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Welcome

IT IS MY PLEASURE to welcome you to the 10th edition of the Australian Academy of the Humanities’ flagship publication, Humanities Australia, edited by Graham Tulloch FAHA. We are particularly pleased that this special 10th edition coincides with our 50th Anniversary, a time for us to celebrate the work of our humanities researchers and to think about the role our disciplines will play in ensuring a humanised future for all. This publication is a key part of that mission.

For 50 years, the Academy has been dedicated to advancing scholarship and promoting understanding of the humanities across our education and research sectors, and in the broader community. Founded by Royal Charter in 1969, the Academy now comprises over 600 Fellows elected on the basis of the excellence and impact of their scholarship. Our Fellows have been recognised nationally and internationally for outstanding work in the disciplines of archaeology, art, Asian and European studies, classical and modern literature, cultural and communication studies, language and linguistics, philosophy, musicology, the arts, history and religion.

This year’s issue of Humanities Australia once again features essays, poems and reflections by our Fellows alongside edited versions of several of our key lectures including the annual Academy Lecture, the A. D. Trendall Lecture and the Sir Keith Hancock Lecture. Many of the articles presented here have been developed out of presentations given at our 49th Annual Symposium Clash of Civilisations? Where are we now? and we are pleased to be able offer readers an accessible platform to engage with these addresses.

I hope you will enjoy reading this very special 10th edition of Humanities Australia. The work on display here represents only a small fraction of the outstanding research being undertaken across Australia, but nonetheless demonstrates the powerful and necessary contribution of the humanities disciplines to our national life.

JOY DAMOUSI
President, Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2017–
This is the 10th issue of *Humanities Australia* and appears in the 50th anniversary year of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. It is not, however, directly a commemorative issue. Rather it continues to display some of the strength and diversity of writing and research in the humanities both by Academy Fellows and by other scholars who have given some of the Academy’s lectures. The Academy’s 50th anniversary has been celebrated in a range of events throughout the year and will also be commemorated in the online publication *50 Discoveries* which describes some significant Australian discoveries in the humanities over the 50 years of the Academy. However, although it is not a commemorative volume as such, the essays and poetry in this issue of *Humanities Australia* all refer, in different ways, to the theme of the Academy’s 50th anniversary celebrations: ‘Humanising the Past, Present and Future’. This theme reflects the Academy’s determination that a celebration of its 50th anniversary should not simply look back on past and present achievements, although that is a very important part of the activities during this year, but also look forward to where the humanities might go in the future. In keeping with this determination the culminating point of the year’s celebrations is the Annual Symposium which is on the theme ‘Humanising the Future’. A number of the essays in this issue look forward explicitly to how the humanities can play their role in fostering a truly human future despite the challenges which both the humanities in particular and the world in general will face in the next 50 years. Closely related to this is another persistent concern: how do we convey to the wider world the excitement we feel about research in the humanities and its potential to address important issues?

Three of the essays in this issue were first given as lectures or papers at the Academy’s 2018 Annual Symposium *Clash of Civilisations? Where are we now?* although none of the three is restricted to this theme. In the first of these, the Academy Lecture, ‘Turning the Level of Civilisation Up—A Twenty-First Century Challenge’, Julianne Schultz begins by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation and expands on this to remark that ‘It is particularly fitting at a conference focussed on civilisations, that we pay tribute to the people who are the custodians of what is arguably the oldest living civilisation on earth’. Her reflections on the real significance of this fact provide a starting point to a discussion in which she asks the question ‘How might we draw on ancient, colonial, modern and contemporary traditions to create a sustainable, hybrid civilisation that respects people and place and provides a beacon to others?’ Ranging widely over the past and present and returning more than once to her
starting point in Indigenous Australia, she concludes by looking to the future and hoping that, despite the worrying signs of declining levels of the human rights which underpin civilisation, we can 'foster a remarkable country, one which learns from the mistakes of the past and displaces complacent caution to imagine and create an even more robust, inclusive, generous, rights-based democratic order that will work well in the very different world of the twenty-first century'.

Michael Haugh approaches the future in a rather different way. At a time when relations between Australia and the USA are subject to serious strains, his 'Australians and Americans Talking' examines interaction between the two nations at a personal level and concludes by suggesting that understanding how such interaction works can improve our communication in the future. The two nations are said to be, in the familiar phrase, 'divided by a common language' but Haugh's examination of the particular case of how Americans and Australians interact in their initial meetings with each other shows that it is not so much the language as the protocols of communication that might separate us: how should we respond to the other person making a joke or offering personal information about themselves or being self-deprecatory? Knowing how this works differently in the two cultures can help us better bridge the gap in communication.

William Christie's starting point in 'Literature, History, Value: The Case of British Romanticism' is, as his title suggests, the Romantic era in Britain and more specifically the criticism of the time as embodied in the dominant literary journals of that period, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, and the most prominent critic of the time, Francis Jeffrey. After describing how criticism in the Romantic era was widely seen by writers as antagonistic to their interests, he turns to the critical trends of recent decades when critics and writers (and also readers) seem to have once again moved in opposing directions. Using the background he comes back to the question of communication – or, to use another term, public humanities – and 'what is expected of the humanities in their role as public interpreters and cultural legislators [and] what they expect of themselves', leading to the conclusion that 'public humanities is never going to work unless we bring critical thinking back into conversation with common reading and common understanding – not to talk down to the public, but to talk with them about the things that matter to us all: the humanities'.

'The Force of Tradition in Early Greek Poetry and Painting', given by Anne Mackay in January 2018 as the Academy's 20th A.D. Trendall Lecture and presented here in an edited version, compares the ways in which writers and painters operate within a strongly defined tradition in the early Classical Greek period. In the present context it might be said to be about the future in the past since the article, after examining the prevailing traditions in each art form, raises the issue of innovation and poses the question of 'whether an inventive original minded painter could readily introduce innovations that would be accessible to his contemporaries and...if so, how' – in other words how can an artist within a traditional framework established in the past and operating in the present move forward into a new future. At the end, however, it looks very much forward to our own future in its hope that the comparative approach it adopts 'can open our eyes to new categories of interpretation'.

Raihan Ismail gave the Academy's 8th Sir Keith Hancock Lecture on the topic 'Hybrid Civilisation or Clash of Civilisations: Rethinking the Muslim Other' at the 2018 Annual Symposium and thus directly addressed the theme of that symposium. In her lecture, now published in edited form, she argues that Huntington's thesis of the 'Clash of Civilisations' in his book of that name is based on a false dichotomy which rests on the mistaken belief that the civilisations of both the Muslim world and the Western world are uniform and monolithic. Ranging widely over recent and past history and also present-day conflicts and events, she points out that all civilisations are interconnected and hybrid and argues that the best way into the future is...
through cosmopolitanism which ‘as an ideal promoting a more inclusive global community is a much better alternative to Huntington’s divisive world order’.

In ‘Aleppo and the Clash of Civilisations’ Ross Burns also addresses the Huntington thesis but in his case through the lens of the archaeology of Syria and specifically the city of Aleppo. Tracing the transition of places of worship from pagan temple to Christian church and then from Christian church to Muslim mosque, he concludes that the process was often gradual (and even sometimes with periods of shared sacred space) rather than the abrupt and violent change we might expect from civilisations clashing together. By analysing how the architect of the minaret of Aleppo, which was sadly destroyed in 2013 in the Syrian civil war, ‘skilfully blended influences from the previous five centuries and several faith-based or decorative traditions’, he shows how it ‘spoke of managed change not titanic clashes’. Created in a more tolerant past, destroyed in present-day civil war, the minaret will hopefully be restored in the future as once again a symbol of the blending of civilisations, not their clash.

Jean Fornasiero’s ‘An Odyssey through Time: Nicolas Baudin’s Long Haul’ describes the slow process by which Baudin’s reputation has been restored after 200 years of bad press. After leading a voyage of scientific discovery to Australia in the first years of the nineteenth century, highly successful in terms of the material it collected, Baudin unfortunately died on the way back to France leaving him open to being cast in the role of scapegoat for the expedition’s perceived failures. The official report on the expedition presented him in an extremely bad light but the release of more and more documents, exhibitions of some of the material collected and held in France, books drawing on the material now made available, and a large body of new commentary have helped redress the balance and make it possible to look forward to a better appreciation of his achievements in the future.

John Kinsella’s poem ‘Surveyors’ is, as he writes in his accompanying commentary, ‘an environmentalist poem and it’s also an anti-colonialist poem’ but it is not restricted to that because ‘poems should have spaces and occlusions and turnabouts and bits you can’t penetrate and bits you can negotiate’.

Yet, though the poem cannot be tied down to one meaning, its passionate condemnation of the mechanistic destruction of the landscape by the bulldozers which follow the surveyors is very clear while his commentary reminds us of the very different, and much more human, relationship of the Noongar people with the land.

Altogether, then, these contributions to the journal offer us plenty of room for reflection on the many and varied ways of ‘humanising the past, present and future’.

GRAHAM TULLOCH FAHA
Editor, Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2016–
Turning the Level of Civilisation Up

A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHALLENGE

JULIANNE SCHULTZ

IT IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE to be invited to present this address, the 49th Academy Lecture—who would have thought when the theme was set a year ago that it would be just so timely!

First, though, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. It is particularly fitting at a conference focussed on civilisations, that we pay tribute to the people who are the custodians of what is arguably the oldest living civilisation on earth.

This is not something to say glibly, but something to savour and interrogate. It is a statement that, quite frankly, when you think about it, takes your breath away. 60,000 years is not geological time—that runs into the hundreds of millions of years—but it is long enough to have seen the physical nature of this place profoundly change. For bays, beaches, cliffs to emerge and disappear and reappear again, and for people to have found a way to survive, struggle, make meaning and flourish together. Contrary to the perspective of those who arrived from the northern hemisphere this was not barbarism in need of civilisation, but a different way of being.

What does it mean, to use the phrase the oldest living civilisation?

How can knowledge of what Stephen Muecke calls the ‘cultural confederacy’ of interrelated communities, languages and cultures of the First Australians shape us? Why don’t more of us know more about this, and the lessons that can be drawn from such survival?

How can we as moral citizens have been complicit, if not directly and personally, in the historic attempts to wipe it out, but by not succeeding in our lifetimes to find a respectful, meaningful and lasting settlement?

What lessons can we learn from these successes and failures, in trying to find an ethic for our times?

How can this inform the creation of a distinctive, pluralist, best possible Australian civilisation? One that responds to the place and the people who call this land home in a world that is confronting more than the usual number of challenges.

These are, I am sure you would agree, big questions to spin out of a few words of acknowledgement. But that is the business we are in: posing big questions that stretch the brain. And little ones that add complexity on the path, we hope, to greater clarity. Trying to understand how what happened before shapes the now and influences the future, and the challenge of making a future of our own choosing. Simply seeking to define, so we can see things better. Things that others might
like to think are obvious—just common sense, plain as the nose on your face. But there is always more: history, context, language, science, economics, politics, philosophy, culture.

Earlier this year I took long service leave. I was pleased to discover this was one of the enduring benefits of colonial society. A century ago travel 'home' would take many weeks and so became a long-anticipated reward for an extended period of work. Now that travel is as simple as a click on a computer screen, the flash of a credit card and a dash to the airport for a twelve- or twenty-hour flight, its rationale has changed.

But, having done my time I took my reward not long after agreeing to deliver this address and drafting an abstract. It is fair to say, I was still wondering what I would say. The starting point Joy Damousi gave me was the reassessment, a couple of decades on, of Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis. You will recall that at the time this generated heated debate. Huntington provocatively introduced the notion of passionately held difference into a world that was supposed to have reached peak homogeneity, even the end of history. He disputed the notion that a universal civilisation was within reach and that cultural, religious, ethnic and political variation had been smudged into distinctions without difference. Huntington quite wisely cautioned us not to be so hasty. Fault lines still existed at the 'micro level' over territory. At the 'macro level' of military and economic power and the enabling framework of institutions, politics, values, culture and religion. He noted with a prescience that only became really clear to the rest of us on the 9th of September 2001, that cultural and religious differences were still real and defining. He was right, triumphalism was not only unattractive, but actually dangerous.

Over the past two decades we have been distracted by wars and terrorism; by globalisation and technology; by the apparently impossible consequences of climate change; while greedily eyeing the increasing affluence of the region, and watching the rise of illiberal democracies and authoritarianism. Meanwhile our affluence, casual cruelty towards those with less and calcifying institutions has not revealed our best selves. We have been responding defensively, rarely imagining or arguing for new ways of being that might be more appropriate for the twenty-first century. We have not learnt the right lessons.

So I interpreted the challenge Joy, Bronwen Neil and Catriona Mackenzie gave me to find a way of addressing Huntington's final entreaty—to 'identify elements of commonality'—from a somewhat unlikely perspective. The world has problems, but as Huntington argued 'different civilisations need to learn to co-exist with each other.' So too in this great south land. How might we draw on ancient, colonial, modern and contemporary traditions to create a sustainable, hybrid civilisation that respects people and place and provides a beacon to others?

So with this brief in my head I reached Singapore. On day one, decompressing by the pool, the Straits Times front page on the 1st of June provocatively addressed my challenge: Has the West Lost It? Local grandee Kishore Mahbubani argued that it was time for the West to seek to influence rather than dominate, to recognise that the rest of the world has taken advantage of the spirit of Western reasoning and been transformed—economically, socially and culturally. That with a little humility, a little more openness and diplomacy, and less military might, a global utopia may be within reach.

Then, because it was just day one of my long service leave, I turned to The Australian. There on the front page was one of its ubiquitous exclusives: ‘Fury as ANU dumps study of Western civilisation.’ Accompanying the report was the full text of the ‘at a loss to understand’ letter from the former Prime Minister John Howard, the chair of the Ramsay Centre which had been in discussion with the university for months. The somewhat menacing last line of his letter made it clear that this was political, not a normal commercial negotiation: ‘I intend
to release our correspondence.’ Signed with the flourish of a hand that had despatched thousands of letters.

Line up, line up, I thought. This is just the sort of stoush they love. They will nurture it: ivory tower versus the real world, with News Corp the white knight demanding that the ivory be honed a certain way. It will run and run. As you know it did, and still does.

Some weeks later in Greece, after an intense, reading, museuming, sleeping, swimming, eating break I had a couple of dozen books I didn’t need to lug around any longer. A local shopkeeper packed them in a Corfu Beer box and I entrusted it to the somewhat idiosyncratic Greek postal service. I watched the postmaster, who had left his key at home that day put the box and 50 euros on the front seat of his beat-up old car. He promised to despatch them after the weekend. I had come to expect trust to beat process in austerity-torn Greece, but I wasn’t completely confident. But sure enough a couple of months later the Corfu Beer box arrived. Meanwhile I hung onto a handful of books as I toyed with ideas for this talk and other commitments. When I laid them out, I realised they were as good a snapshot of a civilisation-defining moment as any. There are three worrying tomes about the collapse of democracy, guides to lessons from a fascist past, explorations of the long tail of war and geopolitical uncertainty, and a romp through the imminent threat of cyber catastrophe. Looking at it now, it seems that all that is missing is the IPCC volume on climate change, but at the time that was still a work in progress.

Just a little light reading. And a weeping Aphrodite, a memento from the extraordinary Acropolis Museum, and its moving evocation of the history of myth, civilisation, war, ambition, plunder and restoration.

It seemed appropriate that in these testing times the Greek goddess of love, beauty, pleasure and procreation should be crying. Never mind that what appears to be her tears are the oxidation of what were once bronze eyelashes.

There is a bit to cry about. Or laugh.

In October 2005 Stephen Colbert was just starting his eponymous show. It is somewhat chilling to realise that this was when he came up with the word *truthiness*: it seems so now, as you will see if you watch it on YouTube. It has taken a while to reach maturity and morphed into the even more menacing *trumpiness*. Truthiness captures the slippery world inhabited by those unencumbered by books, or facts, context or complexity—for those who just know with their heart rather than their heads—where things can just feel truthful.6

Who would have thought that a little more than a decade later the White House would be occupied by a man who makes the Colbert character seem almost reasonable. Quaintly charming. Trumpiness captures something...
even more sinister, statements that don’t even have to feel truthful, apparently ignorant rough-hewn words, weaponised for effect. Whatever comes out of his mouth—alarmingly frequently words that sound as though they emanated from the crib sheet of a propaganda handbook.7

In defining these words Colbert provided a helpful predictor for a president who according to the Washington Post last week, had made 6,420 false or misleading comments in 649 days.8 That is industrial-scale deception—small lies told over and over, medium sized lies that have become a new global lingua franca and big lies that take even his most ardent supporters by surprise and sometimes force a retraction or denial—sort of. But only after they have already infiltrated the virtual world and got a life of their own.

This is not normal. It is not the way we have come to expect even a tainted public sphere, distorted by the commercialisation of public attention, to operate. The president’s mantra of fake news is as he has admitted a deliberate and determined effort to undermine confidence in what remains of a rigorous public sphere and professional journalism that takes itself seriously. In the unregulated, ‘more insidious’ domain of the internet this is particularly dangerous.9

Such industrial scale deception is at odds with the norms that characterise any flourishing civilisation. If truth is irrelevant to discourse, trust is not merely dented it is destroyed. Other norms of acceptable behaviour cannot be far away. What is happening now, goes well beyond spin or hollow speech. The New York Times correspondent Roger Cohen describes it as ‘corrosive, corrupting and contagious’.10

In the shrunken global village this has dangerous implications everywhere, for public and personal behaviour. If the so called, ‘leader of the free world’ can talk the way he does, without regard to fact or feeling, the level of civilisation is turned down everywhere he is heard. What we are witnessing is behaviour contrary to the long-established moral core of a civilised society, arguably giving succour to evil, and deliberately destroying trust.

David Rowe captured this brilliantly with his Australian Financial Review illustration of President Trump failing to note the significance of Armistice in France.11

So how did it come to this?

It is easy to feel that the world is going to hell in a handbasket—the news of catastrophe and disaster, an inflammatory US president, the distortion of social media, global instability of superpower realignment, the palpable threat of climate change, the rise of authoritarian leaders—and that is for starters.

Freedom House,12 the Washington-based NGO, has been monitoring global freedom since 1941, when a very different US President articulated an expansive ethic that has largely prevailed in ‘kin countries’ and beyond.13 With WW2 in full, murderous, destructive fury, President Roosevelt declared that as human beings, all people were entitled to freedom of speech and expression, freedom to worship their god in their own way, freedom from want and freedom from fear. At the time it was ambitious rhetoric, demonstrably at odds

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with the wartime experience. But it provided guiding principles for a different future.

Last month in a very different context, Freedom House reported that around the world political and civil rights had sunk to their lowest level for a decade.

For the twelfth year in a row, democratic setbacks outnumbered gains. Democracy is in crisis. Values are under assault and retreat in country after country. Young people are losing faith in politics. Trust has been eroded by commerce and the calcification of institutions. Millions of people are living without the rights we take for granted as a measure of civil, liberal, democratic society. Even nations that like to pride themselves on a deep democratic history are slipping on the scale, as trust in institutions is eroded and checks and balances slip out of equilibrium and technology remakes the way things are done. This is most notable in the United States which fell to 86 out of 100, and United Kingdom which slipped to 94. Australia and NZ scored 98, with the virtuous Scandinavians topping with perfect scores. This trend line is a matter of real concern, because it is contrary to the previous trajectory. Up until relatively recently enhanced civil and political rights were what was expected, giving comfort to those of us who ‘hope the arc of history bends towards greater emancipation, equality and freedom’.14

Taking a wider view of the state of the globe provides a slightly more reassuring message, that that arc may still be bending the right way. But the tension between ‘individual rights and popular will’ is fertile territory for authoritarian leaders and their shadow puppets. Survival deep in our epigenetics means we dwell on the negative, alert to threats and dangers, ready to respond to fear. But, as Steven Pinker and Kishore Mahbubani loudly proclaim, the bigger picture is not as bad as we might be inclined to think with one ear cocked to the latest news bulletin and an eye on the real Donald Trump’s twitter feed.15

The United Nations Human Development Index shows that as a species we are living longer and better.16 Worldwide life expectancy at birth is now 71 years, and 80 in the developed world, for most of human existence most people died around 30. Global extreme poverty has declined to 9.6 percent of the world’s population; still limiting the lives of too many, but 200 years ago, 90 percent lived in extreme poverty. In just the last 30 years, the proportion of the global population living with such deprivation has declined by 75 percent. Equally unappreciated is the fact that 90 percent of the world’s population under the age of 25 can read and write, including girls. For most of the history of Europe, no more than 15 percent of the people could read and write, mostly men.

So despite the truthiness feeling that things are going wrong, a lot is going right, for a lot of people, in a lot of countries. But this is a moment at risk of being squandered.

Which invites the question of what is at stake, how might the level of civilisation here be turned up, by whom, and to what end.

This was a question addressed by Robert Menzies when in 1959 as Prime Minister he approved the formation of the Humanities Council, the precursor of this Academy which will be celebrating its 50th anniversary next year. At the time, with the Cold War in full swing, and the memory of the hot war still smoking, Menzies declared the Humanities Council would provide ‘wisdom, a sense of proportion, sanity of judgement, a faith in the capacity of man to rise to higher mental...
and spiritual levels.’ He went on: ‘We live dangerously in the world of ideas, just as we do in the world of international conflict. 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.’

Now we are more often likely to hear prominent politicians pillorying the humanities as esoteric, truth-defying; and humanities scholars as ideologues in cohoots with self-aggrandising scientists who are addressing the existential crisis of climate change for personal gain. To attack the university system at precisely the moment when it reaches more people, when its impact on the social, cultural and economic well-being of the nation has never been higher, seems perverse—a local example maybe of medium sized lies, madness even, from the zone of truthiness.

Over the next few days you will be debating with great erudition and insight the nuances of these questions, in your disciplines, in the context of contemporary life, and at the rich interdisciplinary intersection where they meet. As the debate triggered by the Ramsay intervention has shown, there is a lot at stake. For all the noise in the press, the very fact that there are lots of different ways of approaching the study of civilisations has not been addressed except by snide, often ill-informed or defensive comments about ‘relativism.’ I am not a scholar of civilisations or a philosopher, so excuse me if I step on your toes—I am aware of some of the complexity of these debates. The need to define civilisation, and to allow the notion of civilisations, has preoccupied fine minds, and led to different conclusions. Are there seven or eight civilisations, as Samuel Huntington suggested remained when he wrote his most famous essay? Or the 26 or 28, not including the civilisation of the first Australians, which Arnold Toynbee had identified a few decades earlier in his monumental work. Some maintain that civilisations are shaped by religion, others by culture, cities, language, ideology, identity or as a response by human beings to nature.

Civilisations flower and die. Some leave artefacts, buildings and monuments that endure. Others leave stories, philosophies, language, knowledge and ways of being that echo and resonate long after. Some just disappear. Others grow and respond to interaction, adapting and changing as they go. And we now know, many leave a measurable trail in the polar ice as the recent discovery of the traces of lead from Ancient Rome from 1100 BCE revealed.

For me civilisation is pluralist, contestable, open, polite, robust; buttressed by law, culture and institutions...

As Kenneth Clark reputedly said after devoting his life to popularising the study of civilisation, ‘I don’t know what it is, but I recognise it when I see it.’

I like to think of it as a short hand for the way human beings coexist with each other, the world they have created and the natural environment which makes it possible. While recognising the contestability of values, I like the positive humanity of Clive Bell’s notion of ‘reason sweetened by values’ and R. G. Collingwood’s ‘mental process toward ideal social relationships of civility.’ For me civilisation is pluralist, contestable, open, polite, robust; buttressed by law, culture and institutions and maintained by sustainable economic and environmental conditions across time and place.

The past 70 or so years provide a petri dish of how this can be made to work and how it can go wrong. However, as Toynbee said with the prescience that comes from deep scholarship, and the Brainy Quotes website retails, sadly civilisations are more likely to die from suicide than murder, because at the moment that is a bit what it feels like.

I am interested in the world as it has been shaped in the post-WW2 period. It seems to me...
that that is a useful point to use to try to make sense of the long run of success in the second half of the twentieth century. It is also a useful starting point to reflect on its subsequent erosion by money, rising inequality, regulatory failure and institutional distrust. The seeds of the existential threat we are currently watching in slow motion can be found there.

