

## Past, Present, Future

EDITED BY GEOFFREY LITTLE AND ANGUS MARTIN\*

### Arts Generations

On Thursday 8 May 2003 some 200 graduates in Arts, their dates of graduation spanning close to eighty years, gathered in MacLaurin Hall to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Arts Association and to recognise the contribution of the humanities to the life of the community. Representatives of graduates from the decades of the 1920s onwards spoke of their experiences and memories of the Faculty of Arts.

**Mrs Michelle Blanchard**, deputy director of the Koori Centre, welcomed guests on behalf of the traditional owners of the land where the university stands, the Cadigal people of the Eora nations. She felt honoured and privileged to be 'among those of you who share my passion for words and recognise their value, as well as other symbolic systems used in the creative and performing arts. As many of you know much better than I, words have the potential to change lives and to shift mindsets, but most importantly, they help us to make sense of who we are and how we interact with each other'. Mrs Blanchard stressed that words are being used to reclaim an Indigenous past and provide foundations for a positive Indigenous future: 'what better way to contribute to public life than through the medium which accesses our private selves'.

*\* Geoffrey Little is an honorary Associate Professor in English and editor of Arts. Angus Martin is Emeritus Professor of French Studies and President of the Arts Association.*

**Miss Dorothy Gilder** and **Mrs Glen Fogarty** (née Boland), graduates of the late 1920s, were interviewed on videotape as representatives of their decade. (Mrs Fogarty attended the evening.) Miss Gilder became a teacher, worked for over 40 years in the Correspondence School, and later became a benefactor, endowing a medical scholarship in memory of her sister, who taught at the University. She commented on her first days at the University, on the meeting in the Great Hall that served as Orientation, on lectures and lecturers (Professor Tasman Lovell in particular), and on the groups that formed among her fellow students:

‘The University as such didn’t have any form of Orientation except a meeting in the Great Hall. And we had to have our caps and gowns, and they came from David Jones’s store in George Street. So off we went in the late afternoon. And I don’t remember a thing about it, except that we had our caps and gowns, and in my case a home-made little white frock and I think white cotton stockings.

‘I think all the Teachers’ College students who went to the University doing Arts had to do Philosophy I, which was Psychology and Logic. And I remember very clearly Professor Tasman Lovell. It was a very big class and the girls sat together mostly by schools—North Sydney, Sydney High, Fort Street. I was always very sorry for the ones who came from Abbotsleigh. Especially if they weren’t sporting types. If a girl came alone from a small school and was good at sport, she was right. But the ones who didn’t have any sport, they must have had very lonely lives in the beginning.

‘Tasman Lovell knew his stuff and he knew his students. He made it his business to know the names of the College boys who sat at the back and misbehaved. And he was friendly. If you encountered him in the grounds or going down to the tram he always spoke to you. He wouldn’t have known my name but the group I was with, he would speak to us. Nobody else ever did.’

**Mrs Glen Fogarty**, like Miss Gilder, became a secondary teacher, and later was a member of Sydney Teachers’ College. She was

instrumental in setting up a school in Bathurst for intellectually handicapped children, and an organisation, Glenray Industries, to provide employment for them later in life. She spoke of the way in which an Arts education taught her to argue, to think, and to appreciate another point of view:

‘At my private boarding school we had been accustomed to sitting back and saying ‘I think this ...’, but the girls from the State schools started to argue, and they were shouting, and they were haranguing one another. I can remember I was almost frightened ... They were leaning over and stamping their feet and saying, ‘No, no, he was *not* right. He had no grounds for it.—Well, why do you say he had no grounds for it?—Well, for goodness sake, don’t you know anything at all?’ It was argument and I thought, this was the most marvellous thing I was hearing. I sat there and I was enthralled.

‘That was my very beginning at the University. And I think that for the three years that followed I never spent a dull day. I made friends and enemies on that argument. I thought the lecturing was really magnificent, always leading to arguments and discussions ... Every now and again a statement would be made and somebody would say, ‘I don’t agree with that’. For the first time I learned what it was to think for oneself. And I have been able to carry that right through my life. That’s one of the best things—as well as the memory of great friendships that lasted a long time—that I carried away. Not so much scholarship, but friendships and the capacity to see another person’s side of an argument.’

[An archival copy of the full videotapes will be preserved. They give a vivid picture of student life in the late ’twenties and show how two students of that generation carried throughout their lives the experience of studying in the Faculty of Arts.]

