Accused of nothing more than clever cheating —  
wouldn't we all, given half a chance? —  
these kings of the sky falter and mumble.  
That brain like a steel trap that could easily recall  
a shift in their investments of half a point  
months ago, among a welter of obscure trades,  
now struggles to remember who said what  
about some crucial deal a week ago.  
Their mantra — 'nice guys finish last' — which means  
'I'm an asshole, and I always win' —  
shrinks to 'I'm afraid I can't recall' —  
gourmets who could count off every vintage  
from the north slope of an obscure vineyard  
in the south of France now struggle to recall  
a deal involving several billion dollars.

That shark of the market, how daft he seems now,  
how frail and elderly, among the silks  
who nag and worry at his list of crimes. The poet  
resembles this prince of the open skies: When  
forced to get a job and earn his keep  
the poet's dreams, entangled with his giant ego,  
turn him into a blundering buffoon.



# mothers, virgins & demons

READING BEYOND THE FEMALE  
STEREOTYPES IN MANICHAEAN  
COSMOLOGY AND STORY<sup>1</sup>

» MAJELLA FRANZMANN

Unlike the intense scholarly interest over the last century in the analysis of women characters and themes related to women in biblical texts (often dated from the publication of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Women's Bible* in 1895), and in classical, patristic, and Gnostic texts in general, scholars have been slow to attempt similar analysis of the texts of Manichaeism. Manichaeism represents the last and greatest flowering of the Gnostic systems of the early centuries ce, named for its founder Mani, a native of Babylonia in Persia, born in 216 ce. This lack of interest is all the more surprising because there is general scholarly consensus that women fared rather well within Manichaeism by their eligibility to join the inner circle of the Elect, although at least in Western Manichaeism they were not eligible for the higher administrative positions in the community.<sup>2</sup>

Recently there have been a number of studies on women in Manichaeism, the major contribution coming from the Canadian scholar Kevin Coyle who, in 2001, proposed an agenda for the study of women in Manichaeism,<sup>3</sup> and more recently addressed the question of Manichaean women's missionary work.<sup>4</sup> The Gnosticism scholar Madeleine Scopello has also published work on a number of individual women.<sup>5</sup> I have added to this work on individuals and groups of women with two studies of the personal and spiritual lives of

women from the Manichaean community at fourth-century Roman Kellis on the Dakhleh Oasis in Egypt, based primarily on the personal letters from that community,<sup>6</sup> as well as an investigation more generally of the range of female characters and female imagery in two major western Manichaean texts that were also influential in eastern communities — the teaching text of the *Kephalaia* and the liturgical text of the *Psalm Book*.<sup>7</sup>

The initial investigation of the *Kephalaia* and the *Psalm Book* reveals that the most prevalent female imagery in the texts is either of birthing and motherhood or connected with women as creatures of lust and inspiring lust in others. The imagery of birthing and motherhood is used in a positive way in association with certain female cosmic figures, or female-imagined figures like the soul or the church. On the other hand, when these two texts deal with 'real' women who live in the world of the flesh, the same female imagery is used negatively. Women produce offspring from corrupt and filthy wombs, and they are creatures of lust who inspire lust in men, according to the *Kephalaia*. For the *Psalm Book* women are of three types — virginal, continent, or married. The 'married ones' are those who belong to the flesh and the world. Only those who are virginal and continent, like the martyrs, the Elect, and catechumens or Hearers, are worthy of spiritual praise.

(above)  
Montage detail,  
MIK III 6286. See  
pages 58-59 for  
source image and  
information.

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The study of female Manichaean catechumens who appear in the personal letters from Kellis reveals a very positive view of the spiritual lives of these women. How then did women in their ordinary lives as Manichaeans appreciate or understand these images, not the Elect in the rarefied inner spiritual circle but rather the catechumens who served them, many of whom were married and had children? Catechumens would have heard some of these texts in the communal liturgy, been instructed in Manichaean doctrine that made use of these images and concepts about women, and doubtless would have applied some, if not all, of these teachings to their own lives.

Manichaean women's actual experience, as far as one can know that from the Kellis letters at least, provides both another viewpoint to balance the imagery of these two major Manichaean texts, and an impetus towards questioning further initial conclusions about the texts. In what follows, further steps in reading the texts are taken that go beyond the rather simple categories such as cosmic and earthly, virginal/continent and married. First, I seek to question what more can be learned or appreciated by a deeper look at the imagery. Secondly, I aim to investigate other types of Manichaean texts that present women in a different way from that of the formal teaching and liturgical texts, as a means of explicating the complex, overlapping and at times contradictory stereotypes that structured representations of women in Manichaean texts.



## DIGGING DEEPER INTO IMAGES

**The Mother of Life**, a cosmic figure of great importance in the Manichaean drama of salvation and of creation, has not yet been the subject of any major scholarly study.<sup>8</sup> A preliminary study of this figure in the *Kephalaia* immediately brings her motherly qualities to the forefront, as might be expected. She is an example of motherly care, as she kisses the Primal Man, her son (38.22-24), arms him and makes him mighty, lays hands on him and sends him forth to battle the powers of the

darkness (39.3-7). There are strong themes in these passages of the protective and nurturing mother in relationship with her son. Yet, reading further in the Middle Persian texts, one finds other strong attributes for the Mother as she battles to have her son return when he is trapped in the darkness. The Mother and her warrior colleague, the Living Spirit/Virgin of Light, go out to the border of the Light to attempt to save her son, as he is beset by demons in the darkness below. They send out the god, 'Call', like a saving letter and an arrow that one shoots into a fortress. The 'Call' and 'Answer' return to the Mother of Life and the Living Spirit who bring up the Primal Man, and then create ten heavens and the zodiac.<sup>9</sup>

There are aspects of the warrior here in the portrait of the Mother that can be lost with too narrow a focus on her motherly activities. The Mother of Life knows how to equip a warrior for battle; she is knowledgeable in the ways of war, giving him weapons before sending him

(left)

FIG. 1. MIK III 4815. Fragment of a painted textile from Khocho depicting female Manichaean Elect; at the Asian Art Museum, National Museums in Berlin.

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off to battle. Moreover, the imagery used of the Mother and her colleague as they send out the 'Call' — like shooting arrows into a fortress — associates the Mother with warrior attributes. She also has a facility with planning and creative work; she fashions with her colleague the agent referred to as 'the Call' and creates on a cosmic scale.

When investigated more closely, the activity of the Mother of Life goes beyond what might be considered particular to a mother, to attributes of a much more complex character. She is mother, warrior and adept at war, a person of ideas, and powerfully creative. Digging deeper makes more of what is offered in the text to provide a richer understanding of a character, especially where the name or title of the character exerts its own pressure towards approaching her in a more simplistic way.

### SHARPENING THE IMAGES

A study of the *Kephalaia* and *Psalm Book* reveals a number of frequently occurring opposing images or concepts — light and dark, virgin and married, purity and lust, and many more. The polarities can seem so strong that one cannot imagine that they can be brought together in any way. However, the Virgin of Light provides a ready example of a figure who brings together the seemingly opposing concepts of virginity and lust.

The texts involving the Virgin of Light are redolent with polar imagery. One of the most powerful descriptions of the struggle between Light and Darkness, for example, involves the clash between the Virgin of Light and the female demons, in a great battle involving the forces of nature controlled by these female figures. In the description of the creation of the world through the Living Spirit in M 263 there is an excursus about the demons and the damage they do with weather, using dark destructive wind clouds billowing out like great pregnant women. Over against the demons is the Virgin of Light, who has angels at her command to overcome the destructive demons,<sup>10</sup> coming against them with clouds behind her rising up like a great tower.<sup>11</sup> It would be difficult to find a stronger image built on these polar opposites.

The Virgin of Light is a warrior and a physically beautiful female character. She has 'ineffable beauty' which puts the powers to shame, according to *Psalm Book* 2.27-29. She is equipped with five powers to fight against and conquer the five abysses of the dark (10.6-19). The darkness she fights against is characterised by corruption, hatred, lust and desire, anything related to the flesh and the entrapment of the light within it.

But how does her beauty put the powers to shame? The hymn M 741, in which the Virgin of Light is named Sadwēs, provides some detail:

Bright Sadwēs shows her form to the Demon of Wrath. He cries out to her as his own (?), he thinks she is the essence (of Light).

He sows [...] he groans when he no longer sees the form. Light is born in the sphere: she gives it to the higher Powers.

The dirt and dross flows from him to the earth. It clothes itself in all phenomena, and is reborn in many fruits.

The dark Demon of Wrath is ashamed, for he was distraught and had become naked. He had not attained to the higher, and had been bereft of what he had achieved.

He left the body an empty shell and descended in shame. He covered himself in the womb of the earths, whence he had risen in brutishness (M 741/R/3-7).<sup>12</sup>

The event described here is generally referred to as the 'seduction of the archons', and is known from a variety of Manichaean texts from different cultural/language groups, some much more circumspect in their telling than others. In each version the Light or some agent of the Light uses the nature of Darkness against itself, to achieve a release of the Light, invariably involving some kind of sexual activity. Here the Virgin of Light uses her beauty to inspire lust in the Demon of Wrath who ejaculates the previously captured light as semen that falls to earth and is reborn in fruits.

(right)  
FIG. 2.MIK III 6286.  
Fragment of a  
painted textile  
temple banner from  
Khocho depicting  
female Manichaean  
Elect; at the Asian  
Art Museum,  
National Museums  
in Berlin.

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MUSEUM, NATIONAL  
MUSEUMS IN BERLIN.

Another version of this drama occurs in the *Kephalaia*, in which the male cosmic figure called the Third Ambassador accomplishes the same seduction in order to free the Living Soul from Matter in which it is entangled. The text likens him to a great free woman who comes out of her seclusion and shows herself in her beauty in order to save her brother, despite, or because of, the lustful gaze of the men around her (Keph 134.13-135.14).