The title of this talk is drawn from a phrase used by the US Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press which commenced during the war years and reported not long after.22 It urged the owners of the American media to accept a social responsibility in the way they conducted their businesses. They could turn the level of civilisation up or down, the report cautioned. Partly for fear of state regulation, partly because the palpable evidence of the power of propaganda and misuse of media power in the ashes of WW2, a socially responsible framework became the norm in the age of the mass media. These days it would be called social license.

The regulatory device which put the steel in the backbone of US media’s social responsibility, the Fairness Doctrine, was after a concerted campaign during the Reagan presidency, abolished in August 1987. It had provided the architecture: acknowledged the power of information, the importance of truth, the need to present competing views, and provided a platform for increasing professionalism in journalism. Importantly it withstood legal challenges, infuriating its opponents when the US Supreme Court found the doctrine did not contravene the first amendment or impede freedom of speech. But it was abolished at the behest of media owners with a libertarian bent, and now when it is more needed than ever, and despite attempts to revive it, is a dead letter.

For my purposes, and given my interest in the role of the media as a quasi-institution in the political system, it was a symbolic moment. Its abolition was a real turning point. The next year Rush Limbaugh took to the American airwaves with unmoderated, raging commentary and the era of shock jocks was born. It triggered the cascade of media deregulation in many countries including here. Money was always in the ascendency, but after these changes it really took over and freedom of speech was hollowed out and became a commercial commodity. The public sphere became contestable, more than ever a place to buy attention, distract, entertain, and chase niche markets rather than serve a society. It became detached from notions of fairness and fact.23 It was one the first dominos to fall as neoliberalism eroded the institutional framework that had contributed to the rising standards of living, that Steven Pinker likes to trumpet. It made Fox News possible. It also provided the environment in which the information that fills Facebook and Google could flourish. In its early days social media posed as a community builder and a democratising tool. Remarkably quickly the FAANGs (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google) became corporate behemoths straddling the globe. As Jürgen Habermas recently said, theirs is ‘the first media revolution to primarily serve economic rather than cultural ends’.24 Or as Carole Cadwalladr, the Observer journalist whose dogged reporting revealed the role of Cambridge Analytica and Facebook in distorting the Brexit vote, put it more bluntly, a business model based on, ‘the monetisation of fear and hate’.25

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The barbarism of WW2 galvanised the creation of civilising mechanisms and institutions. They varied from country to country, with different impacts,26 but the intention was generally to expand rights and enhance democracy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which will turn 70 on the 10th of December 2018, was the most remarkable global response: its 30 rights recognise and spell out ‘the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family’. Its symbolic power exceeds its legal effect, as George Williams has written.27 It forms part of customary international law and is seen as binding on all nations. It has been translated into 500 languages. Australia has ratified two of the most important subsequent conventions which grew under its umbrella to define
political and civil, social, economic and cultural rights—so it is not without effect here.

The Universal Declaration may well have faults and limits. Some regard it as ‘human rights imperialism’ used by the West to run the world in ways that will protect and promote its interests. But when expansively applied, rather than as an embodiment of Western hegemony, it remains the best organising principle for civility that humanity has yet devised. Ask women in Asia, India and the Middle East, democrats in Turkey, Hungary and Poland, activists in China or journalists in Russia. ‘Without it,’ as a Turkish born scholar recently wrote, ‘we have few conceptual tools to oppose populism, nationalism, chauvinism and isolationism.’

Australians played an important role in the creation of the Declaration, but we have been tardy about its application. Ours is the only democratic nation which does not have a bill of rights—the only one. Rather like my opening remarks about this being home to the oldest living civilisation, this is something that demands pause for thought. It is something we need to address if we are to foster an ethic for a distinctive hybrid Australian civilisation.

It is probably worth noting in passing that some of the most strident opponents of an Australian bill of rights are also somewhat perversely amongst the most vociferous promoters of a narrowly defined agenda to study Western civilisation. It is easy in this environment to forget that the demographics are with those of us who see the arc of history bending up. Surveys show most Australians would welcome a formalisation of rights.

How did it come to this? Why, as Frank Lowy recently asked, did we become so timid? What are we afraid of? Surely a clear statement of rights and responsibilities is central to any attempt to define a civilisation and the way we co-exist, respectfully, sustainably, creatively.

After 15 years in the role, I recently stepped away from day-to-day responsibilities as editor of Griffith Review. While maintaining the role of publisher I have moved to a new position in Griffith’s Centre for Social and Cultural Research. To mark this I was asked to present an inaugural address which explored the role of the humanities in answering the question: what do we want to be when we grow up?

This set me thinking about how my own experiences as a child growing up in a manse had shaped my world view, sensitised me to history and place. For the most formative years of my childhood I lived in the western district of Victoria, captured evocatively in the paintings of Eugene von Guerard. At the time I lived there the western district was one of the wealthiest parts of the country: the wool boom meant that the farmers with the biggest spreads and fleeciest merinos would get huge cheques for their production—at their peak these cheques could be up to a million pounds, tens of millions of dollars in today’s coin.

My father was a minister, and the farmers in his congregation were not the descendants of the squatters with the massive spreads. Yet they still had enough land to ensure that throughout the 1960s the churchyard was full of lairy-coloured cars with big fins—gorgeous petrol guzzling monsters parked under the cypress trees every Sunday.

This area was rich for a reason. The volcanic plains had produced extraordinarily fertile soils. Millions of years after the last volcano had erupted the residue of lava rocks, pock-marked like aero chocolate bars, still littered the country. Many had been formed into fences and foundations. It was windy, wet,
hilly and lush with lakes and streams—the Grampians looming on the horizon and long extinct volcanoes popping out of the plains. The descendants of the squatters had substantial houses, and soldier settlers eked out an existence on plots of land that were too small, except in the very best of times, to produce enough to support a family, even in that relatively poorer period when Australia’s economy was still primarily agricultural.

The pattern of life for a minister’s family was shaped by church, bible study, hymns and liturgies, and as insider outsiders, always watching, and knowing you were being watched. As a result, we learnt the tools of the humanities early, textual analysis before semiotics, theology before fundamentalism, history and geography when the Empire’s pink-coloured maps still prevailed, music as performed in churches and by great orchestras, human relations and morality from parables, psalms and creeds and the genealogical myths and stories in the Old and New Testaments. It was an immersion in the humanities without even knowing that was what it was. A world that would be hard to replicate today, and one which my children found unutterably weird when we visited for the 150th anniversary celebrations.

I was a curious child with the freedom to roam the country roads and lanes on my bike; to take the chance of riding on railway tracks that were rarely used by trains; to explore, pick mushrooms, fruit and wild flowers, watch shearers and harvesters at work; and wonder about what had happened before. At the edge of the pine-enclosed hamlet where we lived, which included two bluestone churches (the older one repurposed as a classroom), a memorial school and hall, manse, teacher’s house, footy oval, timber belltower and car park, there was a cemetery where people had been buried since 1861.

I probably spent more time than would be recommended for children today in that graveyard, wondering about the many lives cut short by the Spanish flu, about the children who died in infancy, the extended families in shared plots, and the old men and women born in faraway places all buried there. But my favorite pastime was to ride along the roads and across paddocks to find the remnant sites of disused farms and houses, to pace out the stone foundations, to pick what would now be heritage plums and apples from the gnarled fruit trees in long forgotten orchards, to walk around the rusty fences protecting crumbling headstones, to imagine life for the settlers, the religious obsessives who set up the first intentional communities, scrapping tribes whose different theological interpretations of the same text meant they could hardly bring themselves to talk to each other.

What went missing was any sense of anyone being there between the time the volcanoes erupted and the arrival of the squatters in the 1830s. As I say, I was a curious child, I had a feeling for the country, for the plants and wildlife, but despite being vaguely aware of reserves closer to the coastal towns of Portland and Warrnambool, I had absolutely no sense of Aboriginal occupation, which is now posited to have been in existence for 120,000 years, or of the murderous battles they fought against the encroaching settlers.

As the daughter of the Lutheran church I knew about Aboriginal missions in Hermannsburg and elsewhere in Central Australia and the outer reaches of New South Wales and even Queensland. But I had absolutely no understanding that these fertile lands once known as Gariwerd had been the preserve of the Jardwedjeli and Djab Wurrung peoples for more than 20,000, that they had built sustainable settlements, trapped fish, husbanded the land, caught kangaroo, yabbies and eels, and made cloaks from possum skins to protect from the fierce winter chill.

We now know much more: the richness of the Indigenous cultural heritage in this part of Victoria is what you would expect for such fertile lands. As two great interdisciplinary humanities scholars, Bill Gammage and Bruce Pascoe, have demonstrated in recent years in The Biggest Estate on Earth and Dark Emu, this was known since earliest European settlement. Some of the uniqueness of the local civilisation was captured by the artists,
the explorers, the anthropologists—those who asked the First Australians and those who looked, curious people deeply grounded in the skills of the humanities. Of course, many just took.

To paraphrase Henry Reynolds, why wasn’t I told?34

I recall as a child of about ten going to the South Australian Museum on North Terrace in Adelaide with my grandparents who were conscientious members of the Lutheran community, there with a sense of obligation to the church’s central Australian missions. On this day we looked at the Aboriginal collections, and that museum had and still has an extraordinary collection of settlement artefacts. I recall seeing human remains and not knowing how to process them. On the way out we passed an Aboriginal man. He moved, and whether I jumped, took a step sideways or had some other reaction, I don’t recall, but I can feel the incident like it was yesterday and remember thinking: how can he be alive, we have just seen the exhibition, they are all dead. They weren’t of course, a fact that has shaped political debate in this country with increasing sharpness ever since.

It took a while, but again the legacy of scholars—anthropologists, theologians, linguists, archaeologists, historians and the increasingly important work of Indigenous scholars—meant that the once apparently blank slate of Australian history is now being filled with human beings doing the things that human beings do—making meaning, families, societies, systems for working with the land and climate. This knowledge is now widely shared, and made the response of the Turnbull government to the Uluru Statement from the Heart so inexcusably ignorant and shameful.

This experience of growing up in the 1960s and then going to university in the 1970s meant that just as I was not consciously aware of the humanities education I was absorbing in the manse, I was also unwittingly absorbing new interest in this place as Australian studies took off. At the time this was just a given. I started high school the same year the Universal Declaration of Rights marked its 20th anniversary. For a child this was just a given, the enormity of its break with history invisible. Likewise, it took me a while to realise that Australian studies was the local manifestation of the decolonisation movement that was shaking the world, as the British Empire gave way to what was supposed to be the American Century with the Soviet Union providing a dialectical counter point.

There was a lot to be done, and the task of making sense of a modern Australia, and understanding its human and physical past was an urgent project. It captured the attention of scholars, journalists, public servants and as the exceptional sales figures for Donald Horne’s *Lucky Country* had shown, the broader public, which put wind in the sails of the politicians who heard this plea. So when I landed at the University of Queensland in the mid-1970s I was able to construct a degree in Australian studies—in literature, politics, sociology and journalism (sadly timetable clashes precluded as much history as I should have done). I remain grateful for this opportunity, and for the scholars who had chipped away at creating a new field despite the widely held view that Australia was neither interesting nor important enough to devote much time to.35

My experience was a product of place and time. This meant I also benefited from the opening of new fields of humanities inquiry, subject areas and approaches which pushed traditional disciplines into previously unchartered territory. If I had arrived at St Lucia a decade later my undergraduate studies would have been shaped by postmodern theory and cultural studies; now it would be very hard to find systematic Australian studies courses in any discipline, and certainly not as an interdisciplinary field.

Reflecting on this I am reminded how we are often unwitting products of things beyond our control. But if we remain open to possibility and change, new layers of meaning can be added. It is possible to see the world differently, to listen and learn to become more civilised.

This seemed to be missing in the overwrought responses to the Ramsay
imbroglio. The most strident advocates of Western civilisation seemed locked in a single world view, happy to talk about the virtues of ‘a hybrid toughness, a capacity to adapt and assimilate, to tolerate and include’ but unwilling to listen or hear. Surely the point of freedom of speech is not so much the talking, as the listening. With an informed and civil dialogue, perspectives and views develop. Surely the possibility of changing one’s mind comes from exploring different traditions and letting them bump up against each other.36

As we have seen in recent years, despite predictions to the contrary as recently as a few years ago, the notion of the nation-state is far from dead. America wants to be great again, Britain wants to be master of its own destiny, China is reviving an empire, and on it goes. The question of who gets to define a nation is being discussed and often angrily debated everywhere: shaped by money, religion, population, culture, technology, politics, expectations and an increasingly uneasy relationship with nature. Richard Flanagan observed, ‘The world is being undone. If we do not reimagine Australia we will be undone too.’37

We need to find a new way to do Australian studies. To revive an interdisciplinary approach that ranges wide, not calcified by past practice. It needs to engage with the world as it is, was and might be. This is what we have tried to do this year in Griffith Review with a journey from the legacy of empire, to the urgent need to find a meaningful settlement with the First Australians, to an investigation of what multiculturalism means now, to the cry for equality embedded in the outcome of the same sex marriage plebiscite last year.

Australia is a very different place to what it was even twenty years ago. The country the politicians talk about is not the one that most of us live in. The need to redefine is now emerging as a real issue—while we should not be afraid to be grounded in our own traditions, we should not be bound by them.38

This is an affluent and successful country—one of the richest on the planet—but one too often beset by wilful blindness and remarkably willing to tolerate casual cruelty. But it is our creation: I think we can do a whole lot better.

It may be time to think again about how we can expansively deal with insights from the rest of the world and from the oldest living civilisation in thinking about this place. Climate change, digitisation and globalisation provide an urgent moment to re-interrogate this place, its land, peoples, law, culture and institutions. As Roderick Ferguson, president of the US American Studies Association, who is leading the resurgence of a very different approach to American studies which aims to keep track of what America is, observed recently, in tragedy there is also the possibility of triumph.39

Perversely, it may be that the national interest test that the Minister for Education has proposed as a new overarching framework for Australian Research Council grants, to solve an embarrassing political problem, could provide such an opportunity. I am not holding my breath on this. Australia and Australians are inextricably linked to the rest of the world, so an expansive interpretation of this proposed test, might open up new fields—as we know, scholarly researchers will always push the boundaries. Some will also reveal transformative and sometimes uncomfortable truths.

When I read the many books about the crisis in democracy in those kin countries we like to compare ourselves with, I am struck by the resilience and robustness of many of the institutions we have nurtured over the past century. As Mike Pezzulo, the secretary of the Department of Home Affairs said last week, ‘Institutions anchor our polity and ensure that power is legitimised and wielded with consent.’40

We can be proud that our robust and independent electoral system is the envy of the world, our enduring system of compulsory voting makes the obligation to participate...
in the political process clear, our judiciary is appointed without undue political interference, executive government is checked by a parliamentary system and an apolitical public service, security and police services are monitored. While we may be uncomfortable about the perverting influence of money in politics we have not plumbed the depths of the distortions that are commonplace in the US and, as were revealed in the Brexit vote, in the UK.

But we are not immune to the global trends and our institutions are not immune from the calcification. Indeed, like a hyper-sensitive child we soak up the tensions that surround us.

So we have seen a debasement of political debate, unstable leadership, reduced transparency, increasing executive decision-making, policy paralysis, polarisation, eroding confidence in political parties, outsourcing of public services, a narrowing economic frame, favoured access to the rich and powerful and the whiff of corrupting money.

Our civil and non-government organisations and institutions have taken a battering as past practices and abuse have come to light, the quasi-institution of the media has been undermined by commercial decisions, technology and uncertainty of purpose, unions no longer have the capacity to represent what they once did, universities are under attack, grappling with competing demands and expectations, the justice system is under intense economic and political strain, under-resourced monitors of deregulation have allowed bad practice to go unchecked, and more than 200 years on we have not reached a settlement with the First Australians.

But there is little urgency in our debate. Our relative affluence has inoculated us and made us complacent. This in turn has begat caution and timidity; it has limited confidence, courage and ambition.

To address this, the time is right for us to take the lead in reevaluating the strengths and weakness of our institutions—to answer again what purpose do they serve. To ensure that they are fit for purpose in a progressive, sophisticated society, to ensure that they help turn the level of civilisation up a notch.

As Mike Pezzulo said, ‘Rather than ignoring our institutions, or allowing them to corrode through indifference, we should see them as sources of strength and stability, and we should rededicate ourselves to passing on their precious wisdom.’ And, I would strongly advocate, questioning them and ensuring they are fit for purpose.

The lessons from abroad are clear—when trust is lost, when institutions do not actively rebuild and respond to changing times—freedom is at risk. Every generation must carry this responsibility anew. The demographics show that a much more educated and informed Australian population now expects more. They have absorbed the principles of human rights and are perplexed when they are not meaningfully applied by a neutral state guided by the rule of law, and regulated by self-correcting institutions. They expect to participate and contribute, not simply to defer to experts who seem to be self-serving.

In the late 1980s I was involved in a project at the Research School of Social Sciences at the ANU. It was called Reshaping Australian Institutions, and promised an opportunity for the generational renewal which is so central to producing enduring, reviving, trustworthy institutions. I was a young observer of academic politics as they played out in Coombs and University House meeting rooms. It quickly became clear that the reshaping reflected a rapidly changing political and economic framework: the rise of what we then called economic rationalism, but is now more commonly known by the moniker neoliberalism. Coombs as its name denotes was the spiritual, and physical home, of the men who had played a major role in shaping Australia’s post-war institutions. Their legacy was up for grabs. The grand old men and the researcher scholars who accompanied them fought hard to protect what they had helped to create. On the other side were those who favoured a market-led approach, who believed citizens were consumers who would, could and should exercise rational choice in their own interests.
It was at times a somewhat mystifying environment—I thought maybe I had missed something. I realise now it was one of those periodic step changes that redefine the way things are seen, just as the rise of Australian studies had done a generation before.

This wasn’t abstract theory. In Coombs rational choice was personal. This became clear when despite protests, the rules of the tea room changed. Gone was the free morning tea. When we lined up we had to pay for the biscuits, as I recall, 5 cents for a Nice, 10 cents for Monte Carlo and 15 cents for a Tim Tam. It was last century, so there was still a tea lady, but users were paying.

Rational choice prevailed.

There were a lot of enduring outcomes from this project. But in a practical sense it ushered in the dominance of economics as the lingua franca of Australian public policy, something that has survived fundamentally unchallenged ever since. It has delivered a lot, but as the level of inequality and dissatisfaction shows, is no longer sufficient.

What happens in this country often shadows what happens elsewhere. Australians are gifted followers. Now thanks to the work of Nancy McLean in Democracy in Chains, Jane Mayer in Dark Money and others who have plotted the longer trajectory of this libertarian approach in the United States, I realise this change of frame was no accident. It was not inevitable, there were lessons to adopt, and others that maybe it would have been better to reject. In the US this was a product of a deliberate movement into the world of ideas. It was driven and funded by those who opposed the framework of rights and freedoms that emerged in the post-war environment. People who did not want to pay tax, people who were threatened by the civil rights movement, people who thought that if the weak did not survive it was their own fault.

They prevailed. What we are seeing now is this philosophy playing out in shocking ways in American politics, as those living with the gap between expectations and reality seek a bigger share of their American dream.

Our political history and framing ethos are very different. We have a different founding consensus and different challenges. There are inspiring things in our past, and things we need to redress. But I am confident that we have the capacity to face the past and create new and durable worlds that are pluralist, outwardly engaged, inclusive and place a collective value on liberal institutions that include and serve us all.

‘Person by person the world does change’, Tony Abbott wrote in his essay for Quadrant that marked the beginning of the end of the Ramsay program at ANU. In his final paragraph the former prime minister suggested that the ‘hundred bright young Australians’ who received the proposed scholarships ‘might change the world’, and begin ‘a much more invigorating long march through our institutions’.

That makes me a little nervous. It sounds a bit like a fifth column, though I doubt that the students would be willing fodder for such a scheme. I suspect that if they were to embark on such a long march, they like me would prefer an open, inclusive, contested, non-ideological journey, with civil and genuinely respectful discussion and debate. Grounded in the unique nature of this place as home to the oldest living civilisations, a product of British colonialism, the creation of people from every continent and our own imagining.

This country has a lot going for it, but we seem stuck in neutral. We need to regain ambition. To foster a remarkable country, one which learns from the mistakes of the past and displaces complacent caution to imagine and create an even more robust, inclusive, generous, rights-based democratic order that will work
well in the very different world of the twenty-first century. It won’t come from politicians—it will, if history is a guide, be something that is worked up on the ground, in our universities, in our institutions, in our justice system, in business, community groups and on social media. As it takes shape, the politicians will follow and carry it forward.

There is a lot at stake, person by person we can help to turn the level of civilisation up in this place so that it becomes much more than a pale shadow of the worst of the rest of the world.

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15. David Bornstein, ‘Scared by the News? Take the Long View: Progress Gets Overlooked’, The New York Times, 10 April 2018; Mahbubani, Has the West Lost it?

24. Harbemas, in Borja Hermoso, ‘Jürgen Habermas’.

25. Carole Cadwalladr, ‘If you’re on the side of democracy, Nick Clegg, why are you going to work for Facebook?’, Observer, 21 October 2018.

26. Seyla Benhabib, ‘Below the Asphalt Lies the Beach’, Boston Review, 9 October 2018; Sleeper, ‘How Hollow Speech enables hostile speech and what to do about it’.


29. Benhabib, ‘Below the Asphalt’.


41. Pezzullo, ‘Prosper the Commonwealth’.


DIVIDED BY A COMMON LANGUAGE?

The United States has had an enormous influence on Australian society and our relationship with the world. The US has been and continues to be one of Australia’s key trading partners. Australia has had an enduring strategic military alliance with the US, and the US is also a key source of cultural influence through film and television, broadcast and social media, and the import of other technological innovations over many decades. Where the US goes, Australia (mostly) follows, it seems. It would be fair to say that in recent years the influence of the US has been challenged by the rise of China on the world stage, and as Australia’s preeminent trading partner. However, as I am a linguist, I am not here to debate political and cultural influences or what might lie ahead. I will leave that to my erstwhile colleagues in political science and cultural studies—who, incidentally, seem to have their work cut out for them in this new age of (social) media-driven politics. Instead, I would like to touch upon a seemingly more intangible, but nevertheless important part of the relationship between Australia and the US, namely, how we communicate and get on with each other at an interpersonal level. After all, economic and political relationships are ultimately built on relationships between people.

It is commonly thought that although we share a common language with Americans, just like Americans and British, there are significant differences in the way in which we communicate. We are, as the infamous quote goes, ‘divided by a common language.’ In some ways that should not be surprising. The US and Australia have very different histories, and very different mixes of ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds in their respective populations. However, it is also true that at least some of us also share common roots with respect to the use of the English language, even if categories such as ‘Anglo-Americans’ or ‘Anglo-Australians’ are (necessarily) contested. And although we are not solely English-speaking societies—it is much more diverse than that in the case of both countries—English is for better or worse the primary lingua franca in both societies, or at least the lingua franca that counts in terms of social mobility. Given we share a common language that dominates in both societies, then are we really so different?

Popular and academic discourse alike would suggest we are. Australians are said to be ‘laid back’ and ‘irreverent’ and fond of ‘taking the piss’ of themselves and others, for instance, while Americans are claimed to be more ‘serious’ and to enjoy ‘talking about themselves’ in a (mostly) positive light. Such claims seem to resonate with the way in which we respectively talk about ourselves.
in discourses on national identity, and we no
doubt can all think of examples from our own
interactions in which we have seemingly found
evidence to support them. However, on close
examination, while we do indeed sometimes
find such things are true to a point, they are
not always true in the way we think. I thus
embarked on a collaborative project with
Professor Cliff Goddard and Professor Donal
Carbaugh, funded by the ARC, to investigate
just that: are there really differences in the
ways in which Australians and Americans talk
and relate?  

AUSTRALIANS AND AMERICANS
GETTING ACQUAINTED

One of the first questions we faced in our
quest to better understand Australian and
American communication styles was to
consider what kind of data would ensure we
were comparing like with like. While talk in
workplaces and other professional settings
is clearly an important site for studying how
Australians and Americans talk and interact,
a whole range of factors can influence how
we talk in such settings, including the specific ‘cultures’ we find developing in different
workplaces, and the histories of interactions
we have with different people. Our primary
aim was to try and compare Australian and
American ways of interacting and relating,
not the inevitable influence of a host of other
factors. We therefore settled on a particular
genre of talk that is arguably both a rich site
for cultural comparisons and also rather high
stakes, namely initial encounters in which
participants who have not previously met are
going acquainted for the first time (or what
linguists like to call initial interactions). Such
interactions are culturally rich, because the fact

that the participants do not know anything
about the other person they are talking with
means they inevitably rely on what they
perceive to be relatively common or shared
ways of getting to know someone. They are
also relatively high stakes interactions because
first impressions count for a lot in many
cases (although thankfully not always). We
thus proceeded to record initial interactions
in which Australians and Americans were
going acquainted, as well as ones in which
Australians were meeting Australians for the
first time, along with initial encounters in
which Americans were meeting Americans.  

