



Editor's Introduction

GRAHAM TULLOCH

WITH ONE SMALL CHANGE—from '2020' to '2021'—I can begin my introduction to this year's issue of *Humanities Australia* in the same words as last year: 'This year, 2020, has been a tumultuous year for the world to which Australia has added its own particular troubles and concerns.' I then went on to mention the bushfires, the emergence of Covid-19 with its threats to lives and livelihoods (including in the arts and universities), heightened tensions with China, renewed attention to Indigenous disadvantage (highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement) and government funding proposals that called into question the value of key humanities disciplines. Thankfully, there have not been the same mega-bushfires (although the threat of bushfires exacerbated by climate change is still very much there) but the other troubles of last year remain, albeit with a change of emphasis. Covid-19 has dominated this year to a greater extent even than last but Indigenous disadvantage, tensions with China and questions about the value and status of the humanities and of the arts remain.

This year's *Humanities Australia* again demonstrates the experience and effectiveness of the humanities in addressing these current challenges but the contributions also remind us that our complex world is not defined by these prominent issues alone. That said, the first contribution deals directly with both the epidemic and the value of the arts in times of crisis. Libby Robin offers a very personal account of her exploration of the responses of and to the arts in the first Covid-19 year. Her article describes not only the state of the

arts and how they responded to the effects of the epidemic on both artists and their audiences but also the process by which she went about exploring this issue. Victoria in 2020 suffered eight months of lockdown and it is from this extreme viewpoint that she considers how the arts reacted to Covid-19 and other crises of the year. There is much that is depressing in the picture she draws, but there is also much that is inspiring. In the face of the epidemic communities confined to their homes turned to the arts. At the same time the arts and cultural institutions reinvented themselves, finding new ways of connecting with and supporting the broader community. Ultimately she concludes that 'Creativity has a future. It remains a place for hope, for meaning and—I argue—for economic, cultural and human growth'.

By way of contrast to this direct confrontation with the first Covid-19 year, Alastair Blanshard comes indirectly at a contemporary issue which had particular resonance in the year of lockdown and isolation. Posing the question 'Were the Ancient Athenians ever lonely?' he begins with Émile Durkheim's identification of loneliness as a peculiarly modern phenomenon. After considering the communal nature of living in urban Athens he argues that the scope for loneliness was limited in this society since 'In ancient Athens, you were almost never alone.' Even in the country, agricultural labour was a shared activity so that there, too, loneliness had little scope. What concerned people was not loneliness but misanthropy, the misanthrope being someone who does not want to join in

communal living. There is, however, one group that did live in isolation, shepherds. This proves to be a privileged position: in Ancient Greece the gods appear without disguise only to isolated individuals. Hence shepherds are the group who most often experience epiphany. All this leads to a balanced conclusion: studying the lifestyle of Ancient Athens reminds us of the benefits of communal living in combating loneliness, but at the same time 'we don't want to lose the pleasures of solitude. After all, as the Greeks remind us, this is the state in which we are most likely to encounter the divine.'

Bridget Griffen-Foley moves outside the confines of our current challenges into the world of radio and television. She uses the fanmail received by Ruth Cracknell, star of *Mother and Son*, and by John Doyle and Greig Pickhaver, who appeared as Roy Slaven and HG Nelson in *This Sporting Life*, to reveal a vibrant interaction between these extremely popular stars and Australian audiences. Cracknell's brilliant performance as Maggie Bear brought her nation-wide recognition and was greeted with enormous warmth, with the fanmail revealing a rich range of responses. Similarly the marvellous pairing of Roy and HG attracted a huge number of admirers, many of them eager to make contact. It is heartening to know that Cracknell responded personally to all her fanmail, as did Doyle and Pickhaver. The archive of fanmail received by these much loved stars reveals itself as a rich resource for understanding Australian audiences' reaction to some key works of television and radio.

Billy Griffiths begins his article with a vivid evocation of his experiences working with archaeologists on Lizard Island, part of the ancestral country of the Dinggaal people, who knew the group of islands of which it is a part as 'Jiigurru' or 'Walmbaar', but he moves on to a consideration of one of the many frontier myths which have overlaid Indigenous stories of the land. Lizard Island has become associated with the story of Mary Watson, who died after an attack on her absent husband's trepang collecting depot. Two Chinese workers also died in or after the attack but have fallen out of the story, as have the killings of Aboriginal people that followed, although they were more

or less openly acknowledged in the press of the time, being presented, however, merely as just reprisals without any mention of the colonising land grab they enabled. This is one of the multitude of stories of frontier violence which underlie contemporary Indigenous disadvantage: they need to be told if we are to achieve the truth-telling called for in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.

Nicholas Shakespeare's 'Beer Lines' brings us back to the present but immediately takes us back to a fourteenth-century Wiltshire pub, then further back to a site where Romano-Britons quarried stone and finally further back still to an Ancient British fort. From there the writer moves forward, through a chain linking amongst other things his former publisher, a painting which reminds him of Tasmania, 'an island which has long been part of my life', and Patrick White, to arrive again at the present. It is a story of coincidences, as so many of the best stories are. Fascinating as a narrative, it also reminds us forcefully of the global interconnectedness of our culture in both the past and the present.

Catherine Speck's starting point is the Australian television series *Operation Buffalo* screened in 2020. Avowedly a work of 'historical fiction' in which nevertheless 'a lot of the really bad history actually happened', the series served, if nothing else, to bring the nuclear tests at Maralinga back to the forefront of the minds of its audience. While many of the older generation no doubt remember the tests, the memory has been much more vivid and painful for the Anangu people on whose land they took place and the article ends with a discussion of the recent powerful work of Aboriginal artists that recalls the tests and their devastating effect on the Anangu country and people. However what has been largely forgotten, though also covered in the article, are the protests at the time against the choice of the test site. Despite the strength of campaigns by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, they were unsuccessful. Taking into account the subservience of the Australian government to British needs and the indifference of the British themselves (the 'ultimate colonisers' as Speck calls them) to the plight of the people who had inhabited the land

for millenia, it provides a sharp reminder of the continuing legacy of colonisation.

Paul Eggert addresses the relationship of past and present, a notion which lies beneath many of the articles in this issue of the journal. His particular concern is the twin activities of scholarly editing of literary texts and conservation of buildings and works of art. He begins with a Thomas Hardy poem about the presence of the past in the present and the presence of the present in our view of the past. Hardy is an apt choice as he was an architect restoring medieval buildings before he became a famous novelist and poet. Tracing the evolution, over the last forty years or so, of ideas about how literary, artistic and architectural works should be edited, conserved, or curated, the article leads us to a recognition that there is no fixed and ideal state of any work of art to which it can be returned and that editors, conservators, or curators can only do their best to present the work of the past in a way that resonates with their own present. To quote: 'Works have lives: all being well, those lives are the conserved object's passport into the future and they are ours into the past.'

Finally Marian Maguire returns us both to frontier violence, colonisation, and Indigenous dispossession and to the Ancient Greeks in her written up version of her 2020 Trendall Lecture. Working from the intriguing notion of combining New Zealand colonial history with Ancient Greek vase painting she has produced a series of stunning images covering such subjects as the encounter of Captain Cook with the Indigenous people of the land he named New Zealand (in *The Odyssey of Captain Cook*) and the occupation of the land by colonists (in *The Labours of Herakles*) where Herakles is 'my stand-in for the British settler'. Her reflections on this artistic endeavour have raised questions about myths and stories including 'whether one could import myth into a land already replete with myth' and 'Can land hold multiple stories or does one displace another?' Discussing the Land Wars she provides a telling parallel to Billy Griffiths's story of how colonists glossed over the violent taking of Lizard Island from the Dingaal people with the heroic story of Mary Watson. In New

Zealand, 'Piece by piece the land was surveyed. In order to ready it for settlers, inhabitants were cleared off. This was done through 'bush scouring', which was understood by townsfolk as the rooting out of rebels in their forest strongholds. In reality ... villages were burnt, crops trampled, people killed.' Nevertheless this is not the only story she tells: in the lithograph *Captain Cook makes his Approach from the West*, Cook is disadvantaged, coming in from the right while 'On the left side of the picture, the protagonist's side, a Māori chief calmly stands.' In bringing the past of Classical Greece into the then present of colonisation and then bringing colonisation into our present, Marian Maguire enacts the connection of past and present which has been such a prominent theme in this issue of *Humanities Australia*. One of the eternal themes of the humanities, it is also a fundamental concern of our world today.

This will be the last issue of *Humanities Australia* in its current form as the Academy moves to a different mode of publication. It has always been intended as an outward-facing journal and this will continue with the Academy's publications into the future. It has been a great privilege to guide the Academy's flagship publication through the last five years. I want to pay tribute to the previous editor, Elizabeth Webby, for her work in establishing a journal of such high quality and interest. I would also like to thank all the contributors over the years and particularly to give my personal thanks to the contributors during my time as editor. I am very grateful to the Secretariat of the Academy for their support to me as the Academy's Editor in all the functions of that role. In particular I want to thank Gillian Cosgrove, who has typeset and designed the journal, and, above all, Liz Bradtke: it has been an immense pleasure to work with Liz and she has made a large contribution to the success of *Humanities Australia*. ¶



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