Both of these descriptions bring together the realm of Light and its agents and an aspect of darkness that seems to be wholly antithetical to them. Quite clearly in each case the end justifies the means, and in the story of the Third Ambassador the reader is told quite explicitly that there is no blame attached to the symbolic woman who represents him because she is not like wanton or proud women who inspire lust by exhibiting themselves. The difficulty with the passage concerning the Virgin of Light/Sadwēs is that she appears to be doing exactly that — exhibiting her beauty in order to inspire lust. The episode inevitably raises a question mark over the nature of virginity and the positive spiritual aspects usually associated with virginity in the Manichaean texts, when the text presents a powerful cosmic female virginal character who takes her revenge on the dark forces in just the same way as they have used lust as a weapon against believers and forced the light into further entrapment in the corrupt flesh and the dark world.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it is a very practical and pragmatic way of using the dark against itself. As the Sermon on the Light-Nous states, the wise and clever person is like the Virgin of Light.<sup>14</sup> Surely the seduction as it is described here is the clever ploy of a rather more complex character than her name would indicate.

### QUESTIONING GENERALISATIONS

**The Kephalaia and the Psalm Book** exhibit a strong thread of imagery dealing with lust, and women as creatures of lust, inspiring lust in others. There are plentiful images and teachings about the danger, where women are presented as major actors inspiring lust. Outside of these texts, however, one finds other writings where the links between lust and



women may not be quite as pronounced. M 572/V/2-19 contains a parable about a woman who allows a monk to put his alms into a storage space or vessel.<sup>15</sup> Then he goes away. A hunter comes who has captured a wolf and wants to put the wolf into the same space and sees that there is a pretty girl in it already. He asks the woman what is in the space. She replies that a monk has put his alms in it. The hunter takes the girl out and puts his wolf in instead. The monk comes in the night, wanting to retrieve the girl. As he puts his hand in to do so, the wolf comes out and eats him. The story concludes with a moral about sin and hell and the final statement: 'so it is with that monk who sought the girl and found the wolf'.

Surprisingly there is no guilt ascribed here to the pretty girl; the entire focus of blame is on the monk. The girl is used in an example of moral wrongdoing by a man but she goes almost unnoticed, in much the same way as she is hidden physically in the story. Yet it is important to notice her, because this story at least proposes that a woman who inspires lust may not be guilty at all. It is only one story, but is a question mark over generalisations about women and lust in other teaching texts.

### BROADENING THE RANGE OF EXAMPLES OR GENRES

In teaching and liturgical texts, the simplest and most readily understood themes are often used to drive home an easily-learned and easily-reinforced message in an unsophisticated way. Stories, however, are different and less easily restrained in their imagination and the sweep of their drama and line of characters, even though the morals or teachings drawn from these

stories may mirror those in the more formal teaching and liturgical texts. It is not surprising, therefore, that stories and parables turn up a larger number of roles and occupations for women than one finds in the rather more straightforward teaching or liturgical texts.

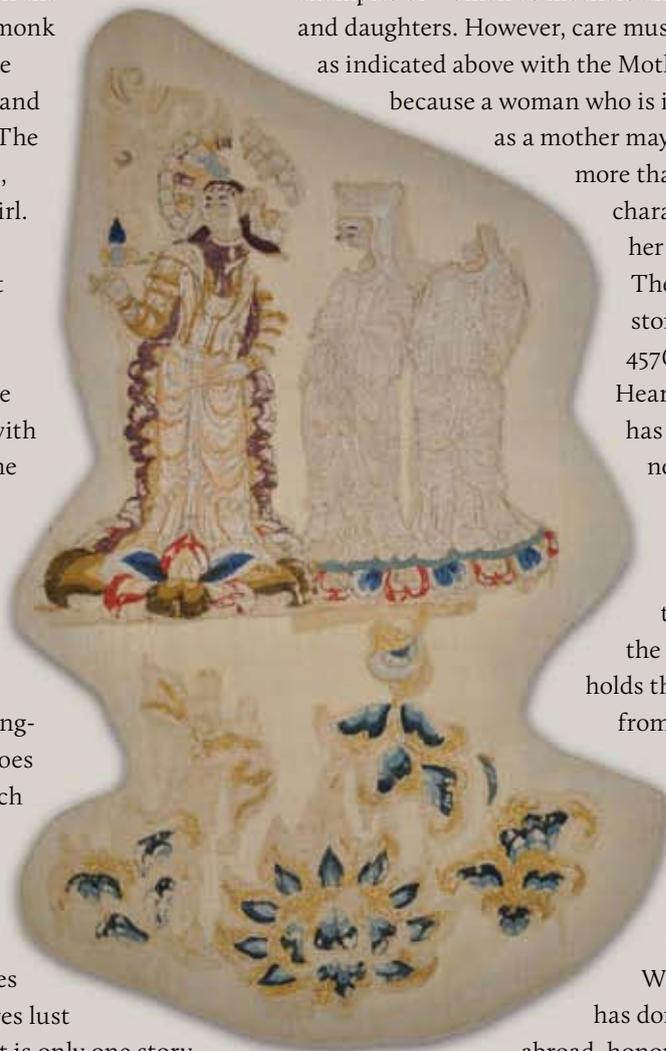
First, as expected, there are numerous examples of women as mothers and wives and daughters. However, care must be taken, as indicated above with the Mother of Life, because a woman who is identified

as a mother may illustrate more than motherly characteristics by her behaviour. The first of four stories in M 4576 deals with a Hearer whose son has died. She does not weep for him, because weeping would be to grieve for the body that holds the soul back from salvation.

Instead she performs spiritual works and gives alms generously.

When what she has done is reported abroad, honour is given to Mani because of her great belief.<sup>16</sup> This is not so much a story about motherhood as about a true believer, the story made more poignant by the fact that it is her son who has died.

Apart from familial roles, stories and parables include women as queens, singers and courtesans of the court, ordinary housewives, women in need of healing, women as victims of war, women as believers, and so on. There are some frequently used formulae, like queens who are described as those who produce diadem-bearing sons/princes,<sup>17</sup> or beautiful daughters who are married to kings as a way of gaining a better life for them or their fathers.<sup>18</sup>



In similar fashion there is a stereotypical way of referring to wives and children as a burden on a man's spiritual advancement,<sup>19</sup> but there are also stories where wives are of enormous help to their husbands, for example in the story in M572,<sup>20</sup> where a man finds a treasure and wishes to retrieve it when it grows dark. The man is forced however to take a corpse out of the place where the treasure is located, instead of the treasure itself, and to put the corpse on his back and carry it to a grave. He cannot get the corpse off his back, no matter how hard he tries, so in the night he goes home to his wife and asks her to cut the corpse off his back. She is very afraid but she does so, and the corpse

characters than perhaps the author intended.

In this story there are two women, clearly opposites — a lovesick young unmarried princess and a clever old woman. The story unfolds as follows. The daughter of a king suffers from her love for a wonderful boy who does not return her love. He takes refuge sitting up in a tree. The king sends horses and men to bring the boy in so he can give the boy to his daughter, but the boy slaughters the horses and men. There seems no way of resolving the impasse, and the daughter is near to death from her love-sickness, when an old woman appears before the king suggesting she knows another way to capture the boy. The old woman takes

THE WOMAN WHO WOULD OFTEN BE DESCRIBED AS A SPIRITUAL BURDEN, IS IN FACT THE ONE TO LIFT THE BURDEN FROM HER HUSBAND AND HELP HIM FIND THE SPIRITUAL TREASURE HE DESIRES.

falls open to reveal treasures and pearls. Thus, the woman who would often be described as a spiritual burden, is in fact the one to lift the burden from her husband and help him find the spiritual treasure he desires.

The power of a woman's belief is possibly best described in a very brief story in M4576, where Ahrmen (lord of the world of darkness) is jealous of a female Hearer. He thinks about tempting her with treasure or trapping her with worldly concerns for good works or for her husband and son and daughter.<sup>21</sup> The story is all the more significant as it refers to a Hearer as the object of Ahrmen's jealousy rather than a spiritually advanced member of the Elect.

### READING AGAINST THE GRAIN

Although many parables and stories have a similar teaching theme about the struggle of the soul against the entrapment of the darkness, the narratives have a life of their own beyond the moral to be drawn from them and it is in 'reading against the grain' of the author's apparent intention that sometimes much more can be appreciated about female characters. The following example is taken from a story from two Central Asian manuscripts, M 46 and M 652/R,<sup>22</sup> in which there are clear female stereotypes but, at the same time, ways of reading the text that make more of the

wine and a lamb and proceeds to the tree where the boy is sitting. She begins by pretending to try to kill the lamb, taking the lamb by its tail. The boy, watching on, suggests that she is going about it the wrong way and that she should be trying to kill the lamb at its neck not its tail. The boy thinks she is stupid and comes down from the tree to give her advice on how to carry out the killing. Once he is down, the old woman gives him wine to drink which is drugged, and then brings him back to the king on her donkey. The king gives the boy to his daughter, locking him up behind three doors (two made of copper and lead, and the innermost one made from iron and lead), from which the boy eventually escapes by playing on his flute and thereby calling a steer that breaks down the doors.

The story is a parable about the fate of the soul, represented by the boy, separated from its heavenly homeland. The parable ends with an outline of who the characters in the story represent, but in the damaged text one can only read that the king represents Ahrmen, the king of darkness. The old woman must be understood as an agent of the king of darkness and thus an evil force herself, and a character to be interpreted negatively. Read in this way, she is a character of little importance in the scheme of salvation for the soul, the most important characters being the king as the ruler of

(left)

FIG. 3. MIK III 6251. Fragment of an embroidered textile from Khocho depicting three females; at the Asian Art Museum, National Museums in Berlin. The two figures on the right are Manichaean Elect; the one on the left may be the Virgin of Light.