What then did we find? What do (Anglo-)
Australians and (Anglo-)Americans do in
these sorts of initial encounters? Research on
initial interactions to date has argued that they
mostly involve people asking questions about
the other person and talking about themselves
in order to find common topics. Naturally,
we also found these kinds of sequences in our
data as well. But we also found participants do
much more than just that in initial encounters.

In the following excerpt from a conversation
between Connor, an American electrician in his
fifties, and Mary, an Australian student in her
mid-twenties, Mary has previously been talking
about how she has worked in her family’s
dental clinic over the study breaks. Connor’s
question here orients to the possibility that
working in a ‘proper’ job has meant Mary has
been able to move out of home.  

(1)

Connor: Do you st- do you still live at home or?
Mary: No I don’t. I’ve been out of home for
about six years now,
Connor: Mhm.
Mary: five to six years.
Connor: You don’t look that old (laughs)
Mary: (laughs)

Mary’s response is taken as an opportunity
for a quip by Connor and shared laughter,
and subsequently further joking and laughter
in that interaction. In our data this kind of
conversational humour was not uncommon.
Both Australians and Americans frequently
joked, and perhaps surprisingly, also sometimes

▲ American and
Australian flag
handshake

IMAGE:
THORSTEN SCHRITT
ID: 1097994956,
SHUTTERSTOCK.COM
teased each other in these initial encounters. They even (jokingly) flirted with each other in a few cases, although not, I hasten to add, in the interaction above.

Australians and Americans also engaged in other forms of talk besides talking about themselves or asking about the other person. They talked about troubles, complained and offered advice, made offers and issued invitations, criticised and disagreed with the other person, and even sometimes took offence, albeit somewhat delicately. Given both Australians and Americans do all these things (and probably more) in initial encounters, what then, if anything, is different in how they talk in such settings?

Consider the following conversation between two Americans, John and Elizabeth, who are in their early twenties. Just prior to this excerpt, they have been talking about riding really large rollercoasters in theme parks around the US.

(2)

John: It sounds so insane. I’m definitely, I’m a kind of adrenaline junky, so I’d be so stoked to do that, but I dun/no I haven’t.

Elizabeth: //But you ski.

John: I’ve never skied.

Elizabeth: I wanna try that.

John: thing I get to my kicks. You know skiing is fun, but uh yeah there’s no snow in Florida so //(laughs)

Elizabeth: //No.

John: I’ve only ever lived in Florida, so I’ve never lived where there’s been snow.

In the course of talking about rollercoasters and skiing, and subsequently beaches in the US and Australia, both John and Elizabeth repeatedly respond to prior self-disclosures from the other participant (e.g. ‘I’m an adrenaline junky’) with self-disclosures of their own (e.g. ‘I’ve never skied’). In doing so, they ‘personalise’ their contributions with respect to their own background experiences. As argued by Donal Carbaugh, ‘Americans believe that one should express one’s self, with very few constraints being placed upon that expressiveness…Such speaking often elaborates one’s personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings.’

Australians, on the other hand, were found to more frequently ask questions that prompt self-disclosures from the other person or prompt them to expand upon talk about themselves. Notably, when such questions were not forthcoming, the person not asking enough questions was sometimes implicitly, or even explicitly, sanctioned.

The following excerpt occurs around eight minutes into an initial interaction between two Australians in their mid-thirties, Natalie and Gary. Up until this point, Natalie has...
been asking Gary a lot of questions. He has not up until this point, however, reciprocated with questions that allow Natalie to talk about herself.\textsuperscript{18}

(3)

Natalie: Feel free to ask me some questions now. That's the way conversations work.

Gary: //No you shouldn't talk to the other interviewers actually.

Natalie: I'm not the interviewer. This is supposed to be a conversation.

Gary: //Oh right.

This is an instance of what ethnomethodologists call a 'deviant case', namely, what happens when someone does not do what is generally expected of them in conversation. This can prompt admonishments and expressions of exasperation, as well as accounts for that behaviour from the person being admonished.\textsuperscript{19} In this case, Gary claims he thought it was an interview, although he subsequently goes on to say that he does not have any questions to ask her, which draws further sanctions from Natalie. What this illustrates is the expectation (amongst Australians) that one should ask questions and not let talk about oneself dominate an initial encounter.

**Self-deprecations**

It may also come as somewhat of a surprise that Australians do not self-deprecate any more frequently than Americans in initial interactions. Indeed, we found that Americans self-deprecated just as frequently. This does not, on the surface at least, seem to accord with the general view that Australians are exhorted to not take themselves too seriously.\textsuperscript{22} Self-deprecations can, therefore, stand on their own.

**A CAUTIONARY TALE**

We have already noted that despite their reputation, Australians do not joke or tease more often than Americans, at least not in the case of initial interactions. So why might it feel like they do? We would argue that it is because both Australians and Americans experience more trouble going along with jocular quips—that is, playful comments on or responses to just prior talk—produced by non-Australians and non-Americans, respectively. In other words,
jocular quips are more ‘successful’ when they are made with speakers from the same cultural background. From an Australian perspective, then, it may seem like Americans are not making as many jokes in initial interactions, in part because we may not recognise them as jokes, or at least do not treat them as ‘funny’ through laughter and the like.

Consider the following two excerpts. In excerpt (5), Cole, an American in his early forties is responding to an earlier question from Sarah, another American, who is in her early sixties, about what he intends to do after finishing his MBA studies.

(5)
Cole: I’m thinking uh, maybe if the MBA works out, and I feel good about it, maybe working on a PhD in economics.
Sarah: And then what you wanna do with that?
Cole: Oh retire, you know, like,
Sarah: (laughs)
Cole: I don’t know, write, teach. I don’t know, whatever like,
Sarah: Mhm.

Sarah’s question about what he wants to do with his MBA initially prompts a non-serious quip (‘Oh retire, you know’), which elicits laughter from Sarah, followed by a serious response from Cole.

However, in excerpt (6), a jocular quip in response to the same question in an interaction between an Australian (Gina) and an American (Sophia), both of whom are in their early twenties, does not elicit laughter, as we can see below.

(6)
Sophia: So you’re studying Italian?
Gina: Yep, it’s a double major so it’s Italian and linguistics.
Sophia: Oh cool.
Gina: So I just /s-/ Sophia: //What do you wanna do with that?
Gina: Um, I didn’t really think very far ahead when I picked the course. (laughs)
Sophia: Yeah.
Gina: It was more just what do I enjoy what am I good at?
Sophia: Yeah.

Gina quips that she did not think about what she would do with a degree in Italian and linguistics. However, Sophia does not respond with laughter or even by smiling, but simply prompts Gina to keep talking. In both cases, asking what someone is going to do after their studies prompts a quip. However, it is only in the case of the interaction between participants from the same culture that the other party responds with laughter.

One might, of course, protest that this is just one case. However, we found that this pattern was repeated across our larger dataset. Both Australians and Americans were less likely to go along with jocular quips through laughter and banter when they were talking with someone from the other culture. Conversely, both were more likely to go along with the quip when it was made by someone from the same cultural background. In short, people from the same cultural background are more likely to respond positively to jokes in initial interactions. We would suggest that this is because such quips generally rely on sharing in particular mocking, critical attitudes, and in intercultural settings, participants may feel more uncertain about this. The point in the case of initial interactions, however, is that this applies equally to both Australians and Americans.

**THE UPSHOT**

There are some potential lessons here for Australians when getting to know Americans in interpersonal settings. When an American
self-discloses, think about self-disclosing in response rather than always asking follow-up questions. When an American self-deprecates, think about self-deprecating in response rather than simply laughing. In the case of jokes, just because they do not always go smoothly it does not mean that Americans are overly serious or do not ‘get’ humour. In fact it goes both ways. Australians do not always get quips by Americans in initial interactions. Going along with jokes often requires not only shared background knowledge, but very often shared membership in a particular group. That is inevitably harder when you come from different societies and you are meeting for the first time.

There are also some broader lessons with respect to how we think about cultural ‘others’ and the ways in which they communicate. The aim of studies like these is to help us bridge the gap between our intuitions about how language is used based on our own personal experiences, and the ‘seen but unnoticed’ sets of practices that underpin patterns of language use that are recognisably Australian and American. In this case, it also shows that while we frequently focus on what people do when they are talking, in some cases examining how people respond to talk can be more instructive.

What happens in workplaces and other institutional settings is, of course, a whole different ballgame, one about which we still do not yet know enough. It is also important to bear in mind that this study focused only on a particular subset of Australians and Americans respectively. It thus remains an open question the extent to which these findings can be generalised further to initial interactions amongst Australians and Americans from a broader, much more representative set of backgrounds. Any claims that purport to be about all Australians and Americans should be treated with due scepticism without grounding in larger datasets. Making such broad claims has certainly not been the aim here. Instead, the aim has been to illustrate how we can use a different lens to examine potential cultural differences in the way in which we talk and relate to others.

While uncovering cultural differences in communication styles is indeed challenging work, especially when one is aiming to understand what people actually do, not simply what they say they do, it is also rewarding work. Understanding how we talk and relate to others, and how it may be similar and different to others in the world is important. Without an appropriate level of self-awareness about our own ways of talking and relating and understanding that of other cultures, things can sometimes go drastically wrong. However, it is not just about avoiding misunderstandings. It is also about continuing to improve our relationships and standing in the world today. In searching for a deeper understanding, then, what better place to start than at the beginning, namely, our initial encounters with cultural others?

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4. On Australians being ‘laid back and irreverent’

2. Gary Nunn, ‘With the Greatest Respect: Why

1. According to estimates from the Department

of Pragmatics. Journal and is also currently co-Editor in Chief of the

Australian National Corpus <www.ausnc.org.au>, articles

and book chapters. He led the establishment

de Gruyter, 2015), and he has authored numerous

publications include Understanding Politeness (CUP, 2013, with Dániel Kádár), Pragmatics and the English

Language (Palgrave Macmillian, 2014, with Jonathan

Culpeper), and Im/politeness Implicatures (Mouton

de Gruyter, 2015), and he has authored numerous

articles and book chapters. He led the establishment

of the Australian National Corpus <www.ausnc.org.au>,

and is currently co-Editor in Chief of the Journal of

Pragmatics.

1. According to estimates from the Department

of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the United States

was Australia’s third largest trading partner (behind China and Japan) in 2017-18, the fourth

largest export market and the second largest import

market. See DFAT, ‘Australia’s Trade in Goods and


resources/trade-statistics/trade-in-goods-and-

services/Pages/australias-trade-in-goods-and-


2. Gary Nunn, ‘With the Greatest Respect: Why

Americans Don’t Get Brits and Aussies’, Sydney


3. A quote variously attributed to Oscar Wilde and

George Bernard Shaw with respect to (perceived)
differences between Americans and the British.

4. On Australians being ‘laid back and irreverent’

see Cliff Goddard and Rahel Cramer, ‘Laid back’ and ‘irreverent’: An ethnopragmatic analysis

two cultural themes in Australian English

communication’, in Handbook of Communication in

Cross-Cultural Perspective, ed. by Donal Carbaugh


On the Australian predilection for ‘taking the piss’

see: Jessica Milner Davis, “Aussie” humour and

laughter: Joking as an acculturation ritual’, in Serious

Frolic: Essays on Australian Humour, ed. by Frances

De Groen and Peter Kirkpatrick (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2009), pp. 31–47; and

Cliff Goddard, ‘Not taking yourself too seriously

in Australian English: Semantic explications, cultural scripts, corpus evidence’, Intercultural

Pragmatics, 6 (2009), 29–53. On the American
tendency to be ‘serious’ and focused on positive

self-presentation see Molly O’Brien, Aussie speech

is helping us get ahead’, The Herald Sun, 14 July 2018; and

Donal Carbaugh, ‘Some distinctive features


Conversation in America, ed. by William F. Edie and


pp. 61-75.

5. ARC DP120100516, ‘Australians and Americans

Talking: Culture, Interaction and Communication Style’, with Cliff Goddard (Griffith University) and

Donal Carbaugh (University of Massachusetts

Amherst).

6. Such data also, incidentally, had an added advantage

for us in understanding what was going on in

these interactions, as the whole history of their

relationship up until that point was recorded and

available for inspection. The participants, therefore,
did not know anything more than we (as analysts)
could observe—a distinct advantage as anyone who

has analysed talk will know.

7. Our total corpus consists of more than eighty initial

interactions: thirty-one Australian–American,

twenty-seven Australian–Australian and twenty-four

American–American pairings. Same and mixed-
gender recordings were made. The participants

ranged in age from eighteen to sixty-five, but most

were in their early twenties to mid-thirties, and

while they came from a variety of regions

around Australia and the US, they were not representative

of ethnic or socioeconomic diversity in either
country, being largely white and broadly middle

class students and professionals.

8. Jan Svennevig, Getting Acquainted in Conversation

(Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999).

9. This excerpt and the others that follow are all taken

from the Corpus of Australians and Americans

Talking (CAAT), except for excerpt (3), which is taken

from the Australians Getting Acquainted (AGA)
corpus. The transcripts in this article have been

simplified in order to make them more accessible

(‘/’ is used to indicate the beginning of overlapping
talk; ‘-’ is used to indicate cut-off words). For a more
detailed analysis of this particular excerpt, see

pp. 542–44 in Michael Haugh and Lara Weinglass,

‘Divided by a common language? Jocular quips and

(non-)affiliative responses in initial interactions

amongst American and Australian speakers of


10. See Michael Haugh, ‘Mocking and (non)-seriousness

in initial interactions amongst American and

Australian speakers of English’, in Handbook of

Communication in Cross-Cultural Perspective, ed. by

Donal Carbaugh (London and New York: Routledge,

2017), pp. 164–17; and Michael Haugh and Danielle

Pillet-Shore, ‘Getting to know you. Teasing as an

invitation to intimacy in initial interactions’,


11. See Michael Haugh, ‘Implicature and the inferential

substrate’, in Implicitness: From Lexis to Discourse, ed.

by Piotr Cap and Marta Dynel (Amsterdam: John


12. Michael Haugh and Danielle Pillet-Shore, First

Conversations: The Pragmatics of Initial Interactions

in English (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

forthcoming).

13. See Michael Haugh, ‘Prompting as a higher-order

pragmatic act’, in Pragmefies and Languages of Theory

Use, ed. by Keith Allan, Alessandro Capone and

Istvan Kecskes (New York: Springer, 2016), pp. 167–90

(pp. 179–81); and Michael Haugh, ‘Prompting offers


23. For a more detailed analysis of these two excerpts, see Haugh and Weinglass, pp. 546–49.

24. Consider, for instance, how the infamous, ‘Where the bloody hell are you?’ campaign was (negatively) received around the world: Angela Ardington, ‘Tourist advertising of Australia: Impolite or situation appropriate? Or a uniquely Aussie invite lost in translation’, in *Situated Politeness*, ed. by Bethan Davies, Michael Haugh and Andrew John Merrison (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 253–69.
CRITICAL REVIEWING IN THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

Perhaps the only thing that all the poets of the Romantic period had in common was an anxiety about how they would be received by their contemporaries, in the first instance, then about how (or whether) they would be read by future readers. It related to a more generalised anxiety about the status and function of poetry in what the satirist, Thomas Love Peacock, in his *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), called an ‘iron age’: when ‘intellectual power and intellectual acquisition have turned themselves into other and better channels’. Poetry, in Peacock’s provocative and only partly comic characterisation, was historically redundant, a hangover from when society thought as a child. The technologico-scientific future glimpsed in the early signs of an industrial revolution, the claims of common sense and logic, and the increasing prevalence of market forces, according to Peacock, would have no place for it. This ‘anxiety of reception’ (to use Lucy Newlyn’s term) explains why so much Romantic and post-Romantic poetry is written about poetry itself, beset by doubts about its own visionary and interpretative powers while yearning to establish a unique epistemology and authority.1

The tense relationship between poet and audience in the early nineteenth century is manifest in one of the most resilient of the Romantic myths, of which Percy Bysshe Shelley’s rhapsodic pastoral elegy for John Keats, entitled *Adonais*, is an exalted expression: the myth of the vulnerable poetic sensibility damaged or destroyed by an indifferent, if not openly hostile, world. ‘I weep for Adonais—he is dead’, mourned Shelley in a poem that was also an historical elegy for poetry itself and a eulogy for fellow poets, real and imagined. From 1802, at the centre of this hostile world, we find the figure of the critical reviewer, the occasion of Shelley’s mythologising in *Adonais*. Shelley’s hypersensitive Keats has been destroyed by the brutal forces of the critical establishment:

The genius of the lamented person to whose memory I have dedicated these unworthy verses, was not less delicate and fragile than it was beautiful; and where cankerworms abound, what wonder if its young flower was blighted in the bud? The savage criticism on his *Endymion*, which appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, produced the most violent effect on his susceptible mind; the agitation thus originated ended in the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs; a rapid consumption ensued, and the succeeding acknowledgements from more candid critics, of the true greatness of his powers, were ineffectual to heal the wound thus wantonly afflicted.3

PUBLIC DOMAIN HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:W_TURNER_BODENSEE_1842.JPG
As so often, the story of Adonais turns out to be a myth in both senses of the word: a fabrication, no less than a powerful story expressing a collective insight or (as in this case) a collective anxiety. Far from being naturally ethereal and retiring, Keats before he contracted tuberculosis was athletic, edgy, and prone to belligerence. But the attack on Keats in the periodicals had been real. ‘The frenzy of [Keats’s] Poems was bad enough in its way’, John Gibson Lockhart had written in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, ‘but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable, drivelling idiocy of *Endymion*.4’ Lockhart was imitating, often exaggerating, a style of literary criticism developed in 1802 by the first of the major Romantic periodicals, the *Edinburgh Review*, a style best exemplified by the *Edinburgh*’s editor, Francis Jeffrey (fig. 1), in his aggressively critical reviews of William Wordsworth, Walter Scott, Joanna Baillie, John Thelwall, Thomas Moore, Francis Douce, and many others. However exigent the commercial pressures behind the development of book reviewing in the eighteenth century, it was never limited to promoting books as literary or commercial objects. From the beginning, reviewing also engaged in the culture of ideas and ideologies, reflecting and fuelling the political and cultural antagonisms that would become more open and divisive after the French Revolution.

In other words, the big Reviews of the early nineteenth century—the *Edinburgh Review* and its Tory rival, the *Quarterly Review*—had barely concealed political priorities: their ‘Right leg is politics’, as Jeffrey famously insisted.5 And the severity with which they prosecuted these interests were integral to a process of demystification that was designed (amongst other things) to establish the cultural authority of the reviewer over both the author and the reader. Critical severity had been around long before 1802, of course, but with the *Edinburgh Review* misrepresentation and severity became especially wilful and especially skilful, politically calculated and, sometimes, vicious and inexcusable. ‘Jeffrey, Croker and Hazlitt may not have slain with a review’, writes Marilyn Butler, ‘but it is not surprising that contemporaries thought them capable of it’.6

The final aspect of Romantic periodical reviewing that I want to register is its institutionalisation of criticism as a distinct professional activity. The *Edinburgh* numbered amongst its contributors a host of original writers whom we would think of as specialist practitioners in their respective fields, and this was part of the success of the Reviews. Walter Scott reviewed literature for the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, for example, as did Thomas Carlyle for the *Edinburgh*. The *Edinburgh* occasionally had Lord Grey for politics, the *Quarterly* the Duke of Wellington. Henry Hallam and Thomas Babington Macaulay reviewed history for the *Edinburgh* and Thomas Malthus wrote articles on political economy for both the big quarterlies. For mathematics and science, the *Edinburgh* could boast John Playfair and John Leslie, respectively Professors of Natural Philosophy and of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. But along with

▲ Fig 1. Portrait of Francis Jeffrey by Samuel Cousins, published by William Walker, after Colvin Smith mezzotint, May 1830.

IMAGE: © NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON, D86492
this specialisation went generalisation, and the core Edinburgh and Quarterly reviewers were not expert practitioners so much as expert critics. The rise in remuneration and status of nineteenth-century reviewing created the phenomenon of the professional critic and certain reviewers stand out as especially prolific. Between them, Jeffrey and Henry Brougham (and to a lesser extent Sydney Smith) accounted for well over forty per cent of the Edinburgh in its early years; Robert Southey and John Barrow and John Wilson Croker, along with editor William Gifford, performed a similar service for the Quarterly. Their reviews attest to their argumentative competence in an impressive range of pursuits, and it is precisely this, and not an expertise in any specific area, that represents their critical strength.

And no practice highlights this distinction better than that of literary criticism. Jeffrey was known to his period as its greatest literary critic and made a point of reviewing the bulk of the poetry and fiction in the Edinburgh himself (fig. 2). When Jeffrey reviewed Scott, or Swift, or Burns, or Wordsworth, or Baillie, or Southey, or Byron, or Crabbe, or Edgeworth, or Moore, or Hemans for the Edinburgh, or wrote on Classical, or Elizabethan, or Restoration, or Augustan literature, he wrote solely as a critic and consumer. Jeffrey’s practical experience as a literary critic was immense. He was extremely widely read in English, as well as in French and Classical literature, and he had written what amounted to thousands of pages of criticism in his late teens and twenties, using the act of writing down his own considered response to everything he read as a personal discipline.7 The line from the professional literary reviewer to the modern literary critic working in a university English department is, in this one sense at least, a direct one. Neither needs to be a creative artist in order to assume critical authority.

For the Romantic writer, on the other hand, this separation of powers became part of the problem, and a source of alienation and distrust. The often antagonistic attitude adopted by nineteenth-century reviewers played a crucial role in reinforcing the self-consciousness of imaginative writing in the Romantic period and a note of desperation can be heard throughout the period protesting that literary life was being misunderstood and undermined by the very institutions that should have been encouraging and ennobling it. Instead of countering the resistance of a new reading public to what was innovative or vitally different, the Reviews were conspiring with the public against selected authors, encouraging the public’s complacency and philistinism.

Lord Byron captured this tension in the title of the satire he wrote (or rather rewrote) in response to his own savaging at the hands of the Edinburgh Review—English Bards and Scotch Reviewers—where the antagonism between criticism and creation is expressed in specifically national, even racial terms. ‘Scotch Reviewers’, by reputation and education habituated to the use of their critical skills,
are stigmatised as having developed literary criticism into a sterile, destructive, self-serving exercise. The English artist struggles to conceive and quicken, to imagine that which he knows; the Scottish reviewer/critic murders to dissect. 'Scottishness', as Stephen Cheeke remarks, 'is represented as essentially mock-heroic, hardened to reality, “unpoetical”.'

The Scottish intellectual effort generally, and the critical effort of the *Edinburgh Review* in particular, are portrayed by Byron as secondary and parasitic productions in which national inferiority and envy are sublimated as indiscriminate censure:

> Each genial influence nurtured to resist,  
> A land of meanness, sophistry and mist.  
> ('The Curse of Minerva', lines 137–38)

**COLERIDGE ON THE CRITICAL REVIEWERS**

To distill this discussion of Romantic periodical criticism, I want to select one example from the many howls of protest against contemporary reviewing that were heard throughout the period: the indirect and complex, but for our purposes suggestive critique of Francis Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review* in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*. The twenty first chapter of the *Biographia* climaxes in an elaborate formal analogy involving a *conflict of interpretations* which Coleridge has with two French army officers over the symbolism of Michelangelo’s famous statue of Moses. Coleridge is recalling a conversation he had with a Prussian friend when he was in Rome visiting the tomb of Julius II (fig. 3), which ‘turned on the horns and beard of the tremendous statue; of the superhuman effect of the former’:

> We called to mind the horns of the rising sun, and I repeated the noble passage from Taylor’s Holy Dying. That horns were the emblem of power and sovereignty among the Eastern nations, and are still retained as such in Abyssinia; the Achelous of the ancient Greeks; and the probable ideas and feelings, that originally suggested the mixture of the human and the brute form in the figure, by which they realized the idea of their mysterious Pan, as representing intelligence blended with a darker power, deeper, mightier, and more universal than the conscious intellect of man; than intelligence;—all these thoughts and recollections passed in procession before our minds.9

The reflections of Coleridge and his friend focus on the human imagination and the symbolic power of art—on what the sublime sculpture of a Michelangelo can convey beyond ‘the conscious intellect of man’. The critical question might be what the statue means, but the figure of Moses, with its horns blending the super-human with the sub-human, is about what *we* mean, and about how, by accessing ‘a darker power’, we make meaning in art. Interpretation here relies upon a cultural literacy that reaches across time.
and space to Abyssinia, the Orient, and the ancient Greeks—the Etruscan god of waters and rivers, Achelous, considered by some to have been the inspiration for the medieval Green Man, is linked iconographically with ‘the mysterious Pan’. Coleridge is modelling a kind of hermeneutics or high criticism, one that relies on extensive erudition and a willed, imaginative receptivity or responsiveness.

