

# Editorial

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Recent voting trends around the nation seem to suggest, among other things, a growing unease at the ways in which the cultural dimensions of Australian life have been subordinated to questions of economic efficiency. It would be rash or foolish to suppose that the reduction of cultural and human values to what can be effectively marketed will reverse itself any time soon; but there is at least some evidence at the political level that people want governments that are prepared to invest more rather than less in the enrichment of cultural opportunities and amenities for everyone.

'Culture' is, of course, a notoriously malleable word. It can be used to refer to everything from grand opera and classic literature to the characteristic activities and attitudes of big business, trade unions, police, and street criminals. Personally I think that in this very inclusive sense, culture can begin to lose meaning, simply becoming synonymous with 'what people do'; and that calling certain things 'cultures' can sometimes be a way of sanctifying them, of refusing to judge, let alone attempt to change them. But as a word denoting those parts of our lives in which we develop our intrinsic possibilities as human beings, whether individually or collectively, it continues to have an important, indeed indispensable, range of meanings.

Culture itself changes, however, and Steve Mullins's article on recent and ongoing shifts and conflicts in the relations between traditional and Christian cultures and belief systems in the Torres Strait island communities describes an important and seemingly unresolved instance of this. The politics of culture figures in different ways in all but one of the other articles in this issue. Belinda McKay's study of Queensland women poets from the establishment of the Moreton Bay Colony up to the Second World War is first and foremost a work of literary retrieval: some of these women's voices have been stilled for a hundred years and more, yet many of their concerns and much of the language they use to express them, are surprisingly accessible to contemporary readers, and a real stimulus to the historical imagination. But her study also shows difference: the different racial and genetic assumptions, and the different political contexts in which women writers lived and worked. All these leave traces in their writings and remind us that even in Queensland, 'the past is another country'.

That might also be the burden of Delyse Ryan's analysis of the public culture of parades, processions and other forms of civic display and citizen participation in Brisbane during the First World War. Ryan gives us a densely detailed sense of the visual spectacle, but also of the ethos of mass participation that prevailed in such events. The patriotic and militaristic sentiments seem a world away from the Brisbane of 2001; yet Anzac Day, in a still recognisable guise, just keeps on keeping on!

Patrick Danaher's account of travelling 'show people' reveals a more 'unofficial' aspect of Queensland's entertainment culture, and Queensland life. Based in part on interviews with the 'showies' themselves, Danaher builds up a picture of the workaday human infrastructure of what, to everyone else, is an opportunity to escape briefly from the working world into an experience of carnivalesque release through the circus and the sideshow. Others make their escape by reading books; and Denis Cryle and Betty Cosgrove have produced some fascinating material on rural reading cultures in central Queensland. The systematic and historical study of reading is still in its early stages in Australia; in that sense, this is something of a pioneering contribution to a field which promises major insights in the coming years – and which also poses major challenges to the researcher.

Finally, there is Robert Thomson's intriguing investigation of the climbing history of Mount Lindesay in South-East Queensland, and specifically of the puzzle surrounding its earliest 'conquest' by Europeans. Here the *Queensland Review* really is breaking new ground – or continuing to do so, since it published a piece by Thomson and Michael Meadows in a similar vein in the last issue. The discovery of a rich mountaineering and rock-climbing culture (that word again!) in Queensland is one of the more exciting recent developments in writing (not even rewriting) the social and environmental history of our State, and the ongoing work of Thomson and Meadows is leading the way. *Queensland Review*, and the Queensland Studies Centre, are proud to be associated with this broader enterprise. Our cover is a photograph of Mount Lindesay by Michael Meadows.

*Pat Buckridge*