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darkness and the boy as the soul who escapes his clutches.

However, if one reads against the grain of the moral of the story, then the old woman is integral to the plot and the development of the story. While the lovesick princess initiates the action by her desire for the boy, it is the old woman who resolves the impasse and moves the action forward. She is indeed the most powerful character in the story, more powerful than the princess who would usually be understood to be above her by virtue of her royal status, more powerful than the king who is unable to dislodge the boy and bring him back with his own forces, and temporarily more powerful than the young man whom she tricks and overpowers and brings back to imprisonment. She is also clearly the most intelligent character in the story. The girl we cannot comment upon, the king fails in his military strategy, and the boy easily falls into her trap by assuming that an old woman is simply stupid and of no danger to him. The story deserves a fuller interpretation than can be given here, within the context of other stories about old women, but it shows what more can be appreciated about characters who seem unimportant in the scheme of things, when reading against the apparent intentions of the author.

## CONCLUSION

**We cannot deny that stereotypical** female characters and imagery appear in Manichaean literature, even in stories and parables that may in other ways go well beyond the typically strong stereotypes found in teaching and liturgical material that are supported by the heavily and strictly dualistic nature of the Manichaean system itself. Further steps are required to break down and reach beyond the stereotypes to appreciate more about the female characters and imagery in Manichaean texts.

There is a much more complex range of activities for the Mother of Life than simply motherhood. There is also the surprising case of the Virgin of Light who uses lust-inciting behaviour against the darkness, and a girl who inspires lust in a monk but does not share his blame. There are a range of character types in

parables and stories beyond the limited range found in major teaching and liturgical texts, and a clever old woman, who unexpectedly, as an agent of the darkness, exhibits a power and intelligence greater than the agents of the Light.

Collecting, listing and categorising key themes and imagery for female characters in major Manichaean works is important to gain a first overall impression of Manichaean women and female figures. Nevertheless, while much of this current research brings to the foreground important concepts about women, it tends to dismiss less noticeable or less frequent images that could be of equal importance. Thus it is important to revisit, again and again, the various steps and interim conclusions of the research process, treating that process as a spiral movement, reaching back and sharpening ideas and conclusions even as we push forward with the attempt to assemble and appreciate the entire network of female characters, imagery and themes in the Manichaean system. ¶



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Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Jesus in Gnostic and apocryphal gospels, the Church of the East and Manichaeism in fourteenth-century China, and Women and Religion.

1. This article appeared in a longer version as the 2007 Academy of the Humanities Trendall Lecture, published in the Academy's 2007 *Proceedings*. My thanks to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation who supported three months of my research on this project in 2007 in Berlin (Institut für Turfanforschung, Berlin-Brandenburg Akademie der Wissenschaften) and Tübingen (Evangelisch-theologische Fakultät, Eberhard-Karls-Universität), and to the wonderfully generous colleagues at each of these institutions.
2. A question remains whether women may have held the position of deacon/deaconess in Central Asia. A text (with archive number Zong 8782 T, 82 = Y 974 = K 7709 in the Museum for Chinese History in Beijing), dealing with housekeeping matters of a Manichaean monastery, lists the winter clothing and shoes

- to be given to certain people connected to the temple. It is possible that the persons referred to as female servants (aspanač — a term not known in the feminine form in Sogdian) might be understood as deacons/deaconesses. See T. Moriyasu, 'Die Geschichte des uigurischen Manichäismus an der Seidenstraße. Forschungen zu manichäischen Quellen und ihrem geschichtlichen Hintergrund', in *Studies in Oriental Religions* 50, transl. by Christian Steineck (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004) for the text (p. 46, lines 40-41) and reference to discussion on this point from Zieme, Yoshida and Lieu (p. 83).
3. J. K. Coyle, 'Prolegomena to a Study of Women in Manichaeism', in *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and Its World*, ed. by P. Mirecki and J. BeDuhn, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 79-92. See Coyle's earlier study, 'Mary Magdalen in Manichaeism', *Le Muséon*, 104 (1991), pp. 39-55, recently updated in 'Twelve Years Later: Revisiting the "Marys" of Manichaeism', in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, ed. by D. Good (Bloomington, IN, and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 197-211.
  4. J.K. Coyle, 'Women and Manichaeism's Mission to the Roman Empire', *Mission*, 13 (2006), pp. 43-61.
  5. M. Scopello, *Femme, Gnose et Manichéisme. De l'espace mythique au territoire du réel*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).
  6. M. Franzmann, 'An "Heretical" Use of the New Testament: A Manichaean Adaptation of Matt 6:19-20 in P. Kell. Copt. 32', in *The New Testament Interpreted. Essays in Honour of Bernard C. Lategan*, Novum Testamentum Supplementum 124, ed. by C. Breytenbach, J. Thom, and J. Punt (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 153-162; and M. Franzmann, 'Tehat the Weaver: Women's Experience in Manichaeism in 4th Century Roman Kellis', *Australian Religion Studies Review*, 20, 1 (2007), pp. 17-26.
  7. M. Franzmann, 'Manichaean Views of Women: A Study of the Teaching and Perspectives on Women from the *Kephalaia of the Teacher* and the Manichaean *Psalm Book*', in "I Sowed Fruits into Hearts" (*Odes Sol. 17:13*). *Festschrift for Professor Michael Lattke*, Early Christian Studies 12, ed. by P. Allen, M. Franzmann and R. Strelan (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 2007), pp. 67-85.
  8. See, however, a study by my student, Kristie Morrison, 'Images of the Mother in Manichaean Cosmogonical Texts: A Case Study of the Mother of Life' (unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, 2006).
  9. W. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte der Manichäer mit einigen Bemerkungen zu Motiven der Parabeltexte von Friedmar Geissler*, Berliner Turfantexte 4 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1973), pp. 51-52, lines 992, 1001, 1013 (M 211 + 500f + 2203 + 2205 + 3840). See also p. 55, line 1033 (M 351/R/5) and p. 56, lines 1054-1055 (from fragments M 384 and M 4517).
  10. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte*, p. 47, line 876 (M 292/R?/11/9). Sundermann also references passages from the Kephalaia (240.16-244.20; 80.25-29; 116.26-33).
  11. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte*, p. 49, line 919 (M 765i/i. S./11/3-4).
  12. M. Boyce, 'Sadwēs and Pēsūs', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 13 (1949-1950), p. 912.
  13. See for example the activity of Az in W. Sundermann, *Der Sermon vom Licht-Nous. Eine Lehrschrift des östlichen Manichäismus. Edition der parthischen und soghdischen Version*. Berliner Turfantexte 17 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), pp. 63-65, lines 7-13.
  14. Sundermann, *Der Sermon vom Licht-Nous*, p. 77, line 109.
  15. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte*, p. 93, lines 1806-1824.
  16. W. Sundermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts. Mit einem Appendix von Nicholas Sims-Williams*, Berliner Turfantexte 11 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981), p. 58, lines 681-682 (M4576/V/Ü-/R/Ü/ [title]) and 683-699 (M4576/R/i/1-17).
  17. See for example, Sundermann, *Der Sermon vom Licht-Nous*, p. 130 (M 133 v/ii/96-100).
  18. See W.B. Henning, 'The Book of the Giants', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 11 (1943), pp. 63-64 (Middle Persian fragment f) and p. 64 (A. [Middle Persian] Frg. d), which Henning references to Keph 192.3. See also M 221/V/11-24 in Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte*, pp. 103-104, lines 2010-2023.
  19. See for example, W. Sundermann, *Ein manichäisch-soghdisches Parabelbuch mit einem Anhang von Friedmar Geissler über Erzählmotive in der Geschichte von den zwei Schlangen*, Berliner Turfantexte 15 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985), p. 33, Text b, lines 198-201.
  20. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte*, p. 92, lines 1784-1803 (M 572/R/2-21).
  21. Sundermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts*, pp. 59-60, lines 717-741 (M4576/V/Ü-/R/Ü/ [title] and /V/i/1-/V/ii/8).
  22. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte*, pp. 84-86, lines 1634-1683.



# 'What's happening?'

## Banality & Intimacy in Mobile & Social Media<sup>1</sup>

» KATE CRAWFORD

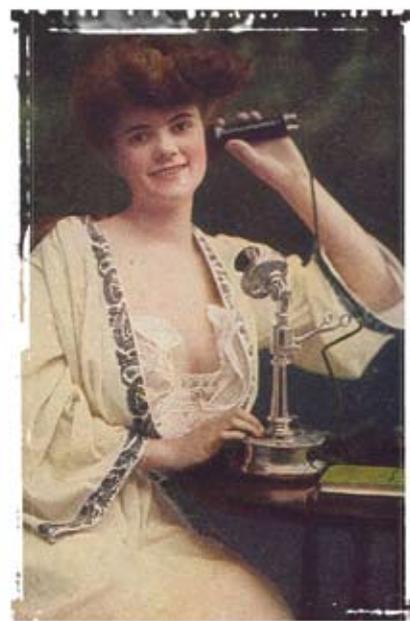
And what, exactly, is it that keeps people, especially young adults, jabbering away into the mobiles held to their ears, or the microphones dangling from their necks? What portentous information, what profound philosophical insight, is it that can't wait until they are home again, or in the actual physical presence of their interlocutor?<sup>2</sup>

So writes Imre Salusinszky in *The Australian* newspaper. His is one of many voices in the popular media that claim mobile phones are a technology for banality in human communication. We have all doubtless been annoyed by loud, one-sided mobile conversations, best portrayed by *The Chaser* in the form of Clive the Slightly Too Loud Commuter. Young people, however, are most regularly singled out as broadcasting the banal into public space.