With the advent of two French army officers, however, the whole tone of the encounter with Michelangelo’s genius sinks. In spite of their apparent ‘distinction and rank’, the Frenchmen—‘instantly noticing the statue in parts’, says Coleridge, ‘without one moment’s pause of admiration impressed by the whole’ (II, 117)—are capable only of a smutty misinterpretation. Seeing the horns of Michelangelo’s Moses, Coleridge had been reminded of the ‘golden horns’ of the sun in Jeremy Taylor’s *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying*, ‘like those which decked the browes of Moses when he was forced to wear a vail, because himself had seen the face of God’; the French officers, on the other hand, can think only of ‘a HE-GOAT and a CUCKOLD’ (II, 116n, 117). Coleridge contrasts his own, genial criticism—informe, sympathetic, imaginative—with the shallow vulgarity of the philistine Frenchmen. For the Frenchmen, the whole mysterious, hierarchical, signifying universe remains ‘a land of darkness, a perfect Anti-Goshen’ (I, 242). The Rome in which Coleridge’s readers find themselves, guided by his interpretative genius, is the Rome of Ralph Cudworth, of Jeremy Taylor, of Thomas Burnet, of John Milton—the grand Indo-European or ‘universal’ scholarship and genius of the Christian Renaissance, towards which Coleridge’s priorities and authorities and examples direct the reader throughout the pages of the *Biographia*. This is a powerful nostalgia that at any point can transform the *Biographia* into an elegy on the passing of a more noble age and culture, one devastated and occupied (as Rome itself was) by French military imperialism, for which French intellectual imperialism—with its want of sympathy and imagination, its reductive scepticism and impious deism—is held responsible. There are more things in heaven and earth than are present in their philosophy.

The French soldiers turn out to be an elaborate analogy for Francis Jeffrey, the anecdote designed to disqualify Jeffrey as a critic and cultural legislator. The association implicit in the analogy is of the Scottish with the French Enlightenment. The allegiance of the *Edinburgh to philosophes* like Turgot, Mirabeau, Quesnay, and Condorcet was on record at a time when even liberal opinion despaired of finding anything valuable in French thought and culture. (The *Biographia* was composed in 1815, the year the British and allied forces finally routed the French army at Waterloo.) The world of art and of metaphysics is posited as so far beyond the limits of Jeffrey’s Gallic consciousness as to expose his critical quibbling and contempt as a form of ignorance, impotence, and imaginative impoverishment. On Mt Sinai, Coleridge as Moses knows no such geographical or imaginative limits, enforcing his self-elected role as genius and cultural lawgiver.

**PUBLIC HUMANITIES**

What I am concerned with in this paper is the business of criticism as it applies to literature in the first instance, but also to the humanities more generally—I am concerned with what is expected of the humanities in their role as public interpreters and cultural legislators, and with what they expect of themselves.

To explore this issue, I have chosen to use the antagonism between creative and critical activity in Romantic literary culture to reflect on some of the changes literary studies have undergone since 1980 and to throw light on some of the assumptions and strategies of the dominant contemporary form of ideological criticism, asking how well we are positioned to manage the re-engagement with the non-university sector represented by the idea (and practice) of public humanities.

The very idea of ‘public humanities’ has to be understood as either paradoxical or tautological, opposed as it is not to a private humanities but to a scholarly or professional humanities, carried on within the confines of a university. As a group of academic
disciplines taking as the primary objects of their enquiry human actions, ideas, institutions, and values, the humanities urge us to examine our personal and social lives. For that reason, however, they can never be confined to universities or, within universities, to specific disciplines. The humanities are something that, simply by virtue of our being human, we are all doing all of the time. Ideas of truth, beauty, equity, and justice are no less important—and no less controversial—for a banker than they are for us. More to the point, the kind of analytical and creative thinking that characterises the humanities is no less important for the banker than it is for us.

So we come back to the question of what, if anything, is distinctive about public humanities, and whether it does or should differ from university humanities? Do we reserve a mode of argumentation or a special language for sharing ideas and issues and sensations with a public audience, a language or an argument that is different from the one we might use with undergraduates, say, or the one we use with our academic peers? Have I said anything so far in this article that I could not or would not share with an interested member of the public not necessarily educated in university humanities? I will not try to answer these questions for other disciplines, but will say of my own—of literary studies—that in the course of my career I have witnessed the alienation of two key audiences for the work we do as university literary critics: readers and writers. And I take the belated development of an oxymoronic ‘public humanities’ as implicitly recognising just that.

What should be clear by now is that, by ‘the public’, I do not mean ‘the dim-witted bourgeoisie’ or ‘the credulous masses’, to quote Rita Felski in another context, to be used and abused as ‘a source of symbolic advantage, a guarantee to oppositional purity or redemptive politics, shoring up the certitude of one’s own advanced consciousness’. Having said that, I hasten to add that the whole issue of our obligations and relations to the public is much more complex than the sentimental or utopian version that I am implying might suggest, with interesting theoretical and practical ramifications, some of which I will reflect on by way of concluding this essay.

ROMANTIC CRITICISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the meantime, let me sketch the case of British Romantic Literature. The Romantic literature that I inherited in the 1970s had...
begun in 1798: Wordsworth was its creative centre, Coleridge its critical centre (figs 4 and 5). Confirmation of Wordsworth’s centrality could be found, not only in Coleridge—Wordsworth was Coleridge’s greatest work, we were told—but in a number of other influential critical gestures by illustrious contemporaries: Hazlitt’s awestruck if querulous exaltation of Wordsworth as ‘a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age’, for example; Keats’s troubled characterisation of ‘the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime’; Shelley’s manifest anxiety about Wordsworth (in Harold Bloom’s sense), returning obsessively to the Wordsworthian precedent or ‘presence’ throughout his career.12 The Victorian canonisation of Shelley and Keats as part of a second generation of what the early twentieth century would settle on as six major Romantic poets served only to confirm the existence and indeed priority of the first generation.

THE OLD CANON

William BLAKE 1757–1827
William WORDSWORTH 1770–1850
Samuel Taylor COLERIDGE 1772–1834
George Gordon, Lord BYRON 1788–1824
Percy Bysshe SHELLEY 1792–1822
John KEATS 1795–1821

Wordsworth’s reputation managed to survive critical theories that were otherwise nominally anti-Romantic—the high culturalism of Matthew Arnold, for example, the Anglo-Catholicism of T. S. Eliot, the narrow vitalism of F. R. Leavis, the close reading of the New Criticism—to be taken up again in the 1960s by theories that were sympathetic to Romanticism and themselves Romantic, like the Freudian agon of Harold Bloom and the Hegelian or apocalyptic historicism of M. H. Abrams.13 One way and another, English literary history had come to fulfil Wordsworth’s prophetic determination to create the taste by which he could be enjoyed.14 Thanks largely to Wordsworth and Coleridge, poetry or imaginative literature, now defined as the sublimation of the immediate and the quotidian, enjoyed a cultural supremacy and the quasi-spiritual status conferred upon it by Arnold. ‘More and more’, wrote Arnold, we will ‘turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us’,15 and time and again the Victorians had found salvation of one form or another in the poetry of William Wordsworth.16

By the 1980s, however, this Wordsworth-centred reading of Romanticism was being seriously and repeatedly challenged by a collective ‘return of history’, which was also at the same time a return to politics. In the wake of the revisionary enterprise begun by Jerome McGann in the early 1970s and given a manifesto in his The Romantic Ideology in 1983, and in the wake of the revisionary history of Marilyn Butler’s Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries in 1981,17 the majority of analyses of Romantic literature took up a position in wilful and explicit contrast to what they saw as a two-hundred-year-old tendency to play right into the hands of a Wordsworth-centred Romanticism by uncritically accepting its rapt privacies and spiritual hierarchies, along with its concomitant suppression of the historical and political temporality of the text (fig. 6). ‘Criticism of Romanticism has frequently been theoretically more Romantic, and certainly more partial, than English Romantic writing.
From that moment, various forms of critical historicism prevailed as various forms of scepticism. From that moment, various forms of critical historicism prevailed as various forms of scepticism. From that moment, various forms of critical historicism prevailed as various forms of scepticism. From that moment, various forms of critical historicism prevailed as various forms of scepticism.

What gave New Historicism most of its polemical charge, in other words, was a suspicion that derived ultimately from the historical materialism of Marxism and the kind of cultural critique practised by Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey, and Frederic Jameson, alert for ‘signs of contradictions (historically determined)’, to quote Macherey and Étienne Balibar, ‘which appear as unevenly resolved conflicts.’ Unimpressed by what Lindberge (after Walter Benjamin) calls ‘the aura that has customarily surrounded romantic poetry’, Marxist and non-Marxist historians alike attempted to get behind Romantic ideology to ‘the actual historical processes by which this aura has come to glorify particular poets.’ The Romantic idea of art that we saw modelled in Coleridge’s deliberately reactionary encounter with Michelangelo’s Moses, with its intimations of immortality, now had to be understood as a socio-economic product, and for ‘the Genius of Poetry’ that Keats believed ‘must work out its own salvation in a man’ were substituted the genii of time and place, production and reception.

As well as having no illusions about the Romantic pieties, New Historicism denounced those pieties as evidence of the poet’s complicity with conservative, usually oppressive forces in society—utilising what Rita Felski calls ‘the well-oiled machine of ideology critique, the x-ray gaze of symptomatic reading, the smoothly rehearsed moves that add up to a hermeneutics of suspicion’. What interests us in all of this is the way in which these critical wars re-enact the antagonisms we discussed at the opening of this essay, what McGann himself calls ‘the civil wars of the romantic movement itself’—between critic and poet; Enlightenment and Romanticism; Whig and Tory; Scotland and England. Those literary historicists who took their cue from McGann and Butler and began in self-conscious and explicit resistance to Wordsworth, and to what they saw as the wilful imposition of a Wordsworth-centred Romanticism, were doing exactly what Francis Jeffrey did when he began his critical enterprise back in October of 1802 with an attack on Wordsworth’s ‘anti-social principles, and distempered sensibility’, ‘his discontent with the present constitution of society—his paradoxical morality, and his perpetual hankerings after some unattainable state of voluptuous virtue and perfection.’

Not only was politics the ‘Right leg’ of the Edinburgh Review, it also had a way of thinking and writing historically. Indeed, the ‘notions of historical relativism and the
historical determination of politics’—notions that late twentieth-century criticism takes for granted—‘would have seemed commonplace in the Edinburgh of Dugald Stewart and John Millar’, as J. W. Burrow has said. Moreover, recent criticism and Scottish historicism both make a priority of economic exigencies, what Thomas Carlyle famously stigmatised as the cash-payment nexus.  

The best way to sum up the reputation of Scottish critical thinking is to look at Jeffrey’s cleverly ambiguous portrait of the proto-sociologist, John Millar, as corresponding ‘pretty nearly with the abstract idea that the learned of England entertain of a Scottish [sic] philosopher’:

He wondered at nothing; and has done more to repress the ignorant admiration of others, than most of his contemporaries. It was the leading principle, indeed, of all his speculations on law, morality, government, language, the arts, sciences, and manners—that there was nothing produced by arbitrary or accidental causes; that no great change, institution, custom, or occurrence, could be ascribed to the character or exertions of an individual, to the temperament of an individual or a nation, to occasional policy, or peculiar wisdom or folly: everything, on the contrary, he held, arose spontaneously from the situation of the society, and was suggested or imposed irresistibly by the opportunities or necessities of their condition.

The same caricature of Scottish philosophy imputed here to ‘the learned of England’ was recycled in an altogether darker or demonic form by Coleridge in the Biographia Literaria, as we saw, and directed at the Edinburgh Review itself. It would become the leitmotif of Carlyle’s portrait of Francis Jeffrey in his Reminiscences: ‘To my regret’, writes Carlyle, Jeffrey ‘seemed bent on, first of all, converting me from what he called my “German mysticism,” back merely, as I could perceive, into dead Edinburgh Whiggism, scepticism, and materialism’. The interest for our purposes lies in the fact that the same ‘scepticism’ and ‘materialism’ characterises the work of modern ideological critics, who like their Edinburgh precursors work within an historical materialist tradition and adopt a self-consciously critical methodology, wondering at nothing and exerting themselves ‘to repress the ignorant admiration of others’. ‘The negative’, to quote Rita Felski, ‘has become inescapably, overbearing, normative.’

THE CHALLENGE FOR A PUBLIC HUMANITIES

Not only is ‘a rigorously political reading…a closed, monothematic reading’, writes M. H. Abram, ‘it is also joyless’—joyless, and often knowing and self-righteous. As with the omniscience of Romantic periodical criticism attacking what they saw as the ‘drivelling idiocy’ of their contemporaries, the process of contextualisation and demystification practised by ideological criticism is used to establish the cultural authority of the critic over the author and the reader, often looking down on the self-deluded author from the moral high ground. The same protest that was heard throughout the Romantic period—that literature was being misunderstood and undermined by the very institutions that should have been encouraging and ennobling it—could be heard from the writers of the 1980s and 1990s, when a whole genre of poems sprang up to assert that, contra Roland Barthes, authors were still very much alive, and to defend themselves and their work from the arrogations of critical theory. ‘Both criticism and “critique”, to quote Helen Small, “whatever their particular valency, omit a great deal. The work of the humanities is frequently descriptive, or appreciative, or imaginative, or provocative, or speculative, more than it is critical.”

This is one of a number of issues that have to be carefully negotiated when sharing humanities with the public, which is usually inclined to give the author the benefit of the doubt when it comes to meaning, style, and motive force. Predisposed to admire where they feel a writer is doing something they could not do nearly so well themselves, members of the public also usually subscribe to a canonical approach to literature. Though
perfectly content to hear about the fluctuations of fortune undergone by the reputations of writers, and indeed fascinated by historical change and the realisation that ‘all our notions [are] husked in the phantasms of time and place’, as Coleridge put it, the public still wants to believe that, however history had played out, Shakespeare would always have been recognised as a great playwright, and that certain writers are to be cherished and preserved because they ‘make glow with significance what is usually unseen, and unspoken too’, to quote David Malouf: ‘that, when it occurs, is what binds us all, since it speaks out of the centre of each one of us; giving shape to what we too have experienced and did not till then have words for, though as soon as they are spoken we know them as our own’.

And the public is stubborn in its conviction that the characters in novels are like real people and susceptible to the same gossip as their neighbours—though the truth is, of course, we know some novelistic characters far better than we are ever likely to know our neighbours. Under pressure, most readers are likely to concede that fictional characters do not share the same ontological status as human beings, but that does not mean what happens to them does not matter. We are moved by literature, according to Dr Johnson, not because we confuse it with reality, but because it brings reality to mind. Little Nell may be a fiction but the good and the young die prematurely, now no less than in the Victorian period, challenging our instinctive sense of social and cosmic justice. Whatever we may think about the ontological status of a work of art, however, public humanities is never going to work unless we bring critical thinking back into conversation with common reading and common understanding—not to talk down to the public, but to talk with them about the things that matter to us all: the humanities.

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14. ‘[E]very Author, as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed,’ in his ‘Essay Supplementary to the Preface (1815), in Wordsworth’s Poetry and Prose, ed. by Nicholas Halmi (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), p. 522.


22. Lindenberger, The History in Literature, p. 32.

23. In a letter to J. A. Hessey, 8 October 1818, Letters of John Keats, ed. by Gittings, p. 156.


31. Felski, Uses of Literature, p. 3.


34. ‘[A]ll our notions’, Coleridge wrote, were ‘husked in the phantasms of Time & Place, that still escape the finest sieve & most searching Winnow of our Reason & Abstraction’, Coleridge’s Notebooks: A Selection, ed. by Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 27.


Tradition is a universal socio-cultural and historical phenomenon. It exerts a force in society that is both normative and formative; it affirms values and imposes constraints against changing them; and yet all the while it responds to the needs and expectations of the society within which it is established. Tradition is deeply embedded in human life, and determines the human world-view, yet because it is so pervasive, it generally works below the horizon of our perceptions. It is only when we study a culture other than our own, and especially one far removed in time as well as divergent in other aspects, that we have the distance to recognise the traditional patterns of activity for what they are. In a highly literate culture, the effects of tradition are complex and subtle: even in a society that treasures innovation and originality there are traditions, but they are interwoven into the societal fabric below the surface. By contrast, in a pre-literate society, the traces of the traditions that governed the oral and the pictorial transmission of culture, history and beliefs tend to be much more evident, and comparative analysis of the two traditions allows insight into the workings of both production and reception within a traditional context. This paper presents some of the major parallels in narrative strategies and techniques between the oral poetic and the painted pictorial traditions of early Greece, and their effects.

In recent years, Homeric studies have explored in great depth the finer points of the narrative techniques peculiar to traditions of oral and oral-derived poetry, including the more recent explorations of how meaning is constructed in an oral-traditional context. A useful starting-point, therefore, is a brief overview of some of the characteristic features of the ancient Greek oral-derived tradition. The Homeric epics are for us fixed texts, but as the cumulative research of Milman Parry in the first third of the twentieth century made clear, the texts of the Iliad and the Odyssey manifest the hallmarks of an oral epic tradition, and so are to be regarded as oral-derived: they are the best evidence we have for traditional epic in early Greece, which, as Parry came to recognise, was not a memorised recital, but a recreation in performance, fresh every time.¹

The most important determining characteristic of Homeric epic is its strict metre of dactylic hexameter, which is best appreciated when the ancient Greek text is heard, rather than read visually. The bards composed their epic in this rolling rhythmic pattern as they went along in performance, but it would have been difficult for them to come up with impromptu phrases that would properly fit the metrical demands, and so traditional poetry is composed of recurrent traditional phrases that were already pre-

¹ Detail, fig. 13b, p. 49.
existing within the tradition: the bards needed
to have a vast repertoire of descriptive phrases
and even whole lines for reference under any
grammatical circumstances to characters,
objects and events. Each of the following
examples of these ‘formulae’ has the same
metrical value and so can slot into the same
position in a Greek hexameter line (stressed
syllables are underlined).

ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν ᾿Αγαμέμνων
(Agamemnon, lord of men)

ὑφ’ ῞Εκτορος ἀνδροφόνοιο
(by Hektor the man-slayer)

θεὰ γλαυκῶπις ᾿Αθήνη·
(the goddess, shining-eyed Athena)

Those examples apply to people but formulae
for objects work in a similar way and tend to
stress the most significant quality of the item:
mule-carts are usually well-wheeled or well-
polished, houses are well-constructed, ships are
swift or well-benched.

There are also situational formulae:
recurrent situations, such as someone
responding to another character’s speech,
can utilise a full-line formula where only the
names are variable. The name phrase may be
placed in the middle of the line but most often
will occur at the end of the line, as in these
two examples:

τὴν δ’ ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς· (Od. 1.63)
(To her in answer spoke cloud-gathering Zeus).

τὴν δ’ ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη ξανθὸς Μενέλαος· (Od. 4.147)
(To her in answer spoke fair-haired Menelaos).

τὸν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα· (Od. 4.593)
(To him then perceptive Telemachos answering spoke).

τὸν δ’ αὖ Νεστορίδης Πεισίστρατος ἀντίον ηὔδα· (Od. 4.155)
(To him then Nestor’s son Peisistratos answering spoke).

The name-phrase changes but the line remains
otherwise the same. These situational formulae
serve in a small way to signal what is to follow:
obviously here they introduce an answering
response; additional, less self-evident signals
would further be picked up by a listener
steeped in the tradition, as an important means
of marking the narrative structuring.

There is a lot more complexity to how these
metrical formulae are fitted together in the
narrative, but this overview should serve to
provide a general idea of how a traditional bard
is able to compose his epic in performance
drawing on his repertoire of pre-existing
phrases. The significance of these phenomena
for production was recognised in the landmark
studies of the early to mid twentieth century,2
but it is only more recently that scholars have
started to try to recreate the audience’s reception
process in an oral traditional societal context.
In particular consequence of the signal work
of the late John Miles Foley, it is now widely
recognised that these formulaic phrases are
much more integral to the reception of epic
narrative than was initially perceived.3 They
are not ornamental epithets, as used to be
assumed: a name-phrase such as πόδας ὠκὺς
᾿Αχιλλεύς (Achilleus swift of foot) goes beyond
mere ornament and encodes a cumulative
reference to Achilleus’ essential persona, which
is thus additionally affirmed every time a
listener hears the phrase in a context. Over
time, given a hearer’s increasing experience of
the numerous contexts in which the phrase
has been heard, it acquires for the individual
hearer’s reception process a resonance that
draws into each specific context a fleeting
echoic awareness of all the other contexts
in which it has been encountered, so that
the figure’s entire persona is
immanent in the reference.4

It is important to recognise
that these formulae are used
extra-contextually — Achilleus
can be described as swift of foot
even when he has been sitting
down for a while (for instance
at Iliad 9.193–96, and on through
Book 9).

In addition, the Homeric
bard has a further repertoire of set piece
situations—type-scenes—that can be utilised in
many different contexts: for instance, a warrior
naturally puts on his armour before battle, and
he follows a logical order: first the greaves, then
the breastplate and sword belt, followed by the
shield, helmet and spear. This can be narrated
in a minimalist way in the basic model, as
for the arming of Paris in *Iliad* 3, 330–38 (the italicised portions are the recurrent standard features, repeated more or less exactly in other arming passages in which, however, descriptive elaborations of the various items are likely to be interspersed):

*The greaves first he set around his shins,*
*fine ones, fitted with silver at the ankles.*

*Next he put on the corselet around his chest,*
*the one of his brother Lykaon: it fitted him too.*

*Over his shoulders he slung his sword, studded with silver,*
*a bronze one, and then his shield, both broad and strong.*

*On his sturdy head he set his well-made helm,*
*crested with horsehair; and formidably the crest tossed from aloft.*

*He took up his stout spear, which fitted the grip of his hand.*

This basic account can be elaborated to a considerable length by describing each item and telling its history.5 The basic pattern is a more or less fixed narrative sequence: any divergence is likely to be highly significant, and to be picked up as such by the hearers experienced in the tradition. It is noteworthy in a battle-poem such as the *Iliad* that there are in fact only four occurrences of these extended arming sequences throughout all twenty-four books of the poem. In each case, they signify that an important warrior is about to enter a battle in which he will experience something momentous: in Book 3, Paris will duel with Menelaos; in Book 11 it will be the first major battle-engagement of great Agamemnon in the *Iliad*; in Book 16 Patroklos is preparing to go to his death in battle; and in Book 19 Achilles is setting aside his quarrel with Agamemnon in order to re-enter the fight and avenge Patroklos’ death, whereupon he will encounter and kill Hektor.

It is clear, then, that any traditionally formulated and recurrent situation has the capacity, strengthened over time, to signal something about the on-going shaping of the story as it continues to unfold. This can be quite a complex effect: Foley analysed the occurrences of the feast sequence in the *Odyssey*, for instance, finding it to be a particularly resonant signal. As he describes the phenomenon, the Homeric feast ‘betokens a ritualistic event leading from an obvious and pre-existing problem to an effort at mediation of that problem.’6 As soon as people are described as taking their seats for a feast, the expectation is created of an incipient and important change of direction in the story-line, such as the resolution of a point of conflict.

My own work over the past few decades has followed my initial recognition that Attic black-figure vase-painting of the sixth century BC exhibits many of the features that characterise the Homeric epics as oral-traditional in nature, given, of course, that they work not verbally but visually. In traditional oral epic the story relentlessly unfolds in real time in performance with no opportunity for individual differences in speed of response. A painted scene by contrast lacks the linear narrative story-line of epic poetry: instead it presents a visual object that can be studied and interpreted at length and at will. Nevertheless, as will be explained, the overall approach of the painter to expressing narrative meaning in his scene is indisputably part of the same tradition-determined culture as the Homeric poems. It is important, though, at this point to stress that this is not in any way to suggest that the vase-painters were setting out to illustrate Homeric narrative passages, text in hand as it were. Seldom in fact can we positively identify a vase scene as corresponding indubitably to a given passage from the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Painters and their contemporaries knew the stories as part of their folk tradition, and drew upon them primarily from that source, although doubtless an occasional bardic performance might have caught their attention with a particularly vividly recounted episode.

