



Editor's Introduction

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As the journal of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, *Humanities Australia* aims to highlight original and creative contributions to this area by Australian researchers and writers. Our third issue has a focus on new directions in the humanities: in particular, the increasing interest in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work and the impact of the digital revolution on humanities research.

Joseph Lo Bianco's Academy Address, delivered at the highly successful Annual Symposium he convened in Melbourne last year, provides a keynote for this issue in drawing attention to the increasingly borderless world in which we are now living, intellectually as well as materially. In 'Politics, Poetics and Policy: Borders, Bordering and Humanities', he concludes that 'Western scholars operating in institutions steeped in Western epistemological practices' will need to come to terms with 'new knowledge practices and discipline combinations that arise when the inexorable and immense multiculturalism our disciplines have kept at bay is no longer resistible'. His essay is a provocative and fascinating demonstration of mixing and matching, ranging widely across time, space, cultures and media. It takes us from current US border disputes with Mexico to mapping in Old Siam, from the

nineteenth-century German philosopher Nietzsche to golfer Tiger Woods appearing on the Oprah Winfrey Show, from Thomas Gainsborough's painting of the archetypal eighteenth-century English couple, *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, to Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa's experimental autobiography *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

Many humanities academics have of course already taken on the challenge of presenting their work through other than traditional print forms, as can be seen from Kate Burridge's account of her interactions with the public via Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio programmes and the recent television series 'Can We Help?'. As Burridge notes, many people are not at all happy about the increasingly borderless world of the English language, and can become very irate and even abusive when their pet prejudices are questioned. Nevertheless, our language is constantly changing and Burridge and her colleagues are now embarked on an ambitious plan to record this through the construction of an Australian National Corpus, a substantial collection of computerised language data. Simon Musgrave's essay gives an excellent introduction to what will be involved in establishing this 'massive online database of spoken and written language in Australia, in all its forms and diversity

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(audio files, written texts, etc.'). As someone who spent much of the last five or so years helping to build an online archive of Australian poetry, I certainly wish I had known as much about the dos and don'ts of building complex online databases as I did after reading his account! The Australian National Corpus will bring together a large number of existing databases and, while being constructed by linguists, will be relevant to many others researching Australian society and culture, including historians, sociologists and social psychologists.

The rapid growth in interest in digital humanities in Australia, as testified by projects such as the Australian National Corpus, is also apparent in the recent establishment, with support from the Academy of the Humanities, of the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities. The Association held a large and highly successful conference, 'Building, Mapping, Connecting', in Canberra in March 2012, with workshops and multiple panel sessions stretching across four days. Since 1993, the Academy has also supported regular meetings of the National Scholarly Communications Forum, focused on the impact of changing methods of scholarly communication. The most recent, 'Book to What Future: The Scholarly Monograph in the Digital Age', was held at the University of Melbourne in September 2011; further details can be found on the Academy's website <www.humanities.org.au>. Electronic publication is clearly the way of the future for more specialist works, one that offers many advantages, if also a steep learning curve for first time authors. We are delighted that Robyn Holmes, Senior Curator of Pictures and Manuscripts at the National Library of Australia, and an Honorary Fellow of the Academy, has found the time to write an account of her recent adventures in ebook publishing. Appropriately, since 2012 is the centenary of the birth of Patrick White, the only Australian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, *Patrick White, Voss and the Cultural Landscape*, co-written with Vincent Plush from the National Film and Sound Archive, draws on the two institutions' extensive holdings of material related to White and his work. In this ebook, as Holmes notes, 'digitised source materials from these and other national collections – manuscripts of all kinds, images, musical scores, sound recordings, oral histories and films – appear as layers and voices in the story, to illuminate the narrative and create what aims to be a rich and living experience for those reading the text'.

We are also delighted to be able to feature in this issue new work by another Honorary Fellow, Thomas Keneally, who is of course also an Australian literary icon. He and his publishers have kindly allowed us to include the first chapter of his new historical novel. Its focus on the controversial topic of euthanasia links to another new multidisciplinary field, that of medical humanities, which draws on the therapeutic value of reading and writing, especially in coping with loss and grief. In his 2011 Trendall Lecture, classicist Professor Han Baltussen outlines recent research in the area, before going on to demonstrate how work by Greek and Roman authors like Antiphon, Cicero and Plutarch may be compared with that of modern writers like C. S. Lewis and Joan Didion. As Baltussen notes, undertaking his research has involved a 'venture into unknown territory'; he has had 'to cross disciplinary boundaries, read up on modern theories and observe contemporary events'. This is exactly the sort of exploration and border-crossing Lo Bianco advocates, and one that has resulted in an insightful and engrossing essay.

More crossing of disciplinary boundaries can be found in Moira Gatens' essay, which makes a close reading of a literary text, specifically George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner*, to offer a reappraisal of contemporary debates about the philosophy of Spinoza. She argues that Eliot's notion of 'deliberative fiction' can help bridge 'the lacuna in Spinoza's political thought between his negative assessment of the multitude and his account of the ethical potential of *all* human beings to become free'.

So, while the only works in this issue by a Fellow belonging to the English section of the Academy are Vivian Smith's two beautiful sonnets, its contents all deal, at least in part, with the English language or literature written in English. My thanks to Jorge Salavert of the Academy Secretariat for his help with this issue, especially in sourcing many of the illustrations. As in this issue we welcome a new designer in Anne Wakefield, I would also like to acknowledge the work of Nicole White in the design of the two previous issues of *Humanities Australia*.



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Editor, Australian Academy
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