This irritation over irrelevant chit-chat from the young mirrors earlier studies into attitudes about women's use of fixed-line telephones. As Lana Rakow observed in her American study *Gender on the Line*, women have commonly been criticised by men for the triviality, length and expense of their calls.<sup>3</sup> In Australia, twenty years ago, Ann Moyal conducted a similar study to investigate how women used the landline telephone to form and maintain social bonds, and found that regular

discussions about ordinary day-to-day events were critical.<sup>4</sup> Moyal drew on Suzanne Keller's work that distinguished between two genres of phone conversation: the instrumental and the intrinsic.<sup>5</sup> Instrumental calls, focused on making business arrangements, making appointments or seeking information, were dramatically outnumbered in frequency and length by intrinsic calls — personal, 'unpressured' exchanges, also known as idle chat.

Women's use of the phone established what Moyal describes as a 'network of callers



which constitute an "electronic community" of friendships, mutual support and kin-

(above)  
Bonus Bureau,  
Computing Division,  
24 November 1924.

SOURCE: SHORPY.

(right)  
Woman using  
telephone, c. 1910,  
from US postcard.

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA.

keeping’, a ‘“psychological neighbourhood” that substituted for face-to-face contact’.<sup>6</sup> This intimacy over distance was maintained precisely by sharing the banalities of everyday life, by talking about what might seem to others to be insignificant details.

There is thus a long tradition of depicting both women and young people as being problematically trivial in their phone use, with their discussions of the everyday seen as inferior or degraded forms of communication. Such a view values those forms of phone use that are instrumental rather than intimate — characteristics coded as ‘adult’ and ‘male’. The criticisms of women for their insignificant chats on fixed-line phones discount the emotional ties developed by these conversations, the care-giving work that both Moyal and Rakow found to be so significant. Likewise, the discourses about young people’s trivial conversations on mobiles overlook the importance of the social bonds developed and maintained in these modes. As Meaghan Morris wrote, banality is ‘always a mask for

exchanges about everyday occurrences represent a connected intimacy between close friends and family. As Ilpo Koskinen noted in his study of mobiles:

In our experiments, it has been a technology that ‘explodes banality’. With it, people transform small things in everyday life into mutual entertainment.<sup>9</sup>

The banal proliferates through mobile media; but it is not without function. Mobile users may be remote, but they are describing elements of their working day, their train ride, or their decisions about what to cook for dinner. They may photograph their cat, a road sign or a particularly good cup of coffee, and upload this to Facebook or Twitter. Once, such moments could only be shared with intimates — people who share working space or home space.

As a ‘machinery that produces banality’,<sup>10</sup> mobile media invite remote friends and family to partake in these experiences in spite of physical distance. Ito and Okabe observe that

WHAT’S HAPPENING MAY BE NOTHING MUCH OR, AS WE SAW WITH THE EXPLOSION OF TWITTER MESSAGES ABOUT THE IRANIAN ELECTIONS OF 2008, IT MAY BE SOMETHING...HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT.

questions of value, of value judgement and “discrimination” — especially in the sense of how we distinguish and evaluate problems [...] and defend our choice of what matters’.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, much of human conversation is couched in small talk and embedded in the mundane. There are the exchanges that contain no substantive content whatsoever, but serve to put people at ease. First described by Bronislaw Malinowski when observing the Trobriand Islanders, ‘phatic communication’ — an exchange that contains almost no substantive content — exists to strengthen social bonds, such that the ‘ties of union are created by the mere exchange of words’.<sup>8</sup> In such communication, the content of the conversation is not important, as it is an exchange which prioritises a recognition of the other’s presence: ‘So what’s happening?’

Mobile conversations commonly contain phatic and non-phatic modes. Even when offering little by way of substantive content,

mobile phones function as a form of ‘glue for cementing a space of shared intimacy’, between lovers, close friends and acquaintances.<sup>11</sup> As fixed-line telephones offer intimacy over distance, so mobiles offer intimacy that travels with you, or ‘full-time intimate community’.<sup>12</sup>

But how does this intimacy change in character when it is shared over a social network, in a public or semi-public space? The social network, Twitter, launched in 2006, is one such space; it garners particular criticism (and much popularity) for trading in the worst kind of human banality.

## TWITTER AND THE USES OF BANALITY

**Twitter asks its users** to answer a question in one hundred and forty characters or less: ‘What’s happening?’ This commonly phatic question can nonetheless be answered in both instrumental and intimate ways: some people write about their lunch, others may link to a breaking news

(right)  
The Notificator  
– an early precursor  
to Twitter.

SOURCE: MODERN  
MECHANIX (AUG, 1935).

story, or share a photograph of a protest. What's happening may be nothing much or, as we saw with the explosion of Twitter messages about the Iranian elections of 2008, it may be something many people see as highly significant. One way to observe Twitter is via Twittervision, which tracks messages in real-time, mapped against a Google world map: <http://www.twittervision.com>. *The New York Times* describes it as 'an absorbing spectacle: a global vision of the human race's quotidian thoughts and activities.'<sup>13</sup>

The number of Twitter users is growing. While the company does not release figures, research firm comScore estimated there were nineteen million visitors to Twitter's web site in March 2009. This figure nonetheless fails to capture the many people who access Twitter via their mobile phone. While it may be popular, Twitter is attracting negative descriptions



Twitter, three main criticisms of the service persist: 'Why would anyone want to do this?', 'It's pointless', 'It's trivial.'<sup>18</sup>

But this very mundanity is central to Twitter's success. As a service, it offers us access to the everyday thoughts of people we are interested in. Rather than the more

THERE IS A TIGHTLY WOUND LOOP BETWEEN THE ROLES OF READING AND WRITING ON TWITTER; USERS SWITCH FROM BEING ONE TO THE OTHER IN THE SPACE OF A MOMENT.

that include 'pointless' and 'time-consuming', as well as 'problematic' and 'addictive'. Lev Grossman in *Time Magazine* describes Twitter as the 'cocaine of blogging or e-mail but refined into crack'.<sup>14</sup> Productivity author Tim Ferriss calls Twitter 'pointless email on steroids'.<sup>15</sup> According to the science fiction author and Twitter user, Bruce Sterling, 'using Twitter for literate communication is about as likely as firing up a CB radio and hearing some guy recite *The Iliad*'.<sup>16</sup>

Micro-blogging encourages the disclosure of simple, easily described moments. Social networking researchers Ashkay Java *et al.* analysed Twitter traffic and found that the greatest number of posts were about 'daily routine or what people are currently doing', followed by conversations — people responding to each other's updates.<sup>17</sup> Twitter's emphasis on temporality (accounting for actions in the present tense) seems to exaggerate the possibility for banality. Twittering from a work computer can encourage messages about the office, or discoveries on the web, while messages from a phone can encourage 'out in the field' reports from events, dinners, gigs or trains. According to Evan Williams, co-founder of

substantial writing that may be developed in blogs, 'tweets' record the moments that are not usually saved for posterity, brief moments that normally disappear beneath the surface of life. In Maurice Blanchot's words, 'the everyday escapes, it belongs to insignificance.'<sup>19</sup>

So why is it that groups of friends, associates and strangers delight in reading these insignificant details from the lives of others? Bachelard once argued that there was a pure joy in recognising the shared experience of trivial, everyday things, as 'insignificance becomes the sign of extreme sensitivity to the intimate means that establish an understanding between writer and reader'.<sup>20</sup> There is a tightly wound loop between the roles of reading and writing on Twitter; users switch from being one to the other in the space of a moment.

Another co-founder of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, has described how people respond when they first hear that tweets are mainly about simple moments such as cleaning the bathroom or boiling the kettle:

The first reaction is to hate it because it's seen as the most useless thing in the world and no one would ever want to know about

boiling water. But these small details in life are what connect us most. Everyone has these specific moments and you normally don't bring them up in conversation because it seems so trivial but it's not, it's really important.<sup>21</sup>

Dorsey's belief in the importance of small details begs the question of why such moments in life are of consequence. How does the sharing of daily actions and thoughts operate to connect people and create intimacy? Elspeth Probyn raises this question in her essay 'Thinking Habits and the Ordering of Life'.<sup>22</sup> For Probyn, domestic duties trouble the boundary lines between what Charles Pierce described as 'the outer world' of social reality and the 'inner world' of subjectivity. Paying heed to ordinary tasks and mundane details reveals the fabricated nature of this dividing line.

In a similar way, Twitter can be understood as a mechanism that commingles these two worlds, where 'the inner and the outer

the household, it could never break loose and initiate communication.'<sup>24</sup>

Twitter is a networked space where we can see the breaking loose of these everyday acts, as they become the basis for communication. Insignificant details, the ordinary, the domestic are the ties that bind groups of users together. Furthermore Twitter offers different analytic perspectives on how people enact intimacy and connection. It reverses the idea of isolated users receiving thin channels of human contact, where trivial details or chatter are deemed to be empty forms of communication. Instead, small details and daily events cumulate over time to give a sense of the rhythms and flows of another's life. The background awareness of others offered by Twitter has been described as 'social proprioception': a subtle, shifting knowledge of where people are, what pressures or pleasures they are experiencing.<sup>25</sup> Leisa Reichelt calls it 'ambient intimacy': an 'ongoing noise' of

TWITTER REVERSES THE IDEA OF ISOLATED USERS RECEIVING THIN CHANNELS OF HUMAN CONTACT, WHERE TRIVIAL DETAILS...ARE DEEMED TO BE EMPTY FORMS OF COMMUNICATION.

continually move through each other'.<sup>23</sup> Domestic chores and cleaning, in many forms, are popular topics on Twitter: in domestic space, office space, but also the many kinds of electronic self-maintenance and clean up. It may be organising an email inbox, deleting texts on a phone, or updating Facebook or Flickr. People are regularly Twittering on these topics, as the answer to 'what are you doing now?' is often something as banal as cleaning and sorting, in all its forms.