My interest here lies not in discussing the subject-matter of the paintings per se, but rather in analysing the means by which the painters evoked their narrative contexts. As will be shown, their techniques are strikingly similar to those of the epic bard: one can recognise systems that *mutatis mutandis* were parallel in their visual expression to the verbal structures and strategies of oral-traditional epic. Painters used visual formulae of various kinds as a natural way of representing common figures and narrative situations, and in the visual reception just as in the verbal, the use of recurrent patterns has a profound effect
that is difficult to appreciate from outside the tradition. While the standard meaning of a recurrent visual pattern is not hard to recognise, added signification often results from the elaboration of an element to draw attention to its importance, or from the omission of an element that the tradition has led one to expect.

Many of the vase scenes at the height of the Athenian black-figure painting tradition (from around 570 BC on) are constructed in a manner that demands a certain level of analytical engagement on the part of the viewer. The most compelling evidence is that in vase depictions time is often treated in a non-linear fashion that to us can seem disjointed. Scenes may incorporate elements or even events from different points in the narrative that will evoke the whole story, pointing, for instance, to a cause-and-effect relationship between episodes.⁷

By way of example, in a scene on an amphora by Lydos (figs 1a and b),⁸ the painter has combined several different episodes from the story of the sack of Troy. On the left is the Recovery of Helen as she works her wiles on Menelaos so that he will not kill her with the sword he holds. In the centre, Priam sits as a suppliant on Zeus’ altar, but will be killed regardless by Neoptolemos, and where one would expect a sword in the latter’s hand, he holds the young son of long-dead Hektor by the ankle, little Astyanax, whom Neoptolemos hurled to his death from the walls of Troy: these two separate episodes are conjoined into a single image that evokes both. The scene is closed on the right by a couple of Trojan women pleading for mercy, while a dead Trojan sprawls in the background behind Priam’s altar. It is a complex composition, and one that is nonsensical if interpreted as a ‘snapshot’—would Neoptolemos be about to batter Priam to death with his grandson’s corpse? A scene of this kind cannot be taken in at a glance: its juxtaposition of selected parts of the story into a single scene needs to be considered analytically. Why are these events brought together? The conflated death of a king and his grandson: is this to capture the widespread slaughter of young and old alike in the Greeks’ root-and-branch destruction of Troy once the city fell? What of the inclusion of the King of Sparta and his bride? Helen’s triumphant re-instatement as Menelaos’ wife and queen is in stark contrast to the futile pathos of the pleading women of Troy on the right. Scenes such as this can be seen to comprise a collection of narrative elements from different temporal points in the story, each with its own cluster of associations, brought together and artfully arranged into the semblance of a tableau that would seem to reflect a particular moment in the story of the fall of Troy, but often one finds that contemplative analysis of such an assemblage of images leads to much deeper perceptions about the event to which they refer. Here for instance, one might respond to the contrast between victor and vanquished, and within that to the differentiated fates of the women of conquered and conqueror, as well as the contrastive parallels between diverse killings. Thus each element evokes its own narrative episode, and all interact to

▲ Fig 1a. (top) Attic black-figure amphora Type B, attributed to Lydos, c. 550–540 BC, Berlin Antikensammlung F1685 (BAPD 310170). IMAGE: © BPK/ANTIKENSAMMLUNG, SMB/PHOTOGRAPHER INGRID GESKE, IMAGE NUMBER 00041616

▲ Fig 1b. (bottom) Attic black-figure amphora Type B, attributed to Lydos, c. 550–540 BC, Berlin Antikensammlung F1685 (BAPD 310170). IMAGE DRAWING AFTER EDUARD GERHARD, ETRUSKISCHE UND KAMPANISCHE VASENBILDER DES KÖNIGLICHEN MUSEUMS ZU BERLIN (BERLIN: G. REIMER, 1843), PL. XXI.
propose to the viewer a variety of cognitive responses that encompass the entirety of the extended narrative. It is significant that whereas in an oral or written textual narrative episodes must be encountered one at a time in linear presentation, visually they can be presented simultaneously, with the logic of their juxtaposition left indeterminate, unexpressed, for viewers to construct their own meaning.

While the constraints of metre—the fixed hexameter of Homeric epic—can be seen as the determining factor in the epic formulae, in the black-figure vase tradition it is the painting technique itself that imposes formative constraints on the painter. This involves the representation of figures as solid black silhouettes on the orange clay ground, within which details such as facial features, musculature and drapery folds can be incised with a sharp point, and over which a very limited palette of additional colouring—white, and a purplish red colour—can be added as highlights. These are the only two applied colours to withstand the firing process, and at this time, all painted decoration was applied before firing, relying on chemical reactions in the kiln to produce the characteristic red and black of Attic painted pottery. A further technical constraint is that in black-figure depictions the head and legs of a figure were generally rendered in profile, while the chest is regularly frontal: there is quite often even a blurring of the distinction between back and front, as can be seen in a depiction on a Panathenaic prize-amphora of the goddess Athena (shield on her left arm, spear wielded in her right hand, and snake-fringed aegis worn like a poncho) (fig. 2). Although in Homeric epic, the aegis belongs to Zeus (Iliad 17.593), vase-painters present it as a regular iconographic marker unique to Athena: this is just one example showing that the vase-painters were not simply imitating the specifically Homeric figures and situations, but rather responding to their own traditional patterns of narrative representation.

So, wherein lie these parallels between the painted and the poetic traditions? The most obvious instance is iconography, which in its use and effect corresponds closely to the formulaic phrases of traditional epic. Like the verbal Homeric nominal-epithet formulae, iconographic elements constitute a system of visual attributes that serve at their most fundamental level to identify important figures. So, for instance, Athena in fig. 2 is marked as female by the white over-painting of her flesh (the standard gender distinction in black-figure), and she wears a long garment unsuitable for battle (contrast Amazons who wear short tunics), but she is equipped with a warrior’s shield and spear, and a helmet, albeit of a special shape that reveals her face.

A scene on a hydria of Herakles tussling with Apollo over who should own the Delphic tripod exemplifies a range of traditional iconographic attributes (fig. 3). In the middle are Apollo, with a quiver hanging at his hip, and Herakles, immediately identifiable by his lion skin and his knotty club held aloft. On the far left, gesticulating in support of her brother, is Artemis, identifiable by her polos hat and bow, while Athena stands on the far right supporting Herakles: she wears her snake-fringed aegis and open-face helmet. Thus, it is relatively easy for a vase-painter to construct a figure of Herakles, Athena or others by including these traditionally sanctioned attributes, and even though in this case the painter has inscribed the names of all the figures in his scene, it is not essential, as the identities are unmistakable from their attributes.
As with the formulaic phrases of epic, these visual attributes do much more than merely identifying a figure in a scene: for one thing, figures are commonly over-determined (that is, there are frequently more iconographic elements than would be needed for mere recognition, not to mention inscribed names). It can be argued that each of the attributes has its own additional associations that reinforce the essentials of the character’s identity. In fig. 3, in the case of Herakles’ lion-skin, there is direct reference to the Nemean Lion and Herakles’ feat of first strangling it and then adopting as his armour its impenetrable hide, and so his heroic stature is visually affirmed and enhanced. It is noteworthy that like Homeric formulae, iconography is extra-contextual, in that it is depicted even in situations where it would be inappropriate in real terms. For instance, a number of depictions of Herakles by different vase-painters represent him in a peaceful context, performing before other deities on the kithara as if in a concert. One such example is on a neck-amphora in London (fig. 4), where he plays the instrument (wearing lion skin and with bow, quiver and sword-scabbard slung about his person) framed by a three-strong audience of deities: Poseidon (trident) sits facing Herakles, while Athena (helmet, aegis, shield and spear) and Ares (helmet and two spears) stand to either side. The various arms and armour are indubitably extra-contextual in such a scene. The continual repetition of Herakles’ attribute-clusters in his innumerable depictions acquires a resonance that, as with the Homeric formulaic descriptions, will evoke in the viewer an awareness of the many other vase-scenes, the many other heroic situations, in which similarly marked renderings of the hero have already been encountered: this awareness transcends any particular context to encapsulate the entirety of Herakles’ heroic persona.

Figure-stance is also an important signifier, although more generalised than iconography. The most obvious is Panathenaic Athena (for instance in fig. 2). On the large amphorae of special shape that were filled with olive oil and given as prizes in the annual Panathenaic Games in honour of Athena, the goddess was always represented on one side as Athena Promachos ('in the forefront of battle’) in a characteristic striding stance in aegis and helmet, brandishing her spear aloft and holding her shield before her: it is a warrior pose, signifying her protective function before the battle-line. She is depicted thus on the example in fig. 2 from around 530 BC (in contrast to her quieter stance on the hydria in fig. 3), and this warlike representation persisted on the prize amphorae from the earliest (c. 565 BC) through to the fourth century BC.13
On a larger scale, corresponding to the Homeric type-scenes such as the arming sequence or the feast, vase-painters utilised recurrent compositional patterns in the arrangement and combination of figures. In the painters’ production processes, these are a natural development from painting repetitive subjects within a traditionally normative context. In the reception process, through the recurrence, the patterns accumulate additional associations that can resonate and interact at quite a deep level of consciousness.

One of the most immediately recognisable scene-types is the fight between two warriors. We can easily trace how a very simple formulation of a commonplace narrative event was variously developed and adapted, and adapted again, within the continuing tradition, even while the simple form continued. This is not a chronological development from simple to complex, but a choice made by the painter: the simple form continued in use throughout, alongside the more complex versions.

As with the arming sequence in Homer, there is a very basic form of fight scene, as for example on an amphora of around 520 BC (fig. 5): its characteristics are the warriors’ striding stance of attack (compare Athena Promachos in fig. 2), the spears aimed reciprocally in visual symmetry, and the shields in the middle, one showing its inner surface with arm grip, the other its bicoloured outer face. This schema can be elaborated in various ways, with more detail for the two participants, more figures included, or even with a specifically identified conflict being superimposed, but the primary impact is still two figures engaged in an evenly balanced encounter. Sometimes framing figures are added, as in a scene from an amphora in Canberra (fig. 6), which also includes the common optional addition of a corpse as the objective of the fight: the slayer wants his victim’s panoply as a trophy, which the friends of the deceased want to deny him.15

Moving beyond the mere formulation of a scene-type, we can examine the application of this same pattern to specific (and uniquely identifiable) stories: for instance, on an amphora of around 540 BC by a painter within Group E (fig. 7) the opponents are Herakles and the triple-bodied Geryon, and in this context the elaboration of the scene-type gains additional signification from Herakles’
iconographic presentation—the shaggy-looking, club-bearing hero against the formally armed, hoplite-type warriors—and Herakles on his own faces a tripled opponent, having already defeated the herdsman Eurytion, collapsing at his feet, as the giant’s first line of defence. Then again, on an amphora in London (fig. 8), the central figure of Zeus is added, intervening in the fight between Herakles and Kyknos (respectively supported by Athena and Ares).

And now we come to examine how the adoption or adaptation of an established traditional scene-type could contribute significantly to the meaning in the depiction of a specific narrative episode. The effect becomes evident when an earlier depiction of a mythological event is compared with a later one in the black-figure tradition: around 570 BC, the C Painter painted a scene in the interior medallion of a cup, depicting the Rape of Kassandra, when Lokrian Aias dragged Kassandra away from the statue of Athena where she had tried to seek sanctuary in the Sack of Troy (fig. 9). In ancient Greek belief, someone sitting on an altar (like Priam in fig. 1), or clasping a deity’s statue as Kassandra does, was sacrosanct, under the protection of the god appealed to. For an assailant to continue his assault regardless was to show contempt for the god’s power and potentially to arouse that deity’s anger—a dangerous venture. The C Painter’s version of the Rape is from relatively early in the tradition (c. 570 BC), and emphasises Athena as a stiff statue with rigid vertical stance, while Aias grasps the arm of the crouching Kassandra. This representation illustrates the central action of the event, incorporating no interpretative signals other than the vulnerability of Kassandra, who is depicted as small and naked: the absence of clothing is made clear by the expanse of her white-overlaid flesh. A commentary of sorts is however offered by the two lotus-flowers, likely indicators of sexually attractive beauty, and the siren behind Athena, a common motif of potential death.
After the mid-century, painters changed the scene-formulation, regularly recasting the Rape in the form of the fight pattern, as is exemplified in a scene from an amphora by a painter within Group E (fig. 10). Aias is presented as a fighter engaging directly with Athena as though with an opponent on the battlefield. The fixed traditional components of the fight scene-type are clear: mirror-image stances of warrior and goddess as each seems to be attacking the other, so that Kassandra, no longer Aias’ direct objective, is positioned between the two ‘combatants’ like the corpse between confronted warriors, as the motivation for conflict (see fig. 6). The impious contempt with which Aias disregards Kassandra’s appeal for protection at Athena’s statue is now formulated in terms of a mortal warrior challenging an Olympian deity, an act of supreme hubris that will result in retribution. This cause-and-effect connection had in fact been established much earlier in the narrative of the now-lost cyclical epic, the Ilioupersis, as Proclus’ summary of the plot makes clear. It seems that the effectiveness of reformulating the Rape as a battle-confrontation was soon recognised, for the new composition became accepted and assimilated into the tradition as the regular pattern for depicting the narrative.

This kind of application of a standard formulation to a new context leads inevitably to the issue of innovation, and the question first of whether an inventive and original-minded painter could readily introduce innovations that would be accessible to his contemporaries, and then, if so, how this might be accomplished. In answer, examples can be sought from among the works of the best and most skilful of black-figure painters, Exekias, to see how he manipulated the traditional response patterns to enrich his scenes with extra layers of signification: in many of his scenes he encoded a depth of interpretative potential that is in its own way the equivalent of the exploitation of traditional mechanisms in the Homeric poems.

First one must appreciate just how repetitive the pictorial tradition could be. This can be illustrated by comparison of two vases by different hands within Group E, produced around 540 BC (figs 11 and 12). These two scenes are markedly similar in depicting Herakles stabbing the Nemean Lion with his sword (in contradiction of the version in which its invulnerable hide obliged him to strangle it!), and there are many more renditions of this narrative by Group E and other painters that follow the same compositional pattern, with few minor alterations of details. The overall impact of all the scenes is the same:
the similarities are obvious, the divergences incidental. The identities of the two framing figures are not explicit, and a suggestion that they may have been intended for Athena and Iolaos is possible only because of a scene by Exekias where his framing figures are both named by inscription, and Athena is iconographically marked.

The master-craftsman Exekias produced an innovative response to this recurrent scene-pattern on a neck-amphora in Berlin (fig. 13a), where he reverses the frame arrangement. Athena, resplendent in her armour, now dominates the right, with a tense Iolaos on the left, both identified by inscription. The lion has been turned to face Herakles, its hind leg in the same raking stance but flipped horizontally, which has the effect of presenting hero and monster as opponents (like a pair of confronted warriors in the fight pattern), rather than just evoking Herakles’ despatch of the creature. It is noteworthy that Herakles here holds no weapon: he is indeed striving to strangle the beast. This is still essentially the old composition, but these changes present a lot more impact and potential for interpretative response to the additional layers of interpretation.

Each pictorial element makes a contribution, and all interact. Athena’s warrior attributes of helmet and shield contrast with the raw strength of the unarmed Herakles’ strangle-hold on the monster lion. Her stance is not that of Athena Promachos, striding forth into battle; here, with her shield held before her, she fends off the lion, as it backs away from its assailant, and she thus forms a kind of back-stop. Her stance makes her look immovable, and so the lion is bailed up between the hero and the ‘hard place’: Gerhard’s rendition in fig. 13b of the original added white for Athena’s flesh restores the original emphasis on her figure at the right margin of the scene, which gives point to the perception of movement across the picture-field to the right. The tension of the moment is palpable: the stance of Iolaos on the left imitates that of Herakles, as though he is empathetically copying Herakles’ battle. While innovative within the tradition, however, Exekias’ Herakles scene in Berlin achieves its effect primarily by reversing the figure arrangement, both creating and capitalising on the sense of direction from the viewer’s left to right.

A far more complex manipulation of traditional elements to convey new content is exemplified by Exekias’ splendid amphora in the Vatican with its obverse scene of Achilles and Aias gaming (figs 14a and b). It is a visually impressive composition with its huge
seated figures, and it has provoked arguably more scholarly interpretations than any other single black-figure scene. It is instructive, therefore, to examine the range of traditional elements and their associations that combine to create the masterpiece.

Many have sought to analyse how the visual impact of this most famous scene is achieved. First of all, on a vase that is already very large (61cm in height) there is the sheer size of the figures, which, seated, occupy the full height of the scene—as is often noted, if they stood up, their heads would break through the ceiling of the frieze above (like Pheidias’ seated Zeus in the temple at Olympia). The unity of form between painting and vase shape is also frequently discussed, but here there is need for caution, because at least some of the unifying alignments can be appreciated from only one viewpoint, directly in front of the middle of the scene, and while they are immediately apparent in most photographs, viewers’ actual visual relationships with a real object in space are complex and constantly changing as the viewers move. Much of the impact of the scene, from whatever angle it may be viewed, derives from the clarity of the silhouette-forms, combined with the intricacy of the incised details, which catch and engage the eye of the beholder. There is the marked symmetry of forms, and the breaks in that symmetry that signal winner and loser: the differentiation is affirmed by the numbers inscribed between Achilles and Ajax, τέσσαρα and τρία (‘four’ and ‘three’), taken to be the respective heroes’ scores. Surely, one feels, there must have been a powerful story being evoked here, but we know of none from any of the extant literary sources, and although many scholars have sought to hypothesise one, the proposals have tended to be unpersuasive, albeit inventive and engaging.

It was only when I began seriously to explore the potential in the visual tradition of black-figure for the creative use of the basic schemata that I realised there is indeed more to be understood about how the scene achieves its effect within its traditional reception context. The basic form of the scene is the pattern of the fight between equally matched opponents (compare fig. 5). The clear articulation of the opponents makes the scene’s traditional underpinnings unmistakable, while their intricate, elaborative detail entices the viewer to study the scene more closely, and to consider its implications. Although the figures are seated, their legs are separated and this stance is evocative of the attacking stride of a duel. The box supporting the gaming board is positioned on the ground between them, in the place occupied by the corpse in so many fight scenes (compare fig. 6): just as the body of the fallen warrior is the focus of the conflict, so, in parallel, the box with its game is assuredly the centre-point of this mock engagement.

Based on this recognition the effect can be more deeply explored: it is indeed a conflict-scene, but between warriors on the same side—this is why their identities are important, and why, therefore, Exekias inscribed their names. They are friends, not enemies, but perhaps rivals, the best and the second-best of the Achaian warriors at Troy. Playing a board
Playing a board game should be a peaceful occupation—why do they need to be armed?
new applications of existing formulations are invented, which are then absorbed into the tradition in turn as formulations in their own right, increasingly emptied of their new meaning as they become more and more familiar through repetition.

It is my hope that this presentation will have offered a measure of insight into what can be gained by undertaking this kind of analysis. Looking at archaic vase-paintings in light of the advancing understanding of traditional meaning-production in early Greek oral-traditional epic (as reflected in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) can open our eyes to new categories of interpretation within the visual tradition of vase-painting. Conversely, I believe that returning to Homer with ears informed by visual analysis can provide additional insights into the subtleties of oral traditional epic, but that is another story, for another occasion.

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Abbreviations

1. BAPD: Beazley Archive Pottery Database: http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/pottery/default.htm

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Anne Mackay developed a special passion for Athenian vase-painting studying Classics at the University of Canterbury, nurtured by the James Logie Memorial Collection curated by Marion K. Steven. Her PhD (Victoria University of Wellington) explored the chronological development of the 6th century BC Athenian potter and painter Exekias, and this, after some 20 years of further work culminated in a monograph entitled *Tradition and Originality. A Study of Exekias* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010). Her comparative analysis of the separate but largely parallel narrative traditions of archaic Greek vase-painting and early Greek oral epic (the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), resulted in a number of articles over the past decades, and having organised two orality conferences in Durban 1996 and Auckland 2006 she edited both sets of proceedings (Leiden: Brill, 1999 and 2008).

First employed as a Junior Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington, she subsequently moved to the (then) University of Natal in Durban, South Africa as Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer and finally Professor of Classics. From 2001 she was Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Auckland (retired 2018). She has served as Chairperson of the Classical Association of South Africa and as President of the Australasian Society for Classical Studies.

1. Although already in his 1928 writings on Homeric epic Parry had seen the significance of tradition in the texts, his recognition of the oral-traditional substructure underlying the texts was fully confirmed by his fieldwork in Yugoslavia (1933–1935) recording and analysing the living South Slavic oral epic tradition, in which he saw direct parallels to Homeric practice. These essential stages in the development of oral theory are described by J. M. Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), chs. I and II.
4. The concept is drawn from Foley’s work on oral-traditional epic and is explored at length in Foley, *Immanent Art*.
5. Compare, for instance, the arming of Agamemnon narrated in Iliad 11.17–44, which expands Paris’s nine lines into twenty-eight.

6. Foley Homer’s Traditional Art, p. 174 (Foley’s italics).


11. The flesh of Artemis and Athena appears dark because the added white has, as often, worn off.

12. Attic black-figure neck-amphora, the name vase of the Painter of London B228 (a painter within the Leagros Group), c. 510–500 BC, London B228 (=1843.1103.23; BAPD 302117).

13. Although over time some of the details changed (for instance, Athena was later turned to face the other way), her stance and attributes remained constant.


15. Attic black-figure amphora Type B (reverse) by a painter in Group E, c. 540 BC, 'The Johnson Vase', Canberra, Classics Museum, Australian National University 84.02 (BAPD 8244). The scene on the reverse of the vase is illustrated in fig. 6. Fig. 12: Attic black-figure amphora Type B by a painter in Group E, c. 540 BC, New York 56.171.11 (BAPD 301036). The reverse is illustrated in fig. 7.


17. Although over time some of the details changed (for instance, Athena was later turned to face the other way), her stance and attributes remained constant.

18. Attic black-figure ‘Siana’ cup attributed to the C Painter, c. 570 BC, London B379 (= 1885,1213.11; BAPD 300525).

19. Attic black-figure amphora Type A, Berlin F1698 (BAPD 310314). The drawing (after Gerhard, 1843– pl. XXII) makes clear some details that are not easy to discern in photographs as the vase in poor condition.


21. Fig. 11: Attic black-figure amphora Type B (obverse) by a painter in Group E, c. 540 BC, ‘The Johnson Vase’, Canberra, Classics Museum, Australian National University 84.02 (BAPD 8244). The scene on the reverse of the vase is illustrated in fig. 6. Fig. 12: Attic black-figure amphora Type B by a painter in Group E, c. 540 BC, New York 56.171.11 (BAPD 301036). The reverse is illustrated in fig. 7.

22. Fig. 13a: Attic black-figure neck-amphora signed by Exekias, c. 540 BC, Berlin F1720 (BAPD 301036). Fig. 13b: drawing of the scene, after Gerhard 1843 pl. XII.

23. Attic black-figure amphora Type A, Vatican 344 (=16757; BAPD 310395). Fig. 14a, Photo after Albizziati, C. (1922–1942). Vasi antichi dipinti del Vaticano, 7 fascicles (Rome: Sansaini, 1922–42), fasc. 5, pl. 41. Fig. 14b, drawing after Adolf Furtwängler and Karl Reichhold, Griechische Vasenmalerei Vol. 3. (Munich: Bruckmann, 1932), pl. 131.

24. Some of the major discussions are noted in E.A. Mackay, Tradition and Originality: A Study of Exekias, BAR International Series 2092 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), ch. 32.