**Professor Donald Horne**, influential writer, lecturer and academic, whose titles include *The Lucky Country* and *The Education of Young Donald*, represented the graduates of the 1930s. He said:

‘I’m about to offer you before we get onto the drinks a few memories of my first year in the Faculty of Arts, in 1939 when I was seventeen. This will be attempted through a recall of six *places* and seven *people*.

‘The first place is the Philosophy Room where John Anderson, the professor, was the charismatic nucleus of a microscopic intellectual universe, especially when he was addressing the Freethought Society he had created at the beginning of the 1930s. Very early in first term I became ‘an Andersonian’. A lot of what this meant has dropped away but it has left me with six poignant phrases.

‘One is the idea of *the spirit of inquiry* as the prime mover in universities, in scholarship generally and in overall intellectual life. At that time, the word ‘research’ was reserved for what went on in laboratories. Another, following Georges Sorel, a favourite of Anderson’s, was to distinguish between the *producer ethic* and the *consumer ethic*, a distinction worth remembering whenever one hears that students are ‘consumers’ or book buyers are ‘consumers’ or, for that matter, citizens are ‘consumers’. A third was to believe that all societies are *pluralist*, made up of different and often conflicting values and ways of life—which is, of course, an affront to ideas of a single national identity or the entry of boat people. And a fourth, connected with this, was that liberty is found in *pursuing things for their own sake* (and not always for the sake of ‘the economy’). The fifth came with the withering of my high school belief that progress was inevitable. In the Freethought Society we were awake-up to the Stalinists so I became instead a *pessimist-anarchist*. And, central to all the rest, the sixth phrase was maintaining *the spirit of criticism*.

There were many places other than the Philosophy Room where we maintained the spirit of criticism but chief among these was the Quad—more exactly the part of the Quad near the Philosophy Room. It was here that some of us began to acclimatise the spirit of criticism to our own purposes, in ways that we went on developing throughout our lives. At first this spirit of criticism was most evident in Oliver Somerville, whose chalk-white face,

brown passionate eyes and dark fidgety hair, along with grubby sandshoes, white silk evening scarf, and alternations between ardent oratory and threatening silences, seemed straight from the set of *La Vie Boheme* and who was of great benefit to me in offering a choice between several different brands of anarchism. But rather than Somerville it might be more useful to recall Edith Riley. Edith went through Andersonianism, sorting out what she wanted. Years later, when I was one of the speakers at a weekend conference at the university on something or other, Edith was there, taking careful notes like a true Andersonian. After lunch—in the Quad—she said: ‘You made two interesting points, Donald’. Then she consulted her notes and discussed each of them as if, next week, we would read about them in the *Union Recorder*.

‘It was in the Quad that I met Joan Fraser (who, decades later, became, as a fiction writer, Amy Witting). She was an older woman (twenty-one!), sitting there rolling her own cigarettes, but our friendship developed not in the Quad but over cups of foul coffee in the Union Refectory (not that I knew foul coffee from fair, having only just taken up the habit). Speaking in a measured style punctuated with dying falls, she introduced me to Dorothy Parker, *New Yorker* profiles, jazz and the blues, Scott Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, the Marx Brothers, the art of the wisecrack, and a whole range of the United States liberal experience, with the result that I could never ever be, simply, ‘anti-American’.

It was ‘Fraser’, as we used to call her, who introduced me to the ‘Ladies Lounge’ in the Park View Hotel, Myrtle Street, a small working class pub down from the University. Myrtle Street carried memories of some golden age of undergraduate life but no one much seemed to go there any more other than a small number of what we would now call intellectuals.

‘Of these the principal was Alan Crawford, at first sight a ‘business man’, with horn-rimmed glasses and a three-piece striped navy-blue suit, but his aloof, sideways glances and elegant manoeuvring of cigarette smoke suggested something more. Crawford was ageing (getting on for thirty!)—and he was a solicitor, but like other ‘student politicians emeriti’ he appeared

to have drawn as much wisdom about statecraft and the general conduct of public affairs from his time on the Student Representative Council as Machiavelli drew from being head of the chancellery of the Florentine republic. As well as a fount of political shrewdness Crawford had been a kind of guardian of the University literary magazine *Hermes* (but by 1939 *Hermes* had fallen into the hands of a middlebrow, a law student called Gough Whitlam).