Feminist theorists have struggled with the importance of the trivial tasks of the domestic everyday for many decades. Sylvia Bovenschen wrote in 1976 about the limitations of the ordinary tasks of household and self-maintenance:

[These activities] remained bound to everyday life, feeble attempts to make this sphere more aesthetically pleasing [...] But [housework] could never leave the realm in which it came into being, it remained tied to

the everyday experiences of people one cares about.<sup>26</sup> Beyond the restricted understanding of the intimate that prioritises exchanges of gravity and magnitude, Twitter represents something more molecular and dispersed.

However, Twitter's capacity to connect people via short reports of their activities can also generate forms of claustrophobia and distaste. Twitter updates can literally interrupt one's working day — particularly as some Twitter clients 'pop up' recent tweets from friends directly on screen. These messages can provide a moment of respite or amusement, or they can be an unwelcome disruption. For people who work from home, the 'disjointed conversations' of Twitter can be a source of distraction, a dispersed social space that can be both pleasant and unpleasant: 'like a watercooler or lunch room'.<sup>27</sup>

But the composition of that social space can present problems. Users ultimately must decide how to construct their own environment in Twitter (a public or private profile; a set

of friends with or without professional colleagues), yet there are few established forms of etiquette when it comes to these negotiations. If these environments operate as a form of networked intimacy that includes close friends, family, distant acquaintances, colleagues and strangers, the decisions about how much and which elements of the ‘inner world’ to share are complex.

(right)  
Typist at typewriter,  
from French  
postcard, c. 1910.

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA.

In addition, the conversational field presented by a Twitter network can be fractured in two critical ways: being disjointed in time and reaching different publics. First, messages may not be seen and responded to until after a posting has lost its currency. Second, messages are broadcast to a user’s entire contact-base, but when friends’ social networks do not exactly coincide with one another, each interlocutor is effectively speaking to a different audience. Conversations can thus seem out of joint: a message is answered too late, or a ‘crossed line’ effect emerges when people have lost the thread of a discussion.

While the general operation of Twitter is the gradual accretion of everyday moments and passing thoughts, there is considerable variation in how people adapt this process. Some use it to describe what they are doing, others use it to share information or converse, others confabulate and entertain. Regardless of the importance or banality of these contributions, they are read by a community of users who come

see that a conversation has a life of its own and makes demands on its own behalf. It is a little social system with its own boundary-maintaining tendencies; it is a little patch of commitment and loyalty with its own heroes and its own villains.<sup>28</sup>



Goffman’s work has been taken up by mobile scholars who are seeking to understand how ritualised communication is used to develop social bonds.<sup>29</sup> While the possible channels for ‘talk’ have expanded since Goffman published *Interaction Ritual* in 1967, conversations continue to build affective ties and define boundaries regardless of the medium in which they occur. As Hjorth has noted, the practice of intimacy has always been mediated;<sup>30</sup> so we can find many commonalities between

WHEN FRIENDS’ SOCIAL NETWORKS DO NOT EXACTLY COINCIDE WITH ONE ANOTHER,  
EACH INTERLOCUTOR IS EFFECTIVELY SPEAKING TO A DIFFERENT AUDIENCE.

to recognise and relate to that presence, tracking their moods, habits and whims. In this way, Twitter is best understood as a disclosing space, with all that entails: truth, falsity, humour, triviality, drudgery, gossip and camaraderie.

### DISCLOSING SPACES

**Writing about the experience** of a face-to-face discussion, Erving Goffman argues:

[T]alk is unique, however, for talk creates for the participant a world and a reality that has other participants in it [...] We must also

in-person, fixed-line telephone, mobile and socially networked conversations. But there are also important differences.

Although the importance of sharing the everyday remains, the available technologies do so evolve and create new spaces, subtly changing the capacities for emotional exchange. As the fixed-line telephone offered the intimacy of listening over distance, so the mobile phone allows those conversations to happen in new territories: textual, visual and aural, moving along with the user. Mobile social networks offer us yet more angles of perception on human rapport and

its plasticity. In semi-public networks such as Twitter, new collective intimacies develop — social groups that bond through the minutiae of their lives, gradually developing a more granular awareness of each other.

Each medium also presents a set of limitations. Twitter's restriction to one hundred and forty characters per message provides a

Goffman emphasised the importance of 'talk' to social bonding, but my interest now lies with understanding and researching the developing modes of 'listening' that underscore what is particular to intimacy in networked mobile media. Twitter is one instance of a space where 'listening in' to the disclosures of others occurs continuously, as

DISCLOSING REQUIRES A LISTENER IN ORDER CONSTITUTE A 'DISCLOSURE', AND AS THE TECHNOLOGICAL MODES OF SPEAKING HAVE CHANGED, SO HAVE THE MODES OF LISTENING.

clear example of a designated boundary that preconditions the kinds of communication that is possible. Its emphasis on reporting the quotidian also constitutes a restraint on other forms of discourse. As we have seen, Twitter users find many ways to adapt the form to their own ends, but there is a limit point: such a space is not conducive to lengthy political debate or detailed analysis. As Bovenschen reminds us, the everyday also creates a bind. While it is valuable and important in human connection, can it ever transcend its realm to instigate other forms of debate, reaction or change? Cultural and feminist theorists have done considerable work to reframe the value and function of 'idle chat' and the everyday, and while they point to the structural limitations, they also suggest its crucial role in building human intimacy.

Sustaining multiple, near simultaneous conversations over communications technologies is commonplace — a discussion over a fixed line at work while responding to email, replying to instant messages while chatting across a kitchen table, sending a tweet while listening to a band at a pub. These are all different kinds of disclosing spaces, some being one-on-one, others being within a closed group of friends, or open to whoever is listening. Disclosing requires a listener in order constitute a 'disclosure', and as the technological modes of speaking have changed, so have the modes of listening. As mobile media forms offer us new spaces of disclosure, so we develop capacities for hearing in different ways: face-to-face, over the phone, or just 'in the background' as we listen to channels of personal daydreams and insignificant chatter.

people tune in to updates from other users over the course of the day. In the history of research into technologies such as the Internet, this kind of activity is never considered participation — merely 'lurking'. Yet it is in this receptive mode, scanning updates in a way that is more akin to radio listening than reading, that the majority of time online is spent. This emerging, diffuse familiarity with the often banal details of people's lives is an important part of the connection and intimacy of mobile and social media. ¶



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3. See Lana Rakow, *Gender on the Line: Women, the Telephone, and Community Life* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
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27. Glenda Hyatt, comment on 'I love Twitter, But I Have to Quit It', *Jim Kukral* Blog, comment posted 28 November 2007, <<http://www.jimkukral.com/i-love-twitter-but-i-have-to-quit-it/>> [accessed 4 December 2009]. Hyatt has cerebral palsy, but uses Twitter to stay in touch with others while she works from home as a writer and blogger.
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# ADAPTATION & VARIATION *in* APPOINTMENTS *to* NATIONAL COURTS<sup>1</sup>

VARIATION

» MICHAEL KIRBY

## THE DARWINIAN LAW OF VARIATION

A **final national court** plays an important role in helping its society to adapt to the ever-changing environment in which law operates. My proposition is that, to be successful, such an institution, and indeed all superior courts, must, like all living physical organisms, adapt to the laws of variation. They must be able to reflect the variety of responses that will permit them to adapt to changing times and needs. Charles Darwin's thesis was that all living organisms need adaptation and variation to survive and adjust to different times and circumstances.<sup>2</sup> Reproduction by identical or near identical cloning will endanger the capacity of an organism to cope with new

challenges, even perhaps to survive. I believe that this conclusion has a message for lawyers, parliaments and citizens about how they should go about appointing the judges to such important national institutions. Variety, not sameness, is the message that Darwin teaches. It is also the message that I propound.

The Australian Constitution envisaged the High Court of Australia as 'a Federal Supreme Court' and as the principal repository of 'the judicial power of the Commonwealth'.<sup>3</sup> However, detailed provisions for the operation of the court, and for the appointment of the Justices, were not enacted until 1903.<sup>4</sup> Federal legislation<sup>5</sup> subsequently provided that the



court would be a 'superior court of record and consist of the Chief Justice and two (later six) other Justices'.<sup>6</sup> In the appointment of new Justices, provision is now made for the Federal Attorney-General, before any appointment of a Justice to a vacant office, to consult with the Attorneys-General of the States in relation to the appointment.<sup>7</sup> This provision was not enacted until 1979. Although it has resulted in the supply of a pool of governmental nominees, and was designed to assuage state criticisms of repeated interpretations of the Constitution inimical to state powers, the process of 'consultation' means just that.

Mason, has argued: 'With the advent of Isaacs and Higgins, Griffith's dominating influence began its steady decline'. The days of friendly concurrences were a thing of the past.<sup>9</sup>

If ever it was necessary to demonstrate the importance of appointments to the values of a final national court, that lesson was quickly drawn to notice when Justice Isaac Isaacs and Justice Henry B. Higgins took their seats. Isaacs, in particular, was no less brilliant than Griffith and even more ambitious. He had a great mastery of the law. And he differed fundamentally in his approach to the construction of the federal Constitution.



(cover page)  
High Court  
of Australia.

COURTESY OF HIGH COURT  
OF AUSTRALIA.

THERE IS NO OBLIGATION FOR THE COMMONWEALTH TO LIMIT APPOINTMENTS  
TO THOSE NOMINATED, MUCH LESS TO ACCEPT ANY OF THE NOMINEES.

The States provide nominees. But there is no obligation for the Commonwealth to limit appointments to those nominated, much less to accept any of the nominees. My own appointment in 1996 followed my nomination by the Attorney-General for New South Wales. I was then serving as President of the Court of Appeal of that State. But not all Justices in recent years were nominated by a government under this statutory procedure.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF JUDICIAL VALUES

**Because of similarities between** provisions in the Australian and United States of America constitutions, the original Justices in the High Court of Australia commonly followed American constitutional doctrines on federal questions, including that of inter-governmental immunities and reserved State powers.<sup>8</sup> In effect, they concluded, from a reading of the Constitution as a whole, that it was intended to preserve and maintain a kind of federal balance between central and sub-national powers.