25. The phenomenon is commonly described as synoptic. For references see n. 7 above.


27. This in turn is a more specific version of the scene type of a figure intervening in a quarrel between unnamed warriors: for instance, on a cup by Lydos of around 550 BC, Taranto 20137 (BAPD 301211) <www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/1DC59388-F17C-4BB3-84E-OFoFoEq1tqetz>, or a later amphora by the Painter of Munich 1410: Munich 1411 (BAPD 301954) <www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/2E6EFl9C-0C6C-4DA4-807A-36CE7784DE7D>.
IN 2014, IN THE MIDST of the rise of ISIS, *The Australian* published a frontpage headline that read ‘We’ll fight Islam [for] 100 years’. In November 2018 the same newspaper, in response to a domestic terror attack in Melbourne, published on its front page the headline ‘Violent Islam Strikes Again’. This sense of ongoing conflict with Islam seems perpetual. Islam, to some, represents values, traditions and visions that are at odds with those of the rest of the world.

The Bourke Street attack also produced divisive rhetoric from some Australian politicians, blaming Muslim communities for not doing enough. The rhetoric gave the impression that there is an expectation that Muslims, wherever and whoever, must be held accountable for the conduct of every one of their coreligionists. These are but some recent and local examples of a wider trend of analysts, politicians and even academics invoking the ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis to demonstrate how Islam is incompatible with the modern world.

The thesis was initially developed by Bernard Lewis, a British-American historian based at Princeton University. Lewis died in May 2018 but left a legacy that continues to shape perceptions of the Muslim world. These are but some recent and local examples of a wider trend of analysts, politicians and even academics invoking the ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis to demonstrate how Islam is incompatible with the modern world.

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It should by now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement in Islam far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilisations.¹

Samuel Huntington developed this idea further, asserting the propensity within Islam for violence. He offered policy advice that recommended limiting the influence of Islam by tightening immigration and curbing minority rights. Huntington vehemently denounced multiculturalism, arguing that it diluted the basic foundations of America. Maintaining Western military superiority over other civilisations, especially Islam, was crucial.²

Following September 11, Huntington’s thesis became more relevant than ever. While some saw the event as proof of the thesis’ correctness, others with a more nuanced view argued that he had done no more than put forward a self-fulfilling prophecy: US policymakers who adhered to his advice had created an interventionist American foreign policy, which in turn had galvanised anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world and empowered radical elements in Muslim societies.³

The rise of ISIS revived the debate about the thesis. It was not hard for ISIS to excite anger. From the Paris and Orlando terrorist attacks, to the enslavement of Yazidi women under the guise of Islam, to the broadcasted beheadings of prisoners, ISIS provoked renewed international debate over Islam and
its ‘shortcomings’. Everything about Islam became scrutinised, and perhaps even more so than in the wake of September 11.

Some, in search for a way to understand the brutality of ISIS, nominate the ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis as an explanation. This thesis would hold that Islam in general is incompatible with Western values, and that ISIS simply adheres to authentic Islam. Those who articulate a different version of Islam are simply downplaying the fundamentally violent and regressive nature of the religion. In 2016 the *Australian Financial Review* was moved for reasons unknown to turn to a former head of the Business Council of Australia for expert theological commentary. Graham Bradley AM in a column for the newspaper criticised Noam Chomsky for rejecting Huntington’s thesis. In Bradley’s words:

“He [referring to Chomsky] and many other critics have been remarkably silent on the atrocities committed by Islamist terrorist groups around the world over the past few years. They too should now reflect on whether Huntington was more right than wrong. And policymakers would do well to revisit Huntington’s foresightful essay.”

Peculiarly, the ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis is celebrated equally by extremist Muslims. To them the thesis correctly encapsulates their claims that Islam—their version of it, of course—is incompatible with Western values that they consider to be corrupt.

**Definitions and Interpretations**

The ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis provokes obvious definitional questions: what are Western values and what is Western civilisation?

There are obviously many interpretations of what Western civilisation represents. The ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis is simplistic and reductionist. It ignores the nuances within various societies, cultures and nations and instead treats the notion of ‘Western civilisation’ as self-explanatory. The proponents of the preservation of Western civilisation often have an elusive conception of what exactly it is that they are trying to protect.

It can be argued that if Western civilisation refers to its religious mores and customs, it must include the Middle Eastern traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Christian tradition was shaped in part by Christian scholars in the Middle East who were based in Syrian monasteries, Egyptian Coptic churches and Turkey. Alternatively, if Western civilisation identifies with the achievements of the Roman Empire, the Middle East cannot be excluded as much of the Middle East was part of the Empire. Other proponents of Western civilisation articulate that it is founded upon the achievements of Western Europe. If this is the case, what about the Muslim and Jewish contributions in Spain, in terms of knowledge and scientific development? Just as there is no single interpretation of Islam, there is no one version of Western civilisation or even uniform ‘Western values’. Western societies continue to debate socio-political issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion and even secularism. The French notion of secularism differs radically from the American version.

The proponents of the ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis then look at Islam, however defined, as incompatible with the West, however defined. The most extreme elements are taken as representative of the Islamic faith. The vibrant theological and political debates within Islam are ignored. Islam is heavily contested within Muslim societies as lay intellectuals, religious scholars, modernist clerics, secular activists, political Islamists and other actors lay their different claims over Islam. These debates within Islam precede the modern world and continue to colour interactions between Muslims.

**Cultures, Traditions and Values**

Lewis, Huntington and others like them are critical of ‘Islamic culture and values’. But what is Islamic culture? There are between 1.5 and 1.7 billion Muslims who share different cultures and traditions. Islam in practice differs from one place to another. The thesis not only ignores diversity at any point in time; it treats culture and tradition as static and incapable of changing. Western societies have
clearly changed over time. Western values and culture, whatever they are, are subject to modification and reconstruction. So is Islam. Cultures, values and interpretations of doctrines have evolved. Traditions are modified and constructed. Some are positively developed while others take a regressive turn. This is illustrated in a non-Islamic context in the famous book *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, which examines how societies re-invent traditions for various purposes. Hugh Trevor-Roper’s chapter in the book discusses the Highland tradition of Scotland as a modern construct developed to assert identity in the context of the union with England. The kilt was long regarded by the large majority of Scotsmen, in his words, ‘as a sign of barbarism: the badge of roguish, predatory, blackmailing Highlanders who were more of a nuisance than a threat to civilised historic Scotland’. Yet today, the kilt and the bagpipe represent a distinctive national identity.

In Muslim societies, Jihadi groups like ISIS similarly radicalise and reinvent religious traditions. The fingered salute which symbolises the oneness of God, used by Muslims in prayers, has been defiled. ISIS militants posed with decapitated heads on one hand and display the fingered salute with the other. For ISIS to appear legitimate, Islamic symbols and practices have been used to provide some sense of continuity, giving an impression, to the naked eye, that they are adhering to religious traditions.

Traditions are also positively reinvented to bring social and political reforms in Muslim societies. Existing interpretations of Islam are challenged by reformist Muslims. Reform efforts in Muslim societies encompass gender equality, rights of minority groups, and liberalisation of Islam. These reform efforts take place within the framework of Islam. Muslims speak of reform without rejecting the essence of Islam, especially the spiritual comfort it offers.

**SUPERIORITY AND RIGIDITY OF CATEGORISATION**

The ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis is intended to demonstrate a collective superiority of Western civilisation over others. It also appears to warn those belonging to Western civilisation of the hostility directed towards them by other civilisations, especially Islamic civilisation. Huntington did not shy away from making these claims. But claims of superiority are an indication of a lack of understanding of others. This in turn contributes to othering, demonisation and dehumanisation of the ‘inferior and violent’ other.

In this so-called state of perpetual hostility, the proponents of the thesis argue that multiculturalism cannot succeed as migration brings together people of diverse, and incompatible, backgrounds. They reinforce the belief that people of different religious and cultural backgrounds cannot co-exist.

How, then, do we de-construct the ‘Clash of Civilisations’?

Edward Said examines different civilisations not as rigid categories. According to him, civilisations interact, making the watertight compartmentalisation of civilisations inaccurate. Differences should be viewed as a strength not a threat. Therefore, civilisations are hybrids. Different civilisations learn and absorb from each other as the world is interconnected through networks of human capital. Islam’s Abbassid dynasty under caliph Ma’mun revived Hellenic traditions, translating the works of Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle which had been lost and forgotten. The revived works were later transported to Europe. They became crucial for the foundation of Western political thought. Similarly, with the advancements made by Western powers in the nineteenth century, Muslim reformists looked to Europe to revive Islamic glory. In the words of Muhammad Abduh in the nineteenth century: ‘I went to the West, I saw Islam and no Muslims… I came back to the East, I saw Muslims and no Islam’. Abduh argued that the depressing predicament of Muslim societies could be explained by the fact that they had regressed, while the West had embraced Islamic ideals. He looked
to Europe to revive the study of sciences and placed importance upon education and women’s empowerment.

Therefore, as Said articulates, rigid categorisation of civilisations, and the argument that civilisations are incapable of interacting in a positive manner, is not only inaccurate but dangerously dismissive of others.

The ‘watertight compartmentalisation’ creates a ‘separate other’, inferior in achievements, values and sophistication. These arguments strip the humanity from the separate other, portraying them as a nuisance at best and the enemy at worst. These arguments undermine the multiculturalism that is inevitable in modern societies. Those belonging to separate cultures or civilisations are perceived as incapable of integrating. The ‘us and them’ mentality disrupts social harmony as it creates a sense of separation and difference, but more importantly facilitates the process of ‘othering’, leaving communities and individuals who do not belong to the dominant culture or race suffocated by the pressure to prove their loyalty and trustworthiness. The depiction of Muslims in media outlets, especially commercial media outlets in Australia, demonstrates these difficulties facing minority groups.9 These include Australians of Sudanese backgrounds who have been targeted by sensationalised news about African gang violence.

WE ARE STILL HERE AFTER 25 YEARS?
The ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis remains resilient. This is evident in the ongoing discourse of how Western civilisation needs to be preserved. Any effort to reconcile the West and the Muslim world is destined to fail. Only one sophisticated civilisation will survive the test of time. As the former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, put it in his quest to implement the formalised tertiary study of Western civilisation through the Ramsay Centre, the proposed degree was not ‘merely about Western civilisation but in favour of it’.10 This narrative reverberates across various parts of Europe and North America.

There is a degree of fear on the part of certain elements in Western societies. They fear that they are losing their tradition, culture, values and identity, and fear further that the existing political order, especially when of a left or centrist persuasion, has little appreciation for the efforts to preserve the gains made by great Western thinkers, explorers and inventors. They fear that the encroachment of the ‘barbaric other’ will dilute the authenticity of Western ideals.

The thesis is a manifestation of the fear caused by growing global instability, lack of opportunities domestically, and disruption of identities due to growing inequality, movement of people, and the changing nature of the global world. These destabilising conditions create a sense of urgency to preserve what is familiar, including identity, values and tradition. This is despite the fact that ‘what is familiar is often elusive’, and more importantly imagined without grounding in tangible reality. Benedict Anderson argues that the nation is socially constructed, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Those who belong to this imagined political community view themselves as a homogenous entity, and some would even go as far as envisioning a shared destiny because of it. This is despite the fact that they may never meet each other in their lives. Drawing from this aspect of his work, it can be argued that Western civilisation is also imagined and socially constructed. However,
even subconsciously, the imagined sense of belonging exists among members of the so-called civilisation.

Evidence for this can be found in public responses to incidents of violence. The 2015 Paris attacks drew wall-to-wall media coverage and worldwide condemnation, in which world leaders marched together against terrorism. US President Barack Obama called it ‘an attack on all of humanity’. Rupert Murdoch declared that the ‘Paris outrage [is] not an attack on all humanity, but an attack on us. ie, Western civilisation!’

The same attention was not given to the victims of ISIS massacres in Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan, occurring contemporaneously, who remained nameless and faceless. They were just numbers.

**VALIDITY OF THE THESIS**

One question to be asked, if other traditions, cultures and value systems are not inferior, is this: why are some plagued with political backwardness, conflict, and a depressing state of misery in comparison to Western societies? The news emerging from some parts of the Middle East and Muslim societies is confronting. The media can be blamed for sensationalisation of news, but there is also truth in what is being reported.

Perhaps blaming value systems, religions and cultures, which are not monolithic anyway, is misleading. The socio-political circumstances of these societies prevent them from making the advances required for development. These circumstances include economic mismanagement which increases poverty, and a lack of investment in education. Similarly, ongoing conflict and the crippling effects of authoritarianism stunt and paralyse intellectual development. Global inequality paralyses the ability of poorer countries to provide the services required to enhance the living standards of their people.

The treatment of women in some Muslim societies is subject to intense criticism and denunciation and even used as justification for war. Besides destroying Saddam Hussein’s non-existent weapons of mass destruction, George W. Bush articulated the need to ‘liberate’ Iraqi women to justify his invasion of Iraq. Today, Iraqi women are in a worse state than ever. The invasion destroyed state infrastructure, crippled the economy, and created ongoing security threats to women. The necessary understanding of Muslim societies when passing judgement or enacting policies on the part of Western policy makers is lacking and inadequate. Often the wrong questions are asked. The work of Laila Abu-Lughood, titled ‘Do Muslim Women Need Saving?’ illustrates how women are the object of pity among some politicians in the United States who are in truth oblivious to the nature of the challenges facing such women. Abu-Lughood interviewed women from the Middle East and asked them if they felt disempowered or oppressed. These women admitted to ongoing oppression in their communities. They spoke of their grievances. However, when asked whether or not Islam oppresses them, these women were shocked and puzzled. One related that the reason she felt oppressed was because state authorities threatened to destroy her stall if she did not pay protection money. A Palestinian woman blamed the Israeli occupation for her grievances as she feels paralysed by her lack of freedom. Many Muslim women who feel disempowered by their circumstances find comfort in their faith.

This is not to say that some Muslim women are not victimised by cultural practices and regressive interpretations of Islam. Female genital mutilation is often used as an example of how cultural and religious practices in Islam oppress women. The infamous Ayaan Hirsi ‘Ali denounces Islam for a number of reasons but is perhaps best known for her condemnation of FGM in Muslim societies. However, her lack of understanding of the subject of FGM leads to misconceptions. For one, there is no religious justification for the practice in the Qur’an or in the Prophet’s tradition. Second, it is practised in some African countries including among Christian communities. It is not a common practice in Saudi Arabia, even though Saudi Arabia is perhaps one of the most conservative Muslim countries. Many have described FGM as an African problem.
The practice is still widespread in Egypt, where young girls continue to die from the procedure. Although the Grand Mufti of al-Azhar University, which is known as the bastion of Sunni Islam, issued a religious ruling that condemned FGM, arguing that it was contrary to Islam, many, especially in rural areas and low-income neighbourhoods in Egypt, still believe that the practice is a religious obligation. Today, both male and female activists in Egypt travel around the country to educate Egyptians about the dangers of FGM.

The difficulties in trying to end the practice can be attributed to poverty, lack of education and political paralysis. These debilitating circumstances prevent the development required to change the state of societies. They slow down societal changes initiated by local actors including reformists and activists.

Western societies have also gone through processes of gradual transformation and evolution. In 1950s Australia, unwed mothers were ostracised, their children taken from them and institutionalised. Some witnessed horrific abuses. Today, such practices are not only socially frowned-upon, but criminalised.

Even if the ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis is accepted at face value—that Western civilisation is homogeneous, more advanced and more sophisticated, because of the achievements made in scientific discoveries, stable political systems and strong institutions that are devoid of corruption—one question remains. What were the factors that contributed to the successful state of Western democracies today?

Was it civilisational isolation? Or was there a ‘superior’ civilisation imposing its values on Western societies, forcing them to develop? Western societies dealt with their problems without the aggressive intervention of those who are viewed as outside the Western world. Like others, Muslim societies continue to battle their inner demons including dealing with bigotry, inequality and abhorrent practices in the name of religion, culture and the preservation of outdated tradition. However, Muslims also have to deal with external hatred and prejudice. Anti-Muslim rhetoric reduces the capacity of reformists to promote progress as attempts to introduce genuine liberalisation are conflated by their opponents with Western imposition on Muslims. Many Muslims remain traumatised by colonialism and external interventions that have only destabilised their communities.

RETHINKING THE MUSLIM OTHER?

Huntington’s thesis was formulated outside the existing framework of nation states. He examined the collective consciousness of Western ideals predicated upon neo-liberalism, freedom and the notion of equality. There is a need to propagate a collective consciousness in today’s world. It is perhaps important to move away from the state-centric approaches to dealing with problems facing the World. However, Huntington’s way of dividing the world between good and evil, or civilised and backward, does not make the world a better place.

As Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli historian, argues, we are part of the global community. Human beings are dealing with pressing problems that are global in nature. From climate change to refugee crises to international finance, there is a need to find common solutions. Even when dealing with terrorism, it is not a problem for the West alone; it is a problem confronting humanity. In Harari’s words, ‘ISIS may indeed pose a radical challenge, but the “civilisation” it challenges is a global civilisation rather than a uniquely Western phenomenon.’

We are ‘global citizens’; different cultures,
religions, ethnicities are to be celebrated in an environment of respectful engagement. Cosmopolitanism celebrates the ideal of global citizenship. It emphasises that we are all citizens of the world as well as recognises the world as diverse but interconnected. David Held examines the evolution of cosmopolitanism as an idea, tracing it back to Stoicism (a school of Hellenistic Philosophy). In his words ‘We inhabit two worlds...One that is local and assigned to us by birth and another that is truly great and truly common. Each person lives in both a local community and a wider community of human ideals, aspirations and argument’.

The stoics propagate that loyalty should be given, first and foremost, to humanity and not to ethnicity, class and nation.

The question is, how can you implement cosmopolitan principles in a world that has been governed by nation-states and nationalism for more than 200 years? If anything, with the revival of populist politics, cosmopolitanism is only a philosophical endeavour with no realistic structures. However, cosmopolitanism has gradually permeated our world with the establishment of global norms and legal frameworks. Global institutions are also restricted by powerful states. We’ve seen how the UN Security Council’s veto power undermines human rights, with Syria serving as a stark reminder of the failure of the international community.

These issues continue to be debated by scholars working in the field. David Held speaks of Cosmopolitan Law, in which global institutions are governed by principles that would enhance the protection of humanity. According to him Cosmopolitan Law is already enshrined in International Law, governed by principles of equality, equal worth and dignity, inclusiveness and justice. This is not to suggest that the cosmopolitan alternative is easy to be implemented, especially when considering entrenched nation-state structures. Nationalism can also be a good thing. It can mobilise constructively. The drought crisis that is affecting Australian farmers has seen fellow citizens coming together to help. The idea that Australians belong to a shared political community, having the responsibility to help their fellow citizens, should not be undermined.

However, it is also important to extend this sense of belonging and inclusiveness to the global community, especially disenfranchised and marginalised peoples. The refugee crisis is a test for humanity, and everywhere across the globe refugees are failed miserably.

CHANGING THE GLOBAL DISCOURSE
The need to change global discourse and promote empathy, compassion and humanity in modern societies is more acute than ever. However, engagement pursued through the prism of superiority, looking down upon the unfortunate as barbaric, inferior and uncivilised, will not only be ineffective but will undermine mutual trust and the capacity to create positive relations. It is also crucial to work with local actors who truly understand the strength and weaknesses of their societies. It is the responsibility of those who are fortunate to assist those who are trapped in a prison of socio-political paralysis, conflict and de-development. More importantly, the fight against global inequality will reduce the gap between the haves and the have nots.

Assistance in the form of military intervention often results in the destabilisation of societies. This may reduce the capacity for state-building and prevent the development of the necessary tools such as education, political institutions and economic development for progress.

The principles of equality and human dignity are to be preserved. As the French poet, Aimé Cesairé beautifully captured it:

But the work of Man is only just beginning, and it remains to conquer all...
the violence entrenched in the recesses of our passion...and no race possesses the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of force. And there is a place for all at the rendezvous of victory.16

To do this, cosmopolitan principles of collective human consciousness may provide the necessary language to frame the global discourse that promotes inclusiveness and shared interests such as environmental protection, eradication of poverty and conflict resolution and prevention.

The rescue of the Thai soccer team from the cave in 2018 serves as a 'true' cosmopolitan moment. The world came together and disregarded ethnic, cultural and religious differences, all in the name of humanity. When the Thai people prayed and offered gifts to the spirits, the world reported with no prejudice and embraced the Thai boys as their own.

In conclusion, the 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis is chauvinistic as those who are perceived as outside the realm of Western civilisation are treated with contempt. The process of othering reduces the importance of empathy, which is a crucial trait for the survival of humanity. The civilisational divide is often imagined and cannot be sustained as the global world is interconnected more than ever. Cultural and civilisational hybridity are unavoidable. Despite its limitations, cosmopolitanism as an ideal in promoting a more inclusive global community is a much better alternative to Huntington's divisive world order.

This article is an edited version of the 8th Sir Keith Hancock Lecture delivered in Sydney on 15 November 2018 as part of the 49th Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 'Clash of Civilisations? Where are we now?'.

It is the responsibility of policymakers to promote inclusivity and to ensure that cultural and civilisational hybridity are not only acknowledged but celebrated. By doing so, we can create a more harmonious and equitable global community.

6. Trevor-Roper, pp. 15.
15. Held, p. 28.
should we worry any longer about 'clashes of civilisation'? Is it still valid to assume that cultures, empires and world powers are stuck on tram tracks, rapidly hurtling towards each other propelled by forces that draw their motive power from world history?

For a while, it was fashionable to believe so or to see a need vigorously to counter such assumptions. We have, after all, been faced in the last two decades with enough appalling conflicts which seem inexorably to set one culture, faith or military power against another to validate the thesis proposed in Samuel P. Huntington’s 1996 work *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.1

But is it possible that we have only imagined ourselves into a belief that civilisations are destined to clash? I have recently finished a history of Aleppo (and revised a companion history of Damascus for a second edition). This has given me a chance to puzzle over Huntington’s scenario from the perspective of two cities central to the history of one of the world’s key regions. I have also contributed to the work of a team based at Oxford University’s Department of Archaeology which is looking at the material remains of the transition from pagan temples to Christian churches to see what patterns emerge. Both these exercises reveal very little of the sort of ‘clash’ that Huntington had in mind but rather indicate that cultures slide gradually into a process of merging or synthesis that may not necessarily involve violence and may take centuries to accomplish.

Anyone who visited Aleppo before 2011 would have been conscious of how its mixture of cultures—Arab, Islamic, Armenian, Turkic, Christian, Kurdish—seemed to rub along without great difficulty. Certainly there were the occasional tensions over the centuries but all paled into insignificance compared to the suppressed disdain directed at the country’s rulers. Now, however, a visitor to Aleppo would find that the city has been physically torn apart by what could very well be construed as a true clash of violent ideologies. How can one city reconcile the two perspectives? Was it for long proceeding quietly on tram tracks towards calamity but no one could detect the signs?

If one takes a ‘clash of civilisations’ approach, it might be reasonable to divide the history of Aleppo, as an example, into ten phases when one culture or political framework replaced another. I counted the following major transitions:

- Bronze to Iron Age/Aramaean
- Aramaean to Assyrian/neo-Babylonian (Mesopotamian)
- Mesopotamian to Achaemenid (Persian)
- Achaemenid to Greek
- Greek to Roman (including Byzantine)
While most of these changes were bookmarked by military battles, a true ‘clash of civilisation’ scenario would also require major cultural changes and even population movements to back these transitions—pressures built up on the interface between cultures so that they spontaneously broke through and brought about change.

Closer analysis of these phases, however, shows nothing like the sort of pattern that Huntington might have expected. On my reckoning, while 9 of the 10 changes were brought about through military action, virtually none of them in themselves resulted in a sweeping cultural change and even fewer in significant population movements. Pressures were indeed building beneath the surface but these forces were rarely directly linked to changes of culture or population. Mostly it was a pattern of elite events that marked the historical divisions but cultures and ethnic shifts moved on separate tectonic plates, often hard to discern except in the long term.

This method, however, doesn’t sell books or inspire TV historical documentaries with re-enactment scenes, constantly swishing sounds of sword blades and talking heads producing brief snatches of prose. A recent effort to reduce the forces of historic change to a few selective bites was Catherine Nixey’s 2017 book *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World*. This catered to the public taste for assumptions that broad historical processes can be summed up in a few events taken to be representative of a vast pattern of incidents.

Nixey’s book is cleverly constructed so that the instances she gives of the wholesale destructive pattern directed against pagan religious shrines and images are surrounded by enough scattered qualifications that we are left with the impression that scholarly detachment has been preserved. In fact, though, nothing like a comprehensive appraisal is undertaken and the focus is given to just a few cases which are constantly assumed to relate to a pattern in which a whole era is declining into darkness, a ‘deliberate destruction of the ancient world’.