‘However a more usual meeting place than Myrtle Street was Sherry’s, a newly opened coffee lounge downtown, run by two European refugees, a husband and wife, although there was nothing about Sherry’s in its appearance that was foreign. Perhaps its owners thought inconspicuous tattiness would reassure Sydney-siders. Fraser and Crawford and Somerville were usually at Sherry’s on a Saturday afternoon. So were ‘Jimmy’ McAuley, a sorcerer of conversation, a controlled spell-binder; Alec Hope, with his soft air of indifference and faint smiles, as if he was thinking of something else; Harold Stewart whose large, heavily lined face made him appear older than 23 and with hair so heavily brilliantined he might be the man who had come to fix the plumbing. Like many others in Sydney, these people mocked the absurdities of the world, but they did it in parodies, limericks, clerihews, epigrams and lampoons. The reason was that, although their conversation was, in general, if in a distinctive way, connected with books, what they had in common was that they all wrote verse and believed that, even more than ‘prose’, verse was central to the human condition.

‘The last of my six significant places is Repin’s coffee shop, also downtown, with its dark booths and awesomely sophisticated aromas. It’s at the end of the year. I’ve just been yet again to the miraculous exhibition of 200 late-impressionist and post-impressionist paintings that has come to Australia, an apt end to a year of wonders in which I have discovered French symbolist verse, Jacobean tragedy, John Donne’s sermons, Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Christopher Brennan and Rilke in translation, have read one volume of Proust, written a dozen or so

symbolist poems and seen three foreign movies. I am, of course, now also familiar with the works of Freud, Trotsky, Joyce and Dostoevsky; I am a philosophical 'realist', a freethinker, a social pluralist, an adherent of a producer's rather than a consumer's ethic and I know five different ways of being an anarchist. 'And now, with this satisfyingly busy year behind me, it's time to open the copy of the *Sydney Sun* I have beside my coffee cup, with its end-of-the-year Faculty of Arts exam results.

'I make a discovery.

'I have not done as well as I was expected to. I hadn't done enough of the work you get marks for.'

**Gavin Souter**, distinguished journalist, historian and author, whose books include *Lion and Kangaroo*, *Company of Heraldry*, and *Mosman: a History*, represented the graduates of the 1940s. He said:

'A pore wydwe somdel stape in age  
Was whilom dwellyng in a narwe cottage

'There you have a relic of my Arts course, a souvenir of 1946 and 1387. It surfaced the other day, word perfect, and I think phonetically correct, while I was reading the memoirs of Kingsley Amis, who happened to have done Old and Middle English under J. R. Tolkien the same year as I was being lectured on them by A. G. Mitchell. Amis and his friend Philip Larkin regarded everything from *Beowulf* to Chaucer as 'a matter for evasion and fraud, confidence trickery to filch a degree in the coming battle of wits with the examiners'. Larkin said, 'I can just about stand learning the filthy lingo it's written in. What gets me down is being expected to admire it'.

'Amen to that for *Beowulf* but, thanks to Professor Mitchell, not so for Chaucer. Chaucer's lingo did not require as much decoding as Old English, and it was just familiar enough to convey a sense of human continuity as well as antiquity. 'I had other memorable English lecturers—notably A. J. Waldock on Milton, and R. G. Howarth on Australian poetry—and good ones in other departments too, particularly Ian Hogbin for Anthropology and

Professor Sadler for Oriental History, which for obvious topical reasons was mostly Japanese.

'I suppose I filched my degree just as cold-bloodedly as Amis and plenty of others have done. But Arts was nonetheless a great experience for me, even though I was not an Andersonian, did not stand for the Student Representative Council, and did not join the Sydney University Dramatic Society. I did, however, take part unsuccessfully in one Union debate, and did have a poem, or rather a parody, published in *Honi Soit*. I also demonstrated for Indonesian independence with hundreds of other students and waterside workers outside the Dutch Consulate-General; and rode on a float in the Commemoration Week procession, which was illegal in 1946 but legal from then on.

'My first year was full time at the University, at St. Andrew's College, with lectures around the Quadrangle and in the new Wallace Theatre, all overcrowded with men and women just back from the war and teenagers like me straight from school. Now that I am 'somdel stape in age' myself (indeed probably more advanced in age than the poor widow in her little cottage) I can hardly credit that late one moonless night in 1946, with other freshers, as our initiation at Andrews, I reached the top of the arch of the Harbour Bridge.

'In my second and third years I had neither time nor inclination for high jinks like that, because in 1947 I became a cadet journalist. That meant combining day and evening lectures with weather reports, shipping lists, police rounds, and even a feature article entitled 'That University Procession', which—so my news editor informed me—the general manager found neither amusing nor interesting. That verdict was reinforced the following year when I failed English III. Thelma Herring, who gave me a sympathetic hearing—and, fortunately, a post—explained that I had not come up to scratch in Part Two of that paper, which was about eighteenth-century comedy. For the next few weeks I grimly read the works of Sheridan, Vanbrugh and Farquhar, and in my second battle of wits with the examiners I somehow managed to scramble under the wire.