The harmony of the original Justices of the High Court of Australia is evident from the fact that they lunched together daily and formed a strong social and professional bond. However, in 1906, the appointment of two additional Justices, each a fine lawyer with less conservative legal views, shattered the calm of the new court. As former Chief Justice

With the support of Higgins, Isaacs began propounding a doctrine that would eventually prevail in 1920 in the *Engineers Case*.<sup>10</sup> According to this doctrine, if a relevant legislative power was granted by the Constitution to the Federal Parliament, the words of the grant were to be given their natural and ordinary meaning and the paramountcy of the federal law was to be upheld. This rule of literalism continues to prevail.

It is vital to appreciate that neither the position of the original Justices of the High Court of Australia nor that of Isaacs and Higgins was unarguable, illicit, improper, wrongly motivated or so-called 'activist'. Each is a legitimate and fully arguable legal approach to the judicial task in hand. Each has had highly intelligent supporters in and outside the Court. Each reflects a different spectrum of values and perceptions about the text and objectives of the Constitution, sincerely held by capable and independent judges. However, because these values have profound consequences for the outcome of cases (not to say for the distribution of governmental powers within the nation), the appointment of judges having such differing views is of legitimate interest to the governmental appointing authorities and to the people of the nation who will be affected by the decisions made by such judges.

(left)  
The Public Hall,  
High Court  
of Australia.

COURTESY OF HIGH COURT  
OF AUSTRALIA.

## THE CREATIVITY OF COURTS IN COMMON LAW COUNTRIES

The books on the shelves of judicial chambers demonstrate the fact that centuries of judicial creativity have preceded the appointments of all of the present judicial incumbents in Britain, Australia, and other countries of the common law. Where else did the common law of England come from, if not from judicial predecessors? To deny the creative element in the judicial function in such a pragmatic and effective legal system is impossible in the face of ever-present reality. Perhaps its very creativity has obliged a kind of fiction or sleight-of-hand to quieten the fears of a democratic people that unelected judges enjoy too much power. Yet creative power they certainly enjoy. Not only in the exposition (or 'declaration') of the common law, but also in the elaboration of ambiguities in legislation. And some of that legislation, over the centuries, certainly counts as 'constitutional' in character. It may not be in a single comprehensive document; but it exists.

In the exposition of the *common law*, there are many familiar instances of the creative role that now devolves on the new Supreme Court of the United Kingdom. Take as an example the string of decisions in the English courts on the so-called 'wrongful birth' cases,<sup>11</sup> culminating in that of the House of Lords in *McFarlane v Tayside Health Board*.<sup>12</sup> To a very large extent, the problem presented to the courts was itself an outcome of the application of new medical technology. Lawyers might pretend that



(right)  
Tapestry Banner,  
High Court  
of Australia.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN  
ACADEMY OF THE  
HUMANITIES ARCHIVES.

legally liable for a birth, because of negligence, of a healthy but unplanned and unwanted child. But three judges strongly dissented.

Even sharper have been the divisions between judges addressing medical professional liability in the so-called 'wrongful life' cases.<sup>15</sup> The majority of the High Court of Australia rejected the existence of a cause of action brought by a child profoundly injured by blindness, deafness and mental retardation

TO DENY THE CREATIVE ELEMENT IN THE JUDICIAL FUNCTION IN SUCH A PRAGMATIC AND EFFECTIVE LEGAL SYSTEM IS IMPOSSIBLE IN THE FACE OF EVER-PRESENT REALITY.

rulings in individual cases derived logically and inevitably from earlier decisional authority. However, no one could seriously suggest that the outcomes were exclusively a technical or purely verbal exercise for which a lifetime in commercial or insolvency law was the best preparation for a high judicial decision-maker. In *Cattanach v Melchior*,<sup>13</sup> a majority of the High Court of Australia<sup>14</sup> held that a doctor could be

occasioned by a repeatedly undiagnosed condition of foetal rubella.<sup>16</sup> The majority of the Court denied recovery on the basis that it was not logically possible for it to be asserted, on behalf of the child, that he should not have been born at all. My own view was, adapting the words of Professor Peter Cane, that 'the plaintiff [...] is surely not complaining that he was born, simpliciter, but that because of

the circumstances under which he was born his lot in life is a disadvantaged one'.<sup>17</sup>

In the United Kingdom, the *Congenital Disabilities (Civil Liability) Act 1976* (UK) expressly prohibited 'wrongful life' actions.<sup>18</sup>

same-sex partner for the purposes of the *Rent Act 1977* (UK). The decision was reached over a strong dissenting opinion that laid emphasis upon the history of the *Rent Act* and how it would have been understood at the time of the

THE CASES SHOW THAT DIFFERING VIEWS CAN LEGITIMATELY EXIST AND DO EXIST AMONGST HONEST AND HIGHLY EXPERIENCED JUDGES.

That Act had been drafted following recommendations of the Law Commission.<sup>19</sup> The Act also reflected the thinking of the English Court of Appeal in the supervening case of *McKay v Essex Area Health Authority*.<sup>20</sup> In other jurisdictions, the preponderance of decisional law has generally followed roughly the same analysis as that of the majority in the High Court of Australia, although not without occasional contrary views.<sup>21</sup> So far as the basic principles of tort law are concerned (and the evaluation of issues raised by relevant considerations of legal principle and legal policy),<sup>22</sup> respectfully I remain unconvinced. But this is beside the present point. The cases show that differing views can legitimately exist and do exist amongst honest and highly experienced judges.

Useful insights can often be found from judicial reasoning in other places. But, in the end, a final national court must reach its own conclusions on subjects involving the content of the domestic common law. They must do so by reference not only to legal authority (which will not formally bind the final court to a conclusion) but also by reference to legal principle and policy. These considerations enliven an evaluative exercise, which is stronger and more convincing if it is transparent in its performance.

### JUDICIAL VALUES AND STATUTORY INTERPRETATION

Apart from the common law, judicial values can also influence the outcome in contested cases of *statutory interpretation*. There could be few clearer illustrations of this proposition than in the divided decision of the House of Lords in *Fitzpatrick v Sterling Housing Association Ltd*.<sup>23</sup> There, the majority held that a person was capable of being a member of the 'family' of his

enactment of the applicable provisions (and still more the provisions upon which they were earlier based, dating back to the early decades of the twentieth century).

A clash was thus presented in *Fitzpatrick* between a value that insisted on a literal interpretation of the words of the legislation as parliament 'intended' those words to apply when they became law. And the value

(below)

Courtroom 1,  
High Court  
of Australia.

COURTESY OF HIGH COURT  
OF AUSTRALIA.



of reading such statutory words so that they would apply in the contemporaneous social circumstances where, by other legislation and human rights provisions, discriminatory, unequal and prejudicial interpretations of the law, contrary to the rights and interests of minorities, have generally been discouraged.

If ever there was a clash of legal values and of contestable principles towards the approach

However, enough has been shown to indicate that the task of statutory interpretation, like that of 'declaring' the common law, is not mechanical. It cannot be performed (at least in a final national court) with no aids other than past cases and a dictionary or two. Individual judicial values affect outcomes. That is why judicial appointments are extremely important, particularly

INDIVIDUAL JUDICIAL VALUES AFFECT OUTCOMES. THAT IS WHY JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, PARTICULARLY APPOINTMENTS TO FINAL NATIONAL COURTS.

(below)

Sign, High Court of Australia.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES ARCHIVES.

to generally beneficial legislation, it can be seen in the majority and dissenting opinions in the House of Lords in *Fitzpatrick*. It is not necessary to dig into the psychological well-springs of the respective Law Lords. Nor is it appropriate to evaluate their respective life journeys, religious inclinations or perceptions about human rights.

appointments to final national courts.

Increasingly, in the coming years (including in the United Kingdom) this truth will come to be realised. It will be realised, for example, by the appointing officers in the executive government who have the all but last (formal) say under our constitutional



arrangements about judicial appointments. But it will also influence the process of consultation and selection that is put in place for the making of such appointments.

### TRADITIONAL AND REFORMED PROCEDURES OF JUDICIAL APPOINTMENT

Under the traditional reformed British model for the appointment of judges, including those of final courts, the last word conventionally belonged to the executive government, elected to reflect the majority of the members in the lower house of parliament. Some (including in the judiciary and legal profession) have found this a defective arrangement. The critics fear purely political appointees. On the other hand, there remain strong arguments in support of both the theory and practice that lies behind the appointment of judges, ultimately by persons elected by the people.

The provision for a democratic element to be included in the appointment of judges, with their law-making role, has a doctrinal and political, as well as an historical, justification. Such appointments provide a constitutional symmetry to the power typically assigned to parliaments operating throughout the Commonwealth of Nations, to remove superior court judges on the

Australia, to ensure a measure of diversity in the values of those appointed to high judicial office. It has attracted public scrutiny of judicial appointments in the media, academic and professional discourse, which is healthy. It has also provided a corrective to an exclusively 'professional' judgment on appointments by involving considerations of the long-term deployment of individual decisional values, not just technical or linguistic skills.

In common law countries, the main radical alternatives to this British model have evolved in the United States of America. In that country, most State judges are either elected to office or are subject to electoral confirmation, which involves a far more active democratic participation in the selection process. Switzerland is the only other country that has procedures for judicial election. Few legal observers in Commonwealth countries would favour such a process. It subjects candidates to direct pressures that may be inconsistent with the independent and impartial performance of their judicial functions. Those features represent the hallmark of a judiciary conforming to modern standards of universal human rights.<sup>25</sup>

The somewhat less radical provisions of the United States federal Constitution also introduced a more openly democratic element

THERE REMAIN STRONG ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF BOTH THE THEORY AND PRACTICE THAT LIES BEHIND THE APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES, ULTIMATELY BY PERSONS ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE.

grounds of proved incapacity or misconduct.<sup>24</sup> Both the appointment and removal of such judges are constitutionally important steps, comparatively rare, at once personal and public and having significance for the governance of a democratic polity.