If we look, though, at the physical evidence and rely less on the highly coloured accounts of ancient church sources, such processes of cultural change rarely seem to have happened in a flash. Another case I’ve been involved in, linked to the situation around Aleppo, was to look for physical evidence of this process of the transition from paganism to Christianity in the countryside to the west of the city. This remains one of the most fertile areas to examine what was happening on the ground in late antiquity, outclassing any other region of the late Roman world in terms of the sheer quantity of evidence. There are over 600 villages from the Roman–Byzantine period with standing remains in the countryside straddling the main highway from Aleppo to Antioch. The chain of hills was better known in the last century as the ‘Dead Cities’ since the first Western explorers of the region noted the almost complete absence of populated villages in a zone which had long lost its major export market for wine and olive oil in nearby Antioch. That former Roman metropolis suffered a precipitate decline after the Islamic Conquest and had few chances to regenerate during the Crusading centuries when it became a true war zone.

Although modern archaeological researchers have barely scratched the surface, we have several comprehensive studies of the epigraphy of the zone, enough to give us a basic sequence of the main villages with their rich store of churches. The Oxford study builds on this record to try to identify the pattern for the changeover from pagan to Christian places of worship—why were some temples repurposed while others were actively pulled down; how did these patterns relate to the campaign by the church from the late fourth century to outlaw pagan worship?

The first conclusion reached so far is that there is no pattern. There are patches where the suppression of temples can be related to the introduction of imperial laws outlawing pagan worship but there are even more areas...
where pagan tradition only went gradually out of style. In effect, for over two centuries many villages respected both pagan and Christian affiliations. (fig. 1)

Perhaps what is more disturbing for the adherents of sword and sandal docos is that many inhabitants had quietly placed a bet each way. Even if temple-going were discouraged or proved impossible once temples had been torn down, the religious traditions attached to a geographical feature (often a ‘high place’ whose origins went back several millennia) persisted. A small temple atop a high place could be re-purposed by installing a monk in a new chapel or by reconfiguring the enclosure of a pagan shrine. While Christianity officially banned re-use of pagan structures, a lot of regions ignored the laws when distant from the monks and bishops who sustained programs of destruction which encouraged the zealots. Moreover, even the zealots couldn’t do much about the countryside itself where the old ‘high places’ still loomed over everything and seemed to offer privileged access to a controlling deity. Thus a mountain like Jebel Sheikh Barakat (frequented by pagans as the abode of Zeus Madbachos, ‘Zeus of the Altar’) continued to attract pilgrim traffic even if there was a slight variation in the access route. The challenge of luring the crowds of non-believers towards centres of mass baptism was made easier by getting close to the new God while respecting the sacred landscape of the old ones with their profiles reaching heaven-wards. It was possible to ‘re-badge’ an existing pagan ‘holy mountain’ and graft Christian pilgrimage onto it.

There were many ways to lure recalcitrant pagans to such dual purpose pilgrimage centres. Often the central attraction was a monk who performed heroic feats of privation, spending all his days atop a tiny platform raised atop a column, for example. But even once baptised, what was to stop a farmer having a bit both ways, addressing his prayers both via the church as well as through a ‘pagan’ custom of tying a bit of rag to a tree limb (as many still do today)? The spiritual encounter was not just a building, a relic or other holy remains, it was the place itself and its environment—a mountain, a spring or a cavern.

While the picture we are often given is of church officials campaigning against such temple conversions, by the sixth century they were not uncommon particularly when a temple building offered a convenient configuration which allowed the installation of an apse in the east. In some cases, too, the church was happy to tolerate the sharing of worship space. Within two centuries of the original imperial decrees banning the re-use of pagan temples, it was quietly happening in numerous centres surveyed in my work on Syria and Lebanon. Usually, the broader temple temenos was used but not the footprint of the old central shrine or cella.

We do not know how most of the old temples had met their end. Some show evidence of a violent destruction and in a few cases such interventions have been dated. Most buildings, though, are more likely to have succumbed to earthquakes and neglect or were robbed for building stone over centuries.

Other examples have emerged from the last century of archaeological research showing that when battles or political events brought a break, the resulting process of change was less a ‘clash’ or a hard break but a ‘soft’ and slow merging of cultural markers. We can see the same pattern at work in the centuries following the Islamic Conquest of the 630s as was discerned above in the pagan/Christian transition. (fig. 2)

It had long been obvious to many Western visitors, for example, that the Great Mosque

▲ Fig 1. Jebel Sheikh Barakat seen from the Church of St Simeon the Stylite, 1985.

IMAGE: ROSS BURNS
of the Umayyads in Damascus stood within the temenos (courtyard) walls of the Temple of Jupiter. In fact, for centuries, Westerners had assumed that the mosque had been a Byzantine church that survived in the form of the prayer hall of the Umayyad Mosque. This was a classic put-down by Western scholars who refused to believe that an Arab civilisation would have achieved such an architectural wonder.

It was only in the 1920s that the façade of the mosque was acknowledged as a uniquely Umayyad work undertaken by the Caliph al-Walid in the early decades of the eighth century. There had indeed been a church in the temple enclosure but it had been built not on the location of the temple’s inner shrine but in the southwest corner of the temenos. Christians and Muslims for the first seven decades of Islamic rule shared the sacred enclosure—the Christians using the southern doorway to head towards their church on the west; the Muslims moving right to offer their prayers at a sheltered space built against the temenos southern wall. The church was removed when the mosque was built under the terms of an Umayyad decree compensating the Christians with three other sites for their churches. The mosque was then built across the entire southern half of the temple courtyard.

There was, then, no hard break in cultural terms between pagan, Christian and Arab cultures in the first Muslim capital. The base population of Syria remained the mix it had been for millennia—Aramaean, Arab, Greek, some Romans. Gradually the culture of the Umayyad court shifted towards Arabic. There was no concerted push for Syrians to convert to Islam although an unfavourable tax system for Christians provided an incentive. It was not until the ninth/tenth centuries that a majority of Syrians had become Muslims. Christian churches met the process of cultural osmosis half way. Most Christians switched to Arabic as the non-liturgical language and so were able to share a common language in education and scholarship with Muslims.

Damascus was not the only city where the lines of religious observance became blurred. At Resafe in the Syrian steppe, the change from Byzantine to Islamic centuries was marked by a process that amounted to a soft transition using shared sacred space. The Byzantines had long revered the burial site of the martyred early fourth century Roman soldier, Sergius, promoting the saint’s heroic courage as a recruitment tool among the Arabs of the
central desert. With the arrival of Islam, it seemed to the new rulers excessive to suppress a cult which had proved markedly successful over four centuries. The saint’s burial chamber in the cathedral that bore his name was then made the focus of a new mosque built against the northern wall of the basilica. The faithful could enter the burial chamber either from the mosque or the cathedral.

However, before I too get carried away by citing a few examples and inflating their significance into a trend, I should add that in Syria there were only nine cases which I’ve identified in my database where religious buildings were shared between Christians and Muslims in terms of ritual use. Most communities did cling to their old cultural experiences and took pride in their traditions. Conversions could be a complicated process—a very personal experience, prolonged in a community over centuries rather than a sudden change. On the way to change there could be arguments and even riots over things like how loud church bells or wooden clappers should be sounded or the enforcement of distinctive dress code to identify Christians and Jews. But mostly people of different faiths understood that they had to rub along with each other and that there was very little point in pushing religious differences to confrontation.

On the path towards change processes that can be spread over centuries, there may be crutches that can be offered to help those having trouble with the transition. Rulers and their architects or builders often provided visual clues. The photo at fig. 3 shows the minaret commissioned in the 1080s under Aq Sunqur, a Seljuk governor of Aleppo, by the city’s qadi, Muhammad Ibn al-Khashshab. The Seljuks themselves had not long converted to Islam and this ruler commissioned a local architect to build this great 45m lighthouse of the faith. The architect, Hasan bin Mufarraj al-Sarmani, was a native of a town 30 km south of Aleppo, on the edge of the great swathe of 600 or more Byzantine villages, bisected by the road to Antioch, mentioned earlier. He was a Muslim but would have taken in the numerous Byzantine churches, towers and funerary monuments that dotted the countryside.

The minaret was unique in many ways. It was the only surviving Seljuk-period monument in Syria. It was unique in the Seljuk repertoire since their specialty was brick architecture. Their minarets further east in Iran were more like lighthouses guiding the long-distance traveller—round in shape and tapering as they rose towards the heavens.

I had a long discussion with the publishers of my Aleppo history about what should be on the cover. They wanted no people, cars or wires in the frame, a list of requirements which ruled out 99 percent of buildings in the Middle East. When I proposed the minaret, they queried

![Fig 3. Minaret of the Great Mosque in Aleppo, 2005.](image:ross burns)
why I would want something which no longer
survived as it was blown up during the early
stages of the fighting in Aleppo in early 2013.
I responded that that was definitely why the
minaret should be on the cover: it should serve
as a lighthouse for our times. That is why too
it is not surprising to find that the minaret
is top on the list of reconstruction projects
being undertaken in Aleppo. It is a lighthouse
for Syrians too not just for crazy foreigners
besotted with ancient monuments.

Let us take a minute to see why this ancient
lighthouse has a modern purpose too. First
it is prominent. At forty-five metres it towers
over most of the traditional city where few
buildings exceeded two storeys. Second it is
extraordinarily beautiful, surely one of the
most gracious and perfectly balanced towers
created over the past thousand years. Third, it
has survived not only wars, Mongol invasions,
two major fires and sundry earthquakes but
even the more mundane hazards of water
seepage threatening to turn it into a square
version of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The lean
was corrected in the 1990s and the limestone
blocks that had been given a heavy beating over
the years had been replaced by skilled artisans
who could access a ready supply of the same
stone from the quarries around Aleppo.

The other reason why the minaret is one of
the city’s most appreciated treasures is that
it has a story to tell. The eleventh century
in northern Syria was an era of bewildering
change with local princes vying with external
powers bent on grabbing the vital corridor
around Aleppo—Byzantines, the Abbasid
Caliphate based on Baghdad, its rival the
Fatimids in Egypt, not to mention the jigsaw
puzzle of new Turkic principalities spreading
into Asia Minor from Central Asia of which the
Seljuks at that stage were just one branch.

It was a time when few rulers could retain
their position for more than a decade. When qādī Ibn al-Khashshab, convinced the Seljuk
governor to build the monument the city
had only a decade or so earlier lost a local
Arab dynasty to one of the many wandering
interlopers who spread across the north
Syrian plains. Ibn al-Khashshab was a bit of
a firebrand in modern terms. At a time when
the Crusaders had not yet appeared on the
horizon, he was already preaching the need for
an Islamic revival—a message that would come
into its own in a decade or so with the first
Crusader attacks on Aleppo.

We do not know what else the architect of
the minaret, Hasan al-Sarmani might have
designed but this minaret is enough to signal
an exceptional talent. He skilfully blended
influences from the previous five centuries
and several faith-based or decorative traditions
without ever resorting to a pastiche or a heavy-
headed effort at messaging. It reaches into the
‘Dead Cities’ zone environment in which this
architect was steeped but draws further ideas
from Roman, and Mesopotamian architecture.
These decorative themes are not piled on
thickly to disguise the surface (as was the case
in the art of the first two Islamic dynasties,
the Umayyads and the Abbasids) but seek the
simplest means to break up an otherwise plain
square-plan shaft divided into five layers by
simple moulded courses.

Though Aleppo lay in a region still
threatened by revanchist Byzantine
ambitions, the minaret made no effort to
hide the area’s rich Byzantine heritage.
Al-Sarmani the architect played with the
moulded bands defining the blind arches
of the upper two registers, with classical
colonnettes and window frames along with
the new-fangled Mesopotamian device of
the muqarnas, the use of little segments of a
sphere to step the graduation of convex shapes
supporting a balcony.

If we knew a lot more of the architecture of
northern Syria in the centuries between the
coming of the Umayyads and the arrival of the
Crusaders a generation after the minaret was
built, the minaret might not be such a surprise.
Unfortunately, the preceding centuries after the
building of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads
in Damascus are an almost total blank as so
little survives across Syria. Yet the Aleppo
minaret shows that accomplished builders and
designers existed and that they were proficient
in the repertoires around them. While some
experts have seen the minaret as a sudden
revival of Classical inspiration, Jonathan
Raby has also rightly pointed out that it may
well represent not the resuscitation of a dead architectural vocabulary but the continuation of a post-Byzantine style which had persisted through the early Islamic centuries.\(^3\)

If the Aleppo minaret also showed how traditions merged and overlapped rather than clashed it was also, four centuries or more after the arrival of Islam, to serve as a lighthouse of the now-majority faith. Hence three of the five inscription bands carry texts from the Koran, leaving no doubt that this building represented Islam as a worthy successor to the old Rome. The second level inscription (the most easily readable from the ground) emphasised that the message of the Prophet went back to the tradition of Abraham (greatly honoured in two mosques in Aleppo) and to Ismael and urged non-believers to submit and offer repentance. (Koran 2. 128) It underlined that while traditions are to be honoured, they can be superseded.

One of the great tragedies of the recent conflict in Syria has been the damage done to its monuments, though a critical examination of the toll that historic buildings have taken must pale into insignificance against the loss of human life, the displacement of a large percentage of the country’s population and the destruction of the infrastructure basic to a modern state including in education and health care. Even if much of the extent of damage to monuments has been over-stated, giving a false impression that the country’s heritage is irretrievably ‘lost’, there clearly have been cases in the last seven years where wantonly destroying historic structures has been part of the vocabulary of war—a real example of introducing a clash of civilisations at the physical level.

In most areas occupied by the so-called ‘Islamic State’ (IS) from 2015, Salafist forces largely supported by Gulf interests began a campaign to destroy monuments of preceding cultures, not usually for any military purpose but purely to signal an era of a confected new ‘caliphate’. Thus not only remains of

Fig 4. Aleppo, Syria
IMAGE: PIETRO FERREIRA, CC BY NC-ND 2.0
the Classical era but simple Islamic tombs honouring the local ‘holy men’ of past centuries were blown up as they were taken to represent attachment to Shi`ite sentiment favouring the honouring of the dead.

Ironically, the Aleppo minaret did not survive long enough to become one of IS’s targets. IS never penetrated Aleppo itself and the only city with a Classical or Byzantine background they managed to control in the dark days of 2015–16 was Palmyra. There they launched an orgy of destruction designed to exploit ‘social media’ to the utmost, signaling their ruthless message on a scale which rivalled the ‘Year Zero’ of the Khmer Rouge in 1970s Cambodia. Spending a few thousand dollars on the dynamite needed to blow up the Temple of Bel’s central shrine in Palmyra, for example, was a cheap investment in publicity for their cause, seeking to panic those who might have been tempted to doubt their ruthlessness.

The Aleppo minaret had been toppled earlier, in 2014, probably in the heat of battle between government and rebel forces across the seam line in central Aleppo. It was a tempting target given its use as a vantage point for the rebels who surveyed the town from its commanding balcony though it is not clear whether its toppling was a pre-emptive detonation to prevent it falling into government hands or the result of an intense street battle in the neighbourhood.

The Aleppo minaret, however, might have been on IS’s hit list if it had reached Aleppo. Like the whole site of Palmyra, it offended the Salafists with the picture it presented of a mix of cultures across the centuries, each building on the other’s achievements. The Aleppo minaret spoke of managed change not titanic clashes.

If we return to the theme of how Aleppo survived numerous ‘clashes of civilisation’ largely without apparent physical damage or the wiping out of preceding population groups, are we left with the possibility that the twenty-first century has presented us with a new paradigm to cope with—political change must be marked by the physical elimination of the remains of past cultures, not just a change of overlords while the surviving population manages to cope with change at their own pace? That too, though, would be too simplistic. Other groups in the past have taken power (usually briefly) and proceeded to wreak havoc in all directions. However, as with IS in Syria, they could not develop enough momentum or popular acceptance to survive. Often in Aleppo they were complete outsiders—Mongols, Timurids, strange sects from the Gulf or North Africa—who eventually were expelled.

For me, the lesson of Aleppo is that obsessing too much on the ‘clash of civilisations’ is not a healthy preoccupation. Even in an enormously complex environment at the crossroads of so many cultures and armies, Aleppo usually returned to a default position of tolerance or at least grudging accommodation. Statistics can be made to prove anything, of course (I have even done a bit of manipulation above) but tainted sources (rabid monks, over-zealous bishops or saintly apologists) are not the whole picture. The physical evidence on the ground is more difficult to sort but it can show us a more complex picture in the longer term.


AN ODYSSEY THROUGH TIME

Nicolas Baudin’s Long Haul

JEAN FORNASIERO

Fig 1a. Portrait of Nicolas Baudin, by Philip Parker King. IMAGE: COURTESY OF MITCHELL LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF NSW, PXG 767.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF BAD PRESS

M. Baudin has no qualities, either moral or social; he is neither a naturalist nor a seaman! His hair stands on end at the slightest squall...

PIERRE-GUILLAUME GICQUEL, 1800–1802

Although the results of Captain Nicolas Baudin’s campaign were most extensive, it seems that bad luck has dogged this expedition to date and that all the biographical dictionaries and voyage accounts have conspired to say as little about it as possible.

JULES VERNE, 1879

Few navigators have had such a bad press as Nicolas Baudin.

O.H.K. SPATE, 1987

All witnesses agree, his personality was dictatorial, cold, and vindictive.

BOURGOIN AND TAILLEMITE, 2002
A BREAKTHROUGH

The visitors who flocked to see *The Art of Science: Baudin’s Voyagers, 1800–1804* as it toured Australia between 2016 and 2018 were not necessarily affected by a wave of Francophilia nor succumbing to the fantasy of an Australia that could have been French—appealing though these themes were at a time of renewed exchanges and partnerships with France. The exhibition’s attendees were also responding to the images and artefacts on display, which offered them a glimpse into the prehistory of their own world, the world of a largely pristine Australia, its inhabitants and its natural products. It is true that this particular exhibition was but the latest edition in a series of rediscoveries of the scientific bounty harvested in Australia by Nicolas Baudin and his team and depicted with sensitivity by his artists. Two of the most beautifully crafted of earlier exhibitions, *Terre Napoléon: Australia through French Eyes* in 1999 and *The Encounter 1802: Art of the Flinders and Baudin Voyages* in 2002, had already done much to raise public consciousness of the historical and cultural significance of these artefacts. Where the 2016–18 exhibition differed from its predecessors was that it assembled by far the largest collection of these treasures, and that it toured for two years through five states and territories, with each region adapting the theme and content of the exhibition to the nature of its own encounter with the Baudin expedition between 1801 and 1803. The themes covered varied greatly according to location, ranging from cartography to Anglo-French relations, from biodiversity to taxonomy, from expeditioner biographies to intercultural encounters. The range of material made available for display was so large and diverse that it enabled curators to provide many striking demonstrations of the voyage’s legacy, one such example being the role played by the expedition’s artwork in the revival of certain Indigenous crafts. The intricate detail contained in Nicolas-Martin Petit’s portraits of Indigenous people and Charles-Alexandre Lesueur’s illustrations of Australian fauna and artefacts helped to provide the link between past and present generations of Indigenous artists, recent examples of whose work was on display alongside the source works that had assisted them in retrieving their ancient artistic practices (figs 2a–2c). The French artwork undeniably had its place in the Australian imaginary.

In a parallel movement that was taking place while the exhibition toured Australia, illustrations and documents from the Baudin expedition were finding their way into public auctions in Paris, London and Australia, and fetching higher prices than ever before. Between 2016 and 2018 items such as the missing chapter of the journal of one of the expedition’s botanists, correspondence between the voyage’s key protagonists, a rare animal drawing and several Indigenous portraits from Petit and scenes by Lesueur, began to enter...
the marketplace, eventually migrating towards new owners, both public and private, in France and in Australia. Although the listings from auction houses show that the strength of this market has been developing over some years, the recent release of such a wealth of material is certainly not coincidental; the market, having gauged a heightened interest, responded accordingly and items of scientific, artistic and historical significance were exchanged. While one might lament that few found their way into public collections, the fact remains that the Baudin voyage had reinforced its place in Australian history, the significance of which can be partially assessed on the monetary value attributed to its artefacts, and partially on the reactions of visitors to the exhibition. After a long odyssey through history the expedition was in view of its destination.

Now every odyssey deserves to be told, and this one is as colourful and challenging as any, especially since it took over two centuries for it to achieve a degree of recognition, and to commence its move from the margins of history towards the mainstream. However, rather than retell the entire story, which is now relatively well known, the focus here is to analyse how its history has long been told and to determine whether its mode of narration was part of the reason it remained enshrouded in layers of myth, despite the best efforts of historians to disentangle it.

THE PRE-HISTORY

The Baudin expedition to New Holland, which set sail from Le Havre in 1800, was long considered a failure. Despite the commander’s past reputation as a distinguished scientific voyager, and the impressive natural history collections that he and his team amassed in the course of their Australian voyage, the expedition fell into disfavour even before its return to France in 1804. Many of those who had originally supported or financed the
venture, particularly the naval and political establishments, greeted the survivors of the long and difficult voyage with indifference, some with hostility. If, upon its return, the expedition was no longer the source of national pride that it had been on its departure, it was certainly not as a result of its scientific collections, which were, by any standards, impressive; it was partly because the commander’s competence and integrity were called into question by his subordinates, and partly because he did not complete one of the key cartographic tasks included in his instructions: to claim the undisputed “right of discovery” over the entirety of the “unknown coast” of southern Australia, the last substantial mystery on the world map (fig. 3).

Since Nicolas Baudin made an unexpected encounter in April 1802, on this self-same coast, with British navigator Matthew Flinders, he had the disagreeable surprise to learn that the coastline which he was expected to be the first to chart was limited to a relatively small section of the present-day coast of South Australia and Victoria; thanks to Matthew Flinders (fig. 4b), who was simultaneously engaged on the same charting mission as Baudin in 1802, and to James Grant, who had been charting as he traversed Bass Strait in 1800, the British could lay claim to the rest. Geo-political strategy mattered, not least during the period of the Napoleonic Wars. This explains why contemporaneous expeditions of discovery were sent to Australia by the French and British in the first place, and why Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders inevitably met on this remote coastline. And, just as inevitably, both navigators paid a reputational price for their failure to claim priority of discovery for the entire length of the “unknown coast”.

However, if redemption was to prove slow for both navigators, the damage inflicted on Baudin’s reputation was to prove almost fatal. Tales of his poor seamanship, his ignorance,
corruption and inhumanity were widely circulated by Baudin’s fellow voyagers, for whom a scapegoat was needed to protect their own careers from the contamination of failure. The scapegoat was well chosen: not only had Baudin died in Mauritius on the return journey, but he was also a naval outsider, with no champions to protect him from the orchestrated onslaught. The process of laying blame is entrenched in the official account of the expedition, the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* (fig. 5b) compiled by the chief naturalist François Péron (fig. 5a) (and completed by cartographer Louis Freycinet). This version of events influenced representations of the voyage and its commander for two centuries, and echoes of the mythmaking that arose around Baudin’s person and his voyage still resonate today.

When literary representations are added to the mix the myths become more tenacious still. Baudin was unlucky enough to feature not only as an object of ridicule in a widely read novel by Jules Verne, but also as a disgraced figure in Verne’s otherwise glorious history of French exploration. However, more fortunate in that regard than Richard III, whose bad reputation was sealed by Shakespeare’s eponymous play, Baudin was subjected to more ridicule than vitriol and, as a consequence, he did not long remain a figure of public interest. He was fortunate too, in that an extensive archival documentation of his voyage was deposited in French public collections, in which his own narrative remained safely preserved until the time came to review the record.

And that time finally did come, in the early years of the last century. Ernest Scott’s *Terre Napoléon: A History of French Exploration and Projects in Australia*, although highly critical of some of the aspects of the Baudin expedition, was the first major study to refute some of the long-standing charges against its commander. However, Scott’s mustering of primary sources, although impressive, was not complete enough for him to resolve all of the existing controversies, which meant that he could not disregard entirely the record provided by the expedition’s official narrative. He thus came to adopt part of the discourse of rivalry that Péron had initiated against his commander. For the same reason, Scott also became enmeshed in a second rivalry paradigm that had developed around the expedition in British naval circles. While Scott convincingly refuted early British accusations that the
French held Flinders captive in Mauritius while copying his charts, he was not averse to promoting the superiority of Flinders’ qualities and achievements over Baudin’s. Indeed, he tended to promote Flinders as an exemplar of British decency, describing him as “a downright Englishman of exceptionally high character” and “an Englishman of the very best type”.

When Scott alluded to the arrival of Baudin’s ship in Sydney Harbour in June 1802, he described the Géographe as disabled, saved only by the intervention of Flinders’s fit, healthy and competent crew: the French, too scurvy-ridden and too few in number to manœuvre their vessel, were towed to their moorings by...

A boat’s crew of robust blue jackets from the Investigator [...]. Soon the British tars climbed aboard, sails were trimmed, and the tiller was grasped by a strong hand, a brisk British officer took charge, and the ship was brought through the blue waters of Port Jackson....

This view, propagated by Scott and based largely on Péron’s dramatised testimony, was unsubstantiated by the journals of Baudin’s officers or by the ship’s log, which described an unremarkable operation by which the Géographe was guided to its anchorage. However, it is Scott’s version that has regularly been repeated as fact by historians and journalists. He had tapped into a rich nationalistic vein by the marked contrast he drew between British maritime knowhow and French incompetence. This vein also runs through the fictionalised version of the encounter between the two captains which featured in Ernestine Hill’s novel of 1941.

Through the memorable description she gave of the meeting between a sharp and impeccably turned-out Flinders and a dipsy Baudin in a “snuff-stained vest”, she breathed new life into the paradigm already so ably exploited by Scott—to whom she paid due homage.

RENEWAL AND REGRESSION

In the late twentieth century the expedition’s history once more came under scrutiny from both French and Australian historians, who made serious attempts to dispel the predominant rivalry narratives. In 1974, the publication of Nicolas Baudin’s journal in English introduced the commander’s voice into the public arena, and provided a narrative that challenged much of the substance within the official account of Péron and Freycinet. Although hailed as an important breakthrough by the vast majority of reviewers, and fruitfully exploited by researchers ever since, the journal was not as well received by those for whom the rivalry paradigm was an unshakeable article of faith. The aggressive affirmation by one of Flinders’s biographers—flying in the face of the contrary evidence provided in the journal itself—that Baudin’s writings showed him to be not only incompetent but illiterate, was but one example of the tenacity of the prevailing paradigm. That this was not an isolated phenomenon can be seen in a similarly outraged reaction to another key publication of the 1970s, Aux origines de l’anthropologie française, by Jean Copans and Jean Jamin.

Through the retrieval and dissemination of archival documents, this work examined the aims and results of the ‘Observers of Man’, the learned society which was responsible for supplying ground-breaking anthropological instructions to the commander and his scientific team. The ‘observers’ on the expedition were those who contributed to the record of encounters with Indigenous peoples, and their number included both Péron and Baudin. By drawing attention to these records, Copans and Jamin pointed to the value not only of Péron’s pioneering field work, but also of Baudin’s conscientious reporting of...
the details of the lives of the peoples and individuals he encountered, particularly in Tasmania. Curiously, while this publication rapidly became a major source document for anthropologists seeking to understand the early history of their field, a section of its contents was contested by one anthropologist for whom Baudin’s name could not be allowed to sit alongside Péron’s. To prove his point, Paul Jorion mounted a double attack. Firstly he took to task an influential British critic of Péron’s anthropology by accusing him of buying into an outdated paradigm of national rivalry. The critic in question, Francis Moore, had reproached Péron with neglecting the task of studying the Indigenous population of Port Jackson during the expedition’s five-month stay in 1802, and with choosing instead to prepare a “spy” report on the state of the nascent colony. While Moore did not resort to the nationalistic argument pursued by Scott, that Péron had thus engaged in an act of dishonesty or even treachery by taking advantage of his unsuspecting British hosts, his comments on Péron’s failings as an anthropologist, and the energetic French response, did demonstrate that nationalistic sentiments could still be aroused when Péron’s status as “first fieldwork ethnologist” was called into question, particularly by an Englishman. The nationalistic argument pursued by Scott, that Péron had thus engaged in an act of dishonesty or even treachery by taking advantage of his unsuspecting British hosts, his comments on Péron’s failings as an anthropologist, and the energetic French response, did demonstrate that nationalistic sentiments could still be aroused when Péron’s status as “first fieldwork ethnologist” was called into question, particularly by an Englishman. 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However, Jorion had a second axe to grind: this concerned Baudin and fed directly into the rivalry paradigm that pitted Péron against his commander. In this instance it was historian Jean-Paul Faivre who was Jorion’s target. Faivre was the recognized expert on the Baudin expedition, being the author of a study based on a detailed investigation of its extensive archives. As such, he was invited to write a preface for Copans and Jamin’s work. It is true that the harsh assessment of Péron and Freycinet made by Faivre in his preface was neither balanced nor likely to be appreciated by the presumed audience for the volume, but Jorion’s riposte was conducted on another level altogether, in that he sought to demolish Faivre’s reputation as an historian. He then proceeded to justify both his admiration for Péron and his distaste for Baudin whom he went on to describe as ‘the sycophant in all its horror’. Whatever the merits or otherwise of Faivre’s preface or Jorion’s response, the striking feature of the debate between two contributors to this version of the rivalry paradigm is the belligerent nature of the discourse involved. By transplanting the rehabilitation of Baudin into Péron’s territory—the domain of science in general and of anthropology in particular—Faivre, and hence Copans and Jamin, had made a tactical error. If British anthropology, through Moore, was prepared to admit both Péron’s failings as a pioneer and Baudin’s qualities as an observer, French anthropology, through Jorion, was not. As a consequence of the rivalry paradigms that were still in force, and their perceived intrusion on the otherwise solid historical grounding of their work, Copans and Jamin made the decision to remove Faivre’s ‘embarrassing contribution’. In the second edition of their work, which appeared in 1994, without the preface, they made the conscious decision also to step back from the Péron–Baudin confrontation.

In that sense they were right, for the time for viewing the expedition and its protagonists primarily through the lens of conflict and rivalry should by now have been relegated to the past. A detailed analysis of the expedition had been in print for seven years by the time Copan and Jamin’s 1994 edition appeared, and it not only outdated previous versions of the narrative, but set the benchmark for all future scholarship in the field. In this book, The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia 1801–1803, Frank Horner completed and revised the historical record into which Faivre, Scott and others had made important inroads, while moving beyond the paradigms that had bound his precursors. Having obtained access to a greater range of archival material, Horner was able to counter the myths and misrepresentations by tackling them head on, through a series of well-constructed arguments based on evidence cross-referenced from multiple sources. The essential narrative of what happened when, where and why was
now firmly in place. In the same period, new work was emerging on specific aspects of the expedition, such as anthropology, natural history and art history, which directed attention towards the expedition’s legacy of achievement rather than to an historical narrative of failure.32

In theory then, much of the ‘Australian legend’ that Horner had dismissed should have fallen into disuse, but in practice it continued to hold currency within an emerging trend of popular literature on the topic, as legend tends to do. For example, the rivalry theme, through the narrative of a hotly contested race between Flinders and Baudin, retained its readerly appeal, as several twenty-first century works of popular history could readily demonstrate.33 However, that the same paradigm maintained its influence within the mainstream of historical debate was less to be expected in the wake of Horner’s work. As the bicentenary of the expedition’s encounter with Matthew Flinders approached, it brought out a range of new reflections on this event and its protagonists. However, the response of commentators who reported on these studies was often to reproduce, if not the colourful clichés of old, at least the familiar discourse of rivalry. In 2001–2002 Nicolas Baudin continued, much as before, to be rated second-best in comparison with his British counterpart. In reference to French cartography in particular, respected commentators evoked the ‘inferiority of the French charts’ and ‘French incompetence’ or claimed that Baudin’s reconnaissance was ‘dilatory and careless’.34

Even within the historical studies on which such reviews were written, Baudin was found to have committed navigational errors that resulted in the expedition’s slow progress along the African coast.35 Yet this accusation, originally made by Péron, had long been discredited by Horner, Spate and others,36 and would seem to have passed well beyond the status of an unresolved issue. Why then was there an obstacle to circulating a message which had been amended and sanctioned in the usual ways by the community of scholars?

**COMBATTING THE LEGEND**

For those researchers in French-Australian history who remained as committed as Ernest Scott to the intention that he had articulated when embarking upon his own work on the expedition a century earlier, that ‘the truth about the matter should be known’,37 the continued elusiveness of this goal was both a disappointment and an encouragement. Clearly, greater reflection was needed on the reasons behind the persistence of mythical elements within the historical record if solutions were to be identified. On the one hand, disentangling fact from myth, rumour and hearsay is history’s eternal combat; on the other, for a history with a relatively small history, the Baudin expedition seemed far from being the most desperate of causes. However, if the situation seemed salvageable, the case was far from simple.

The possible causes of the entanglement of myth and history in Baudin’s case were many and varied. Firstly, the obscurity of which Jules Verne had complained when conducting research on the Baudin voyage in the 1870s, and in which it had languished for so long, meant that published material on the topic was relatively rare, and that fact-checking was consequently difficult and onerous. Even in the twenty-first century, research is still within the phase of identifying and synthesizing archival material. This phase is daunting enough in the case of the Baudin expedition. The dissemination of the voyage’s documentation across public and private repositories in several countries and several languages will long represent a major challenge in terms of access, time and resources. Given the scientific nature of much of the material within those archives, the proliferation of facts across many branches of technical knowledge also poses significant problems of understanding and interpretation. If researchers are to arrive at some of the understandings required to encompass the multiple missions of a voyage of scientific discovery, and to illuminate the dark corners in which myth and legend can take up residence, the task for historians today is to rethink how such collective histories can be made and
effectively circulated. When engaging with such histories, teamwork presents itself today as the most obvious answer. Scott had spoken of the ‘several lifetimes’ of work required for cross-checking the facts involved in any research endeavour. We chose to overcome this problem by putting together some simultaneous ‘lifetimes’, that is, by establishing teams of researchers bringing different sets of skills to bear to the task. In this way we were seeking less to re-engage in a process of rehabilitation of the voyage or its captain, than to determine how to read their collective legacy today and how to engage with a cultural legacy that is richer than anyone could have imagined when pioneers such as Scott first took up Baudin’s case.

John West-Sooby and I commenced this task by collaborating with historian Peter Monteath in a work designed to counter the Flinders–Baudin rivalry paradigm and to establish the political, scientific and artistic parallels between the two voyages rather than their respective places within a hierarchy of voyaging. By adding our contribution to the publishing output which marked the bicentenary of Flinders’ circumnavigation of Australia, we had also hoped to bring the Baudin story to a much wider audience of maritime historians and enthusiasts than if we had attempted to retell the saga of the French expedition in isolation. Given that the publication of Encountering Terra Australis received recognition from maritime historians and led to invitations to speak at major events such as the bicentenary of Flinders’ map of Australia, we were able to conclude that breaking the mould of the rivalry narrative had facilitated the acceptance of a multi-layered and multi-cultural version of the Franco-British encounter of 1802. Secondly, this refreshed narrative opened up new possibilities for the dissemination of information, as researchers from a variety of disciplines began to make contact seeking answers to questions that Baudin’s voyage had aroused within their respective fields.

The realisation that there was such a strong demand for increased access to the historical record was the motivation behind a second collaborative project to which we contributed, The Baudin Legacy, supported by the Australian Research Council, and led by distinguished manuscript scholar and Baudin specialist, Margaret Sankey, and by the eminent Belgian scientist and historian of the expedition, Michel Jangoux (fig. 7). The project’s aim was double: to provide access to the Baudin archive through making available the French transcription and English translation of key documents, and to publish our own analyses of the documentation, individually and in collaboration. The project was, and remains ambitious; work on the online repository hosted by the University of Sydney still continues today. Most of its material is sourced from the French National Archives and the Natural History Museum in Paris, with other collaborations being developed. The website provides for exchanges with researchers from different fields, but also with artists seeking inspiration from the expedition’s artwork and artefacts. The project team maintains a strong relationship with the French repository holding most of this artwork, the Lesueur Collection of the Natural History Museum of Le Havre. This institution is developing its own online repository in parallel, a project to which the Baudin Legacy also contributes its expertise.

Naturally, the provision of documentation to a wider readership, while useful for researchers...
seeking to locate a point of detail, is not a strategy for correcting, augmenting or revising the historical record itself. Online publication of raw images or unmediated documentation, in the form of transcriptions and translations, is an invaluable tool for raising awareness of the voyage’s source material, but can only effect a new evaluation of the record—especially a record of such vast dimensions—if these documents are accompanied by expert commentary. As we have seen, the existence of conflicting testimonies has long posed problems for scholars, but any new retelling of the expedition’s story also needs to take into account the multiple versions of the same event which are to be found in the journals of officers and naturalists. In order to deal with this problem and to provide context and balance, the team has published key texts in critical editions, and plans to produce still more, in French and in English. Annotated editions both of the empathetic letter of Baudin to Governor King on the fate of Indigenous peoples, and of Péron’s belligerent memoir to the French Government on the urgent need to invade the colony of New South Wales, seek to bring clarity to a wider public on the political and contextual circumstances that opposed Baudin and Péron to a far greater degree than personal differences ever could. For the moment such publications are of the traditional print type, in order also to engage a scholarly audience, but online publication of the same type is not to be excluded as the Baudin Legacy and Le Havre websites evolve. One thing is certain: as long as the main sources of information on the expedition’s chronology and itinerary, namely the official account by François Péron, and the journals of Nicolas Baudin, remain available to readers in their current unmediated form, without commentary or annotation to account for their differences, the temptation will remain for opinion to be divided between the expedition’s two alternative narratives.

**OTHER APPROACHES**

Another form of publication which the Baudin website enabled was the co-writing of essays and papers in collaboration with groups of researchers from different fields. Relationships were forged by colleagues becoming aware of the resources available on the website and initiating a fruitful dialogue about the information they were seeking to obtain from the records in fields as diverse as linguistics, anthropology, cartography or natural history. However, to date, the most productive areas in terms of initiating interdisciplinary collaborations and writings have been ornithology and art history. In the first case, current interest was revived by the fact that the bird specimens collected by the Baudin expedition were so numerous that they were not exploited systematically until relatively recently, thus providing an invaluable untapped resource for taxonomists. In one or two cases, I was able to locate, transcribe and translate the source texts that assisted colleagues in proposing an answer to questions surrounding the identity of species, a collaboration which occasionally resulted in co-authorship of scientific papers. The unravelling of the identity of the “mystery bird” of St Peter Island gives but one example of how the expedition’s archives retained the memory of a bird sighted by Péron and illustrated by Lesueur (fig. 8). The revival of this quaint memory of a bird described “always looking smug”, a species now absent from the remote

![Fig 8. Noisy Scrub-bird Atrichornis clamosus or Rufous bristlebird Dasyornis broudbenti, by Charles-Alexandre Lesueur. Pencil on cream paper—25 x 20 cm. IMAGE: COURTESY OF MUSÉUM D’HISTOIRE NATURELLE, LE HAVRE - N° 79 041](image-url)
location in which it was originally observed, is not just anecdotal: it also feeds into concerns of our own times about changes in habitat and climate that have diminished the varieties of birdlife abundant in 1802.

Proof of the value in extracting historical information for new publics is also provided by the example of the art world. Australian curators and artists have long been attracted to the delicate and empathetic works of Lesueur and Petit which capture the artists’ sense of wonder at observing for the first time the peoples and lifeforms in different regions of Australia. In Littoral, a joint project with curator Vivonne Thwaites, I assisted with identifying those French archives that would provide her with the images and documentation she would require to design an exhibition and catalogue around Lesueur’s lifetime obsession with oceans and marine life (figs 9a & 9b). Her mission was also to relate Lesueur’s vision of Australian shores and their fauna to the preoccupations of contemporary Australian artists with their environment.44 The resulting exhibition, which contrasted Lesueur’s delicate watercolours of fish, molluscs and crustaceans, with several installations, showing water cycles of the sea and rivers, intercultural encounters on the seashore, and degradation of the littoral, alongside lacy, fragile images of marine plants, went on display in Hobart in 2010, and met with a warm critical reception.45 The catalogue also offered the opportunity to discuss some of the little known details, derived from archival documents, of Lesueur’s early attachment to Baudin and his initial training within Baudin’s close-knit group of scientific companions, but also of the musical experiments conducted during encounters with Indigenous Tasmanians.46 Both sets of details provided a counterpoint to commonly expressed views about Péron’s exclusive role as a scientific
mentor to Lesueur and about Péron’s neglect of the instructions on social anthropology provided to the expedition by the philosopher Joseph-Marie Degérando.*47

The archival research conducted in the course of our various projects also led to the development of a close working relationship with Gabrielle Baglione and Cédric Crémière, respectively the curator of the Lesueur Collection and the Director of the Natural History Museum of Le Havre. Our mutual familiarity with the expedition’s archives and understanding of the necessity to disentangle the history of the voyage from its mythical elements determined us to undertake a strategy of creating exhibitions on research-based topics. The cycle commenced with The Art of Science (fig. 11), the Australian touring exhibition cycle of 2016–18, with its lavishly illustrated scholarly catalogue, and the collaboration will continue with a series of exhibitions from 2020 to 2022 in the newly renovated Museum of Natural History in Le Havre. Whilst it is increasingly common for humanities scholars to disseminate the results of their work through exhibitions and various forms of public performance, such a choice, in the case of the Baudin expedition, is a particularly effective one: exhibitions are well suited to raising awareness of a history in which aesthetics play such a large part through the charming idiosyncrasies of the scientific illustrations of Lesueur and Petit.

In the two centuries since the return of Baudin’s expedition to France, and the publication of its official narrative, much has now changed, both in regard to the public perception of the voyage, and its importance as a record of Australian life, landscapes and lifeforms in the early nineteenth century. Much remains to be done, however, as the voyage records are vast, and increasingly require the input of researchers across a range of the scientific and humanities disciplines to release new findings and articulate new insights into the voyage’s mission and achievements. Ample space remains for teams and individuals to work this fertile ground in new ways. In the meantime, if, by the jettisoning of old legends, Nicolas Baudin himself may have finally emerged from his centuries-long voyage through history as an accomplished navigator, and even a philosophical traveller—and certainly no Captain Bligh (but was Captain Bligh?)—, his voyage itself still has the potential to bring home more bounty from the Southern Lands for historians and scientists alike.¶

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The official account of the Baudin expedition appeared under the full title of *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes exécuté par ordre de Sa Majesté l’Empereur et Roi, sur les corvettes le Géographe et le Naturaliste, assigné par ordre de la République (1801 et 1802), avec l’histoire de la traversée du capitaine Baudin jusqu’au port-Louis de l’île Maurice*, vol. i (Paris: F. Buisson, 1804).

For an account of the previous scientific voyage undertaken by Baudin from 1796 to 1798, a voyage that had given him the status of a national hero, see Michel Jangoux, *L’Expansion française dans le Pacifique, 1800–1842* (Paris: Nouvelle Éditions Latines, 1953).


Horner rightly states that other reasons contributed to the judgement that the expedition had been a failure (pp. 340–43), but in finally attributing this judgement to the “political climate” or Napoléon’s realisation of his now “shrunken horizons” (p. 343), he also links Baudin’s disgrace to a loss of face, if not territory, to the British.


For example, a highly unflattering story was circulated by the zoologist who deserted the expedition at Mauritius in 1801: see Jean-Baptiste Bory de Saint-Vincent, *Voyage dans les quatre principales îles des mers d’Afrique, fait par ordre du Gouvernement, pendant les années neuf et dix de la République (1801 et 1802), avec l’histoire de la traversée du capitaine Baudin jusqu’au port-Louis de l’île Maurice*, vol. i (Paris: F. Buisson, 1804).


Richard III remains a contested figure: arguments and counter-arguments continue to be exchanged between his detractors and supporters, leaving him trapped, as a recent commentator described it, in ‘a kind of narrative hell’ (Robert McCrum, ‘Richard III, the great villain of English history, is due a makeover’, *The Observer*, 15 September 2012.)


Joron, p. 94.


Joron, p. 95.

Joron, p. 94.


46. The essay from *Littoral* was later worked up into a major study of the anthropological project pursued by Péron and his companions, and led to a creative interest by musicians in the notations of Indigenous music gleaned by Lesueur and the expedition’s astronomer Bernier. See Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, ‘Cross-cultural Inquiry through Art and Performance: the Baudin Expedition to Australia, 1800–1804,’ in *Conciliation on Colonial Frontiers: Conflict, Performance, and Commemoration in Australia and the Pacific Rim*, ed. by Kate Darian-Smith and Penelope Edmonds, Routledge Studies in Cultural History 34 (New York/Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 17–35.

47. For Degérando’s instructions see *The Observation of Savage Peoples*, ed. and trans. by F.C.T. Moore.
AROUND HERE there is a lot of surveying going on, mainly along the roads which are being widened—often excessively widened—in the name of road safety. Whilst there is clearly a problem with deaths on the roads over-zealous clearing of vegetation and widening of roads is not the answer.

You see the markers with pink ribbons on the vegetation and you know it’s going to be cleared. You see the surveyors arrive in their khaki uniforms and their X Lights and their tripods and their GPS equipment, satellite laser markers and all sorts of things and they’re like the vanguard of colonialism: they come in and they mark out and then they go and then the machinery comes in—the bulldozers the excavators and so on.

They rely on the pseudo ley lines of earlier surveyors, those who came in and broke up the land—stole the land—and then the next generation of surveyors come in and use their points of reference—their false ley lines as I call them, implanted ones, and try to override the presence and the understanding of the country of Indigenous people.

This is stolen land—we live on Noongar land—and we see the pink markers go up without consultation with elders, without consultation with the Noongar community. It’s terrible seeing the last vegetation go and seeing the re-routings that go on without consultation and without respect, so that’s what this poem responds to. It’s an environmentalist poem and it’s also an anti-colonialist poem and it’s a poem that looks for conversation about technology and about cause and effect.

The poem does what the poem does—it is not only limited to what I have said here—no poem should be. Poems should have spaces and occlusions and turnabouts and bits you can’t penetrate and bits that you can negotiate. It is itself. That’s what language is. But this invasiveness, this penetration of environment by the quiet art of surveying that presages the assault of bulldozers and excavators—deletions and erasures—they’re the normalisers, that’s the way it is—that’s something I wish to address in the poem.

This is an extract from a video recording made by the author.

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Surveyors
JOHN KINSELLA

(i)
Post, tripods, laser lines—
such precision these theodolite wishes,
the markers; flags fluttering
as Legionnaire’s caps to ward-off,
that repetition of lines to lay down,
slopemeter the cut through hills to come
tumbling in the wake of, such GPS arrogance
to lay down a prophetic axiomatics—but beers later.

(ii)
They come in reconnaissance,
but something as permanently marked
as xylene, barrage, ripple terror of serial explosions,
the slicing through to the bone, resetting
at angles that suit replacement.
The shapes to follow.
Commode of pegs before invasion of shitters.
Dulcet in silent signal, semaphore
to see trees fall in a heap,
but none of their dirty work, that art-lie.
Triumph of the spies.
Nature’s fifth column.
Extensions of holy
or otherwise.

Between two points
the everything to nothing
before the new ‘something’.
Climate changers
of gentle movements
as traffic passes close, risky,
or maybe a bird, or something
crawling. By.

(iii)
Who owns what in the levelling,
the borders of reference,
the doing a day job?
The ‘science’?
Earth curve to touch
sky packaging, and glare.

(iv)
Black swan impossibility of what white swans
of survey see down the bottom of the loop, cutting
off a bushy corner, consigning.
Such busy bees with their range. Declivitous
as a creek struggles through forty-two degrees centigrade
and has to be breeched. A contract. A commission. A job. Evaporation.
Virtual vision not there for the endgame—
the bloody mulch, the hacking up to deconstruct
which is language’s weight and so specific in its originating.
Travel later the fruits of pseudo-acclivitous labour—
the legacies of jobs done well for all the evidence
left to us, laid out bare and burning under sun and stars.
Those hired pick-ups, those big utes, those SUVs, those rugged off-road and in crisp beige-khaki uniforms. Mainly blokes, but not exclusively: flexible pronouns trickling into discourse, into folds of earth to be levelled: line of sight, the terraforming sign-off. Steady aim.

That burden of proof: does more good than harm or...?
Which is easier to prove: the machines travelling to undo places on routes undone already where surveyors laid down a redrafting in roundabout terms, or the journaling by blowhard explorers and their usurpings?

Pegs—little flagpoles clipped ribbons pink as tongue fluttering against the desiccating blast of air—soundless when driven past, eerie if walking past. Presaging a stake in the game, in the hearts.