



Editor's Introduction

» ELIZABETH WEBBY

Welcome to the 2016 edition of *Humanities Australia* which again aims to present a small sample of the outstanding research and writing being carried out by humanities scholars and arts practitioners in Australia and internationally. Several of the essays this year deal with interactions between the human and natural worlds, involving the hunting and collecting of animals and insects, across various times and cultures. Others deal with the hunting and collecting of information, whether in fifteenth-century Florence or contemporary Australia. This remains an essential part of humanities scholarship despite the vast difference between an illuminated manuscript and a computer database.

Those who attended the Academy's 2015 symposium at the University of Sydney had the pleasure of hearing the annual Academy Lecture given by Ian McNiven. 'The Ethnographic Echo: Archaeological Approaches to Writing Long-term Histories of Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs and Ritual Practices' outlines his ground-breaking study of midden mounds from the Torres Strait in the light of what he calls 'ritualised middening practices'. While archaeologists had previously interpreted Indigenous middens as little more than rubbish dumps, McNiven argues that the shrines, trumpet shell mounds and dugong bone mounds he examined had been carefully constructed and had ongoing cultural significance. As he concludes, "Today, present generations of Goemulgal, young and old, can look upon

these midden mounds and say with ancestral authority — this is who we *were*, this is who we *are*, and this is who we *will continue to be*.'

In marked contrast, Peta Tait's 'Dressing for War and Unnatural Poses: Human-Animal Acts at the Turn of the Twentieth Century' describes a cultural practice that thankfully has now almost died out — the training of wild animals for performance in circuses and other forms of popular entertainment. As she demonstrates, this was at its height in the early years of the twentieth century: 'Animals were caught up in a chain of economic transactions emblematic of a determination to exploit nature, often through force. Countless animals were hunted, trapped, transported and traded for profit to English, European and American menageries and zoos.' While wealthy hunters still go to Africa to shoot lions and other animals, this is increasingly condemned and certainly no longer justified on scientific grounds.

Some hundred years earlier, the advancement of science was also the justification for the extensive collecting of exotic insects described by Deirdre Coleman in 'Insect Itineraries: From Sierra Leone, West Africa to Sydney, New South Wales'. In this case, wealthy Englishmen were the collectors, employing men like Henry Smeathman to brave the dangers of hunting for insects in equatorial Africa. Smeathman sent specimens to entomologist Dru Drury for inclusion in his three-volume *Illustrations of Natural History*. After Drury's death in 1803, many of his insects

(above)
Academy
Secretariat,
Canberra, Australia.

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were purchased by Alexander Macleay and brought with him to Sydney in 1826, where they remain in the University of Sydney's Macleay Museum. As Coleman concludes, 'That these insects, valuable in large part because of the risks of looking for them, would travel, in the end, within cabinets and across continents to Australia speaks to their high scientific, cultural and social meanings in the rarefied world of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collectors.'

In their 'Marco di Bartolomeo Rustici's Amazing Adventure', Nerida Newbigin and Kathleen Olive take us further back in time, to around 1450 when a Florentine goldsmith, Marco di Bartolomeo Rustici, 'began work on a *summa* of his readings in the form of an account of his journey to the Holy Land in the year 144-'. As the authors explain, this was a collection of a different kind, an illustrated manuscript bringing together information from various sources, dealing in turn with the history and geography of Florence, the journey from Florence to Alexandria in Egypt and the holy sites of Egypt, Sinai, and Palestine. In an amazing adventure of their own, Newbigin and Olive had the task of transforming the latter's PhD thesis on the manuscript into a two-volume edition to be presented to His Holiness Pope Francis on the occasion of his first official visit to Florence, on 10 November 2015.

This issue also features essays by two Fellows of the Academy who currently hold ARC Laureate Fellowships, larger research grants that allow for the undertaking of ambitious projects. In 'Simply a Hypothesis? Race and Ethnicity in the Global South', Warwick Anderson outlines the process by which he came to expand his earlier studies of the sciences of 'whiteness' in Australia into a 'historical inquiry into patterns of racial thought across settler societies of the southern hemisphere, a study comparative in method and style, transnational and inter-colonial in scope.' Funding for postdoctoral research associates enabled the identification and translation of archival material from southern hemisphere countries, written in French, Spanish, Portuguese and German as well as English, with the aim of transforming 'research in the history of science and racial thought, lending it southern inflections, sometimes an Australian accent'.

In his 'The Prosecution Project: Investigating the Criminal Trial in Australian History' Mark Finnane describes another ambitious Laureate project designed to ask: 'What happened to the criminal law after its introduction to Australia? How were its processes of prosecution and trial shaped by the colonial context? And what kind of legacy for contemporary criminal justice was left by those colonial transitions?' As with Anderson's project, a large team of researchers is involved, though in this case not all are academics. As well as providing access to digitised archival records of Australian criminal trials from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, the web portal built by Finnane's team allows people carrying out genealogical and other historical research to annotate material in the database.

It is a pleasure to also include here the recent Trendall Lecture given by a distinguished American academic, Carole E. Newlands, from the University of Colorado Boulder. 'Becoming a "Diva" in Imperial Rome: Ovid and the Problem of the "First Lady"' looks at the question of how it was possible for a mortal woman to become a Roman goddess. It examines 'the crisis in female representation occasioned by the novel emergence of women of power and influence ... in Roman public life' under Augustus (31 BC–AD 14) and Tiberius (AD 14–AD 37), with a particular focus on the work of the poet Ovid.

We are again delighted to be able to feature work by two of Australia's leading writers. Michelle de Kretser's story 'Life with Sea Views' offers wry but also chilling glimpses into the troubled recent history of her birth country, Sri Lanka, anticipating some of the material in her prize-winning novel *Questions of Travel* (2012). David Malouf's two poems, from his most recent collection *Earth Hour* (2014), like much of the material in this issue, look at interactions between humans and the natural world. The title poem, indeed, concludes with an image of the 'midden, our green accommodating tomb'. ❧



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