Combined with the strong tradition of apoliticism between the coming in and going out of the judges of our tradition, the foregoing arrangements must be said to have worked rather well, on the whole, over a very long time. They have recognised constitutional realities. They have assured a democratic and even political role in the appointment of judges. And when the significance of judicial values is understood, that political element has, in my view, been justified. It had tended, at least in

in the appointment of federal judges. It did this by the constitutional requirement that federal judges must be nominated by the President but appointed 'with the Advice and Consent of the Senate'.<sup>26</sup> The Senate is advised on such confirmations by the powerful Judiciary Committee. At least in recent times, a great logjam has arisen, delaying the appointment of federal judges in a way that was clearly not envisaged by those who drafted the constitutional article.<sup>27</sup>

To Commonwealth eyes, however, this is only one of the defects of the United States provision. Whilst recognising the high importance of appointees and of their values for the discharge of their office, the confirmation procedure has tended to subject

candidates to questions that lie at the heart of their future judicial performance. It has subjected them to huge political pressure to participate in ‘coaching’ by representatives of the President, with a resulting potential to diminish the judicial office by needlessly involving its members, or potential members, in controversies defined by political and partisan perspectives.<sup>28</sup>

### THE MODERN AUSTRALIAN APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES

In Australia, the procedures for judicial appointment have not, so far, formally challenged the ultimate repository of the appointments power. It belongs, in the

the lower courts (where they began) to some superior courts, including state Supreme Courts and the Federal Court of Australia. As well, the present federal Attorney-General has appointed a non-statutory committee to advise him on appointments. The committee comprises three present or former judges (former Chief Justice F.G. Brennan of the High Court; former Chief Justice M.E. Black of the Federal Court; Justice Jane Mathews, formerly of the Federal and Supreme Courts) and an official from the federal Attorney-General’s department. The committee’s reports, which are confidential, are advisory only.

As stated, in the case of the High Court of Australia, legislation requires a non-binding consultation to take place with the

IN AUSTRALIA, THE PROCEDURES FOR JUDICIAL APPOINTMENT HAVE NOT, SO FAR, FORMALLY CHALLENGED THE ULTIMATE REPOSITORY OF THE APPOINTMENTS POWER.

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Courtroom 1,  
High Court  
of Australia.

COURTESY OF HIGH COURT  
OF AUSTRALIA.

conventional British way, to the executive government of the Commonwealth or States or Territories concerned. Nevertheless, in a comparatively short time, procedures for advertising judicial vacancies and inviting applications and nominations have spread from

Attorneys-General of the States of Australia. However, appointment is reserved, under the Constitution, to the Federal Executive Council, which advises the Governor-General. That Council comprises, relevantly, politicians who are members of the federal cabinet. In

effect, because of the recognised legal, constitutional and political significance of appointees to the operations of the final national court in Australia, the ultimate decision is made by the cabinet. It has before it a recommendation from the Attorney-General. However, according to well substantiated reports in Australia, many a name has gone into cabinet with the support of the minister. However, if the proposed appointee does not have the support of the Prime Minister and of senior ministers, it is unlikely to proceed to appointment.

### NEW PROCEDURES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In the United Kingdom, the selection procedure for the new Supreme Court is established by the



*Constitutional Reform Act 2005* (UK). It involves a panel of five persons, chaired by the President of the Supreme Court. The panel also includes the Deputy President of the Supreme Court and three other members, each nominated by the respective judicial appointments bodies of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These nominees need not be judges or even lawyers.<sup>29</sup> However some typically are judges. The selection procedure has been described in the media as ‘convoluted’. Clearly, it is dominated, if not formally controlled, by presently serving judges. Contrary to previous practice, the President of the Supreme Court even has a role to play in the selection of his or her successor.

Only one of the recent twelve Supreme Court Justices (Baroness Hale of Richmond) is a woman and all but one (Lord Kerr of Tonaghmore) has a background that includes a degree from either Oxford or Cambridge University. From time to time, there have been similar comments in Australia about the comparative lack of diversity in the professional education and legal practices, of most of the nation’s final court judges. As in Canada, however, the gender imbalance of the final court is much less visible. (In Australia 3 of 7 are women, in Canada 4 of 9, including the Chief Justice. In New Zealand, the Chief Justice is a woman: Dame Sian Elias.)

From the foregoing considerations concerning the importance of *values* (involving the ascertainment of relevant legal authority, legal principle and legal policy) in final national courts of appeal, I would suggest that a number of conclusions may be drawn.

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

**First, judges in final national courts,** even more than trial judges and judges in intermediate courts, have very large responsibilities: for the interpretation of constitutional and equivalent provisions; for the construction of important but ambiguous legislation; and for the ascertainment and ‘declaration’ of the emerging common law.

Secondly, the performance of the foregoing tasks, particularly at the level of a final national court, is rarely a purely technical or mechanical function. It is highly desirable that



judges of such courts should be conscious, and transparent, about their own processes of reasoning.

Thirdly, an appreciation of these features of judicial reasoning, especially in a final national court, will have a number of practical consequences for the organisation of the court and performance of its functions, including the provision of the facility of intervention and advocacy by the parties, addressed not simply to past authority but also to the broader considerations of principle and policy that will be presented by an appeal.<sup>30</sup>

Fourthly, for the tasks that are committed to final national courts, a range of professional and personal skills on the part of the judges appointed to serve is essential.

Fifthly, once the foregoing is acknowledged, there is wisdom in retaining a distinct role for the elected government in the appointment of judges, especially judges of appellate, and particularly judges of a final national court. With popular accountability for such appointments in a representative democracy, it is highly desirable (if not essential) to have more than a purely nominal or informal or restricted link to the elected government and parliament. The input of governments that change over time, and which are accountable to parliament, into the appointment of such judges, not only affords democratic legitimacy for the appointees, reflecting arguably the most precious feature of the national constitution.



(above)  
The Public Hall,  
High Court  
of Australia.

COURTESY OF HIGH COURT  
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It also tends to secure, over time, a variety of changing values that are also reflected in the changing compositions of parliaments and governments themselves. This is not to politicise the judiciary along purely partisan lines. It is simply to reflect the reality that strongly differing views are often held in

of a purely judicial dominance of the appointments of future judges is obvious. The risk in such a procedure is that there may be insufficient questioning of the values of the judicial candidates, their background and experience, and an excessively deferential attitude to the established professional

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society about the kind of value judgments which such judges must necessarily perform.

No one suggests the adoption in Australia, or the United Kingdom, India or other Commonwealth countries, of elections or political confirmation of the American variety. To our eyes, these procedures have too many faults. By the same token, the effective assignment of (most) judicial appointments to advisory bodies operating wholly or substantially within an established legal culture is equally defective. Without disrespect to the very distinguished present and past judges and other officials participating in such procedures, theirs is not the only or even the main voice that should be heard. To replace judicial appointment by elected politicians effectively by a system of judicial appointments selected by present or past judges severs the important link of the judges to democratic authority for their tasks. In the process, it risks the effective imposition of an overly narrow perspective about what really matters in judicial performance. It runs the particular risk of limiting the inputs of information and assessments that are addressed concerning the very wide range of values and qualities that are essential to the judges of a final national court, immediately upon their appointment.

These conclusions do not require a return to the former appointments system whereby persons were exclusively appointed in a mysterious and secret process undertaken by politicians advised by departments, judges, and other officials. The introduction of opportunities for nomination of, and application by, candidates is desirable. So may be a facility for some kind of appropriate interview process. Nevertheless, the danger

values and culture. That danger is far greater than the supposed danger of political appointments, given the strong democratic inhibitions upon the appointing ministers to avoid criticism on that ground.

The wisdom of the politicians may be that politicians (more than many judges) will be more aware of the need for observance of the laws of variation of which Darwin wrote so long ago. All living creatures and their institutions thrive best where they exhibit diversity.<sup>31</sup> Inescapably, law and judging are value-laden activities. The appointment process for the judiciary, and particularly in a final court, should reflect this reality. ¶

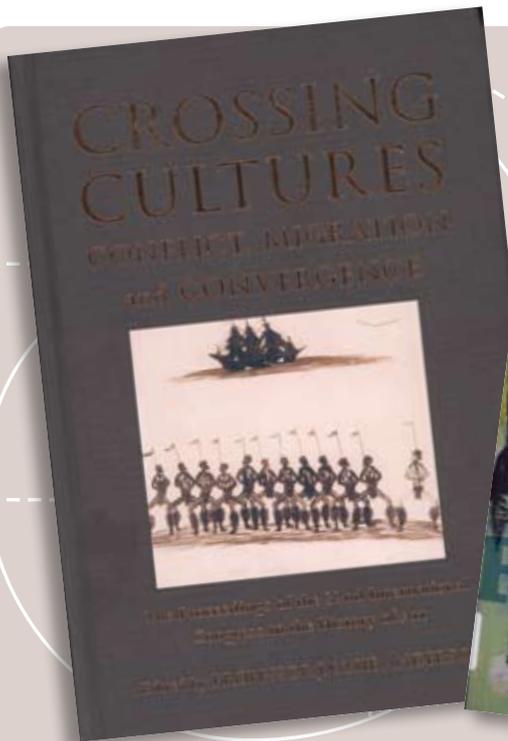


THE HON MICHAEL KIRBY AC CMG FAHA FASSA served for thirteen years (1996-2009) as one of the seven Justices of Australia's highest constitutional and appellate court, the High Court of Australia. This service made him Australia's longest-serving judicial officer, with other appointments since 1975 including President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal (1984-1996) and Inaugural Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission (1975-1984). International posts include President of the International Commission of Jurists (1995-1998), President of the Court of Appeal of Solomon Islands (1995-1996), Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Human Rights in Cambodia (1993-1996), as well as numerous positions in the OECD, the Commonwealth of Nations, the ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNODC, WHO Global Commission on AIDS and UNAIDS. He was Chancellor of Macquarie University (1984-1993) and holds honorary degrees from seventeen universities. He was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Academy in 2006.

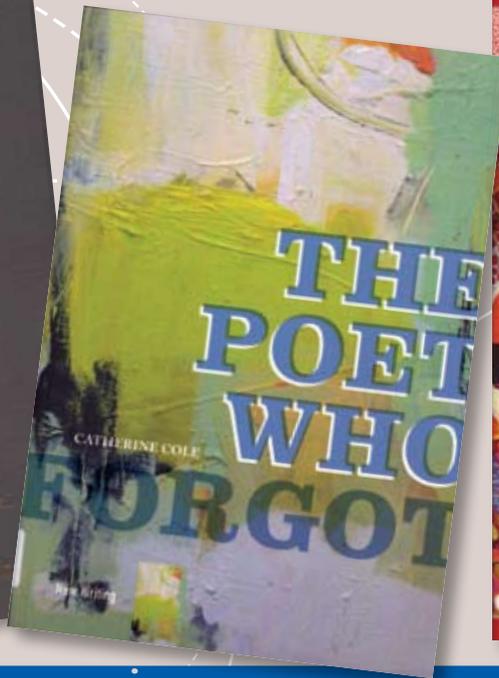
1. This article is an edited extract from a paper delivered in London in November 2009 at a conference organised by the Society of Legal Scholars and the University of Birmingham's Law School. The full version will be published in 2010 in the proceedings of the conference.
2. See C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859), Great Books Edition, ed. by R.M. Hutchins, (Encyclopaedia Britannica: Chicago, 1952), p. 1.
3. Australian Constitution, s71.
4. *Judiciary Act* 1903 (Cth).
5. *High Court of Australia Act* 1979 (Cth).
6. *Ibid*, s5.
7. *Ibid*, s6.
8. This doctrine was derived from *McCulloch v Maryland* 17 US 316 (1819). See *Deakin v Webb* (1904) 1 CLR 585; *Baxter v Commissioners of Taxation* (NSW) (1907) 4 CLR 1087.
9. A.F. Mason, 'Griffith Court', in *The Oxford Companion to the High Court of Australia*, T. Blackshield, M. Coper and G. Williams (eds.), (OUP, 2001), 311 AT 314.
10. *Amalgamated Society of Engineers v Adelaide Steamship Co Ltd* (Engineers Case) (1920) 28 CLR 129.
11. *Thake* [1986] QB 644 (CA), leave to appeal to the House of Lords refused. See also *Gold v Harigney Health Authority* [1988] QB 481 at 484; *Allen v Bloomsbury Health Authority* [1993] 1 ALLER 651 at 662.
12. [2000] 2 AC 59.
13. (2003) 215 CLR 1.
14. McHugh, Gummow, Kirby and Callinan JJ; Gleeson CJ, Hayne and Heydon JJ dissenting.
15. *Harriton v Stephens* (2006) 226 CLR 52.
16. Gleeson CJ, Gummow, Callinan, Heydon and Crennan JJ; Kirby J dissenting.
17. P. Cane, 'Injuries to Unborn Children' (1977) 51 ALJ 704 at 719. See *ibid.*, (2006) 226 CLR 52 at 59 [10].
18. Section 1(2)(b).
19. Law Commission of England and Wales, *Report on Injuries to Unborn Children* (LawCom No.60, 1974), Cmnd 5709, pp. 45-54.
20. [1982] 1 QB 1166.
21. See *Harriton* (2006) 226 CLR 52 at 70 [53]-[73].
22. (2006) 226 CLR 52 at 86 [110] ff.
23. [2001] 1 AC 27 at 34. See A. Lester and Ors. (eds.), *Human Rights Law and Practice*, 3rd edn (London: LexisNexis, 2009), p. 401 [4.8.48].
24. See e.g. Australian Constitution, s72; Indian Constitution, s124 (4).
25. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Arts.10-11, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Art.14; *European Convention on Human Rights*, Art.6.1 ('Right to a fair trial'). See Lester and Ors, above n.47, 277 at 324 [4.6.55].
26. United States Constitution, Art.II.
27. *Washington Post*, 16 October 2009, pp. A1, A20.
28. See L. Eisgruber, *The Next Justice: Repairing the Supreme Court Appointments Process* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
29. *Constitutional Reform Act* 2005 (UK), ss26, 27, 28.
30. *Povey v Qantas Airways Ltd* [2005] 223 CLR 189, applying *Air France v Saks* 470 US 392 (1985) and considering *Sidhu v British Airways PLC* [1997] AC 430 (concerning the meaning of 'accident' in Art.17 of the Warsaw Convention on Civil Aviation in its application to deep venous thrombosis).
31. See Cass R. Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

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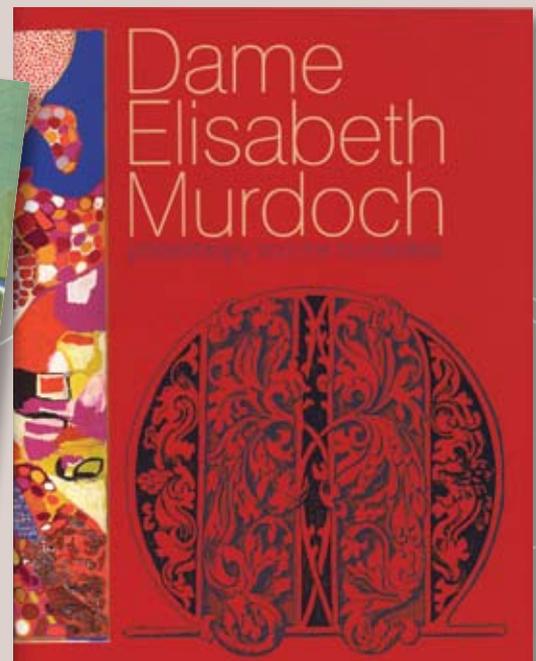
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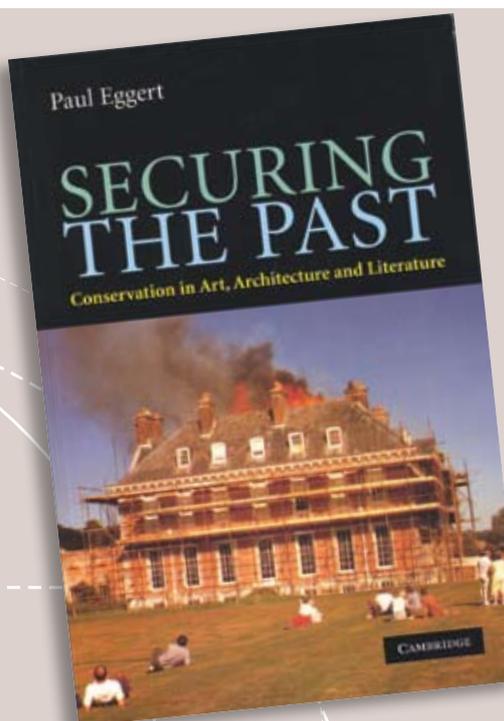


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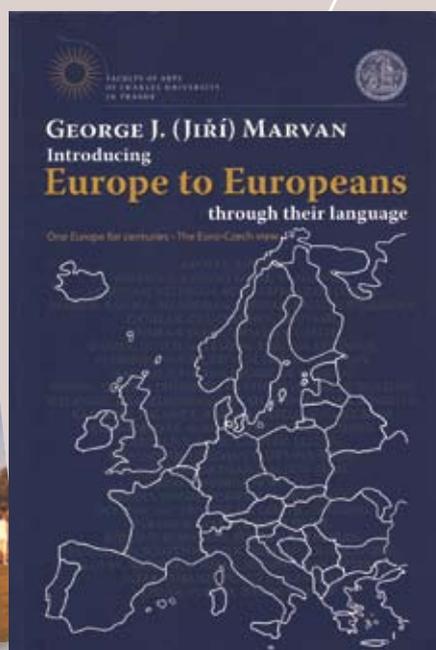


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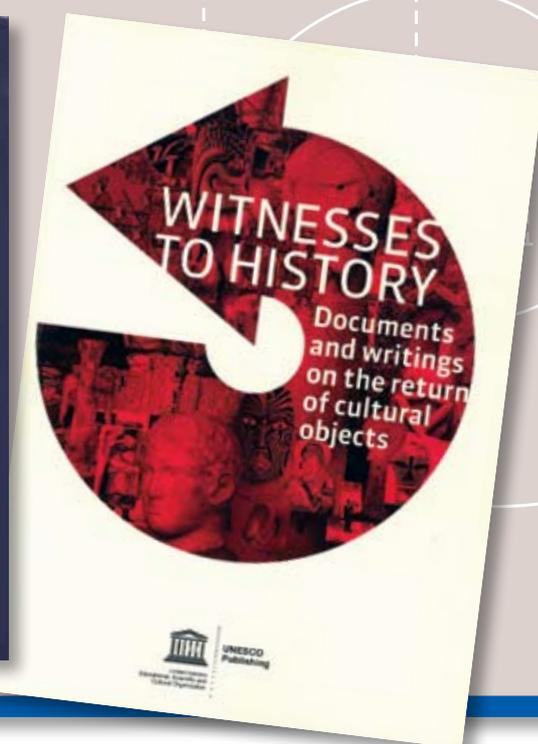
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