‘Last week, in the Rare Book Collection at Fisher Library, which holds all past examination papers, I tried to locate the cause of my temporary fall from grace. Part Two had required me to answer two out of eleven questions such as, for example, “Discuss the preference for weeping, in comedy, among eighteenth-century audiences”. I have no idea which two I might have answered, but I do marvel at the kind of knowledge I was once able to muster on demand—and not only in English. Endocrine glands, Aboriginal kinship systems, Japanese shoguns. Never mind that most of it has evaporated in the meantime. I console myself with the thought that what mattered most in Arts was the getting of knowledge rather than the knowledge itself. The getting process made me read, write and think more than I would otherwise have done. It also gave me a sense of direction in libraries, a taste for research and an interest in the past. That’s more than enough to be thankful for, and more than enough about me, so I’ll make way for the next generation.’

**Edmund Campion**, priest, writer, editor, literary judge, and academic, whose publications include *John Henry Newman* and *Great Australian Catholics*, represented the graduates of the 1950s. He said:

‘Fellow artists and artisans. More than half a century ago, a young man took a tram from Enmore to Chippendale and enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at the University. After nine years of boarding school, what a joy to stroll through the Quad with coins in your pocket and make your way to the Union for coffee and a chocolate-covered doughnut! To buy your own lunch at the Union Buttery after years of meals in the school refectory! (Once, when he ordered *four* sandwiches, the kindly lady behind the counter suggested that was being a trifle excessive.) And then, in the afternoon, when Manning House was open to males, to go there for tea! (I remember going in with a Communist Party organizer and his look of anti-American disdain when I bought a Coca-Cola: ideologically correct, even in his diet, he drank milk.)

‘And all around you—*girls!* What wonder! What joy! What

tingling excitement! No wonder, fifty years on, he could say with the Psalmist, 'The lines of my life have run in pleasant places'—no more so than in the Faculty of Arts.

'Did he do any work, that young fellow from Enmore? Oh yes: he wrote undistinguished essays here in Maclaurin Hall, the original Fisher Library, delighting in its hammerhead beams and the William Morris fabrics and tiles. And with hundreds of other Arts I students he packed into what was then the biggest lecture hall in the University, the Wallace Theatre, for lectures in English I and History I. Some of this, he would think later, changed his life. He never forgot, for instance, A. G. Mitchell coming in to an English I lecture and beginning by saying,

Margaret, are you grieving  
Over Goldengrove unleaving?  
Leaves, like the things of man, you  
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?

It was 'Spring and Fall' by Gerard Manley Hopkins; and that day, for one of his youthful auditors, Professor Mitchell opened the door to poetry, a door that stayed open for life. Likewise, that young man from Enmore carried through life a memory of A. H. Macdonald's final lecture of the History I course, which was about the building of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Professor Macdonald's revelation of architectural beauty remained in the student's memory as permanent furniture of his mind. Decades later, he would try to make a stopover at Constantinople, to see for himself, only to be told that there didn't seem to be an airport at Constantinople—of course: it's called Istanbul now, isn't it?

'That young man who got off the tram from Enmore—if I had to describe him in one word, the word would be 'tribal'. He belonged to one of the big tribes of Sydney and found his schooling, his society, his friendships and his sense of meaning within that tribe. At the same time he felt intensely Australian; but he felt this tribally. In one of his books he would recount how this tribal identity had received its first challenge at his initial Latin I lecture, when he learnt the name of a dark-haired vivacious girl across the room: Myfanwy. 'Myfanwy', he wrote, 'a strange name I had

never heard before, so different from the Eileens and Ireces and Kathleens of my boyhood'. It seemed to tell him, he reflected, that he was that day taking a step outside the tribe where, until then, he had lived, moved and had his being. The same Myfanwy would appear in a later book of his where he would record that her family home had been the first place he had ever seen a large private stock of books; and he remembered how the first volume of the collected Swift had been missing from that wall of books; obviously someone was reading it. (He also remembered how they sat on the floor, listening to long-playing records of Shakespeare: how charming it sounds now.)

'So let this catalytic Myfanwy stand for all those transformations of members of other tribes (and of none) who impacted here on our boy from Enmore, challenging, enticing, correcting and extending him. From them he learnt that not all wisdom resided in his own tribe; that other tribes had wisdoms of their own, different perhaps, but nonetheless authentic. So he learnt the foundational lesson of Australian pluralism; respect for other points of view. In later life, he would think this pluralism to be the most important thing he learnt here.

'Not that he ever abandoned his own tribe. Far from it. In those years he and his tribespeople were trying out new ways of being Australian Catholics. A decade before the event, the themes and meanings which historians call the Vatican II era were already being test-run here at the University of Sydney: the Bible placed at the centre of liturgy, theology and spiritual worship 'in a language understood of the people' (to borrow an Anglican phrase); the love of God replacing the fear of God as the dynamic of moral choice; a morality of striving for justice rather than a morality of guilt; a recognition of the rights of conscience and religious freedom; acknowledging the brotherliness of other churches and the authenticity of other intellectual traditions; multiculturalism inside the church; the freeing of lay intelligence and the slow erosion of clerical control. It was history in the making, in those years, here at the University. Today, when Taliban Catholicism is in the ascendancy, it is impossible to think of those

years without finding oneself murmuring, with Wordsworth:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive  
But to be young was very heaven.

‘One further thing: it allowed us time to become writers. *Honi Soit* provided what every wannabe writer needs: space to fill and colleagues in support. Virginia Woolf said that she learnt to write by grinding out reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Our *TLS* was *Honi Soit*. I remember a contemporary at Melbourne University telling me that he intended to become a leading Australian intellectual; so he wasn’t going to write for student publications; because when he became a star, enemies would dig out his juvenilia and hit him with them. Even then, I knew he was misguided: you must walk before you can run. (Truth to tell, fifty years later, he never became known for his running.) Floreat *Honi Soit*.

‘One story from my own year as editor. Addressing freshers in Orientation Week, the Student Representative Council President, in later life a Liberal Party powerbroker, got carried away; he told them, ‘An entrance certificate to the University is not a licence to commit sin’. The next week, a letter in *Honi Soit*: “Would you please advise me what the correct licence is, where it can be obtained, and how much it costs?”.’

So for my generation, the University of Sydney proved to be a gymnasium of intellect and spirit.

**Andrew Riemer**, academic, translator, literary editor and critic, whose titles include *The Habsburg Café*, *America with Subtitles*, and *Sandstone Gothic*, represented the graduates of the 1960s. He said:

‘From 1956 to 1959, I spent four marvellous years as a student in the Faculty of Arts. They may not have seemed quite so marvellous, it is true, had I not wasted the previous two years in a depressing, ill-advised and utterly futile attempt to pass the first year of Medicine. But my time in the Faculty left me with far more inspiring memories. I received what I can see in retrospect

was a fine liberal education. It was, admittedly, formal and impersonal; the people who taught me often seemed remote, unapproachable. But I revelled in the freedom which that remoteness and impersonality gave me. From the perspective of later times, the academic climate of those days may seem irresponsible. We had few obligations to fulfil before the insane cramming sessions just prior to the annual examinations. That gave us, however, the inestimable gift of time to waste—in Manning House, at the films in the Union Hall, and in all manner of non-academic pursuits. Yet there was time, too, for talk—often endless, no doubt jejune discussions of politics, art, literature, music. We had time to read, copiously and indiscriminately, books that would never appear on any syllabus. In short, we had the leisure to discover, if we were so minded, something about ourselves.

‘I remember the people who taught me with great affection. There were, of course, bores and incompetents among them. But their failings and shortcomings paled in comparison to the many who were true scholars, who had something vital to say to us, no matter how much some of us might have resented the chore of turning up to lectures, listening and taking (or pretending to take) notes.

‘Many of these people are, sadly, no longer with us. Some of you may think it churlish of me to mention only one name, but time prevents me from doing anything else. The person I have in mind did not teach English Literature, which became my specialty, but Modern History. He was Ernst Bramsted, Dr Bramsted as he was always called, the first European intellectual I encountered, a refugee (like me) from the horrors of twentieth-century Europe. Despite his almost impenetrable accent, he held most of us spellbound. A few weeks ago I was reading the memoirs of the historian Eric Hobsbawm, and as I followed the fortunes of that European intellectual (perhaps the last in a long line) the image of Dr Bramsted in that dusty, steeply raked lecture room almost half a century ago rose in my mind’s eye.

‘Nostalgia is a dangerous drug, to be resisted at all costs.

Nevertheless, when I was on the other side of the fence, as it were, during my years as a member of the Department of English, and as the bureaucrats and bean-counters strengthened their stranglehold on most aspects of academic life, I came to realise how privileged my contemporaries and I had been. And I also realised that present-day undergraduates, despite the allegedly responsible way that they are required to jump through one academic hoop after another every five minutes, are receiving an education of sorts, certainly, but not the humane, liberal education of my undergraduate days, an education capable of producing thinkers with independent minds, which alone justifies, in my opinion, the existence of the Faculty of Arts.'

**Susan Wyndham**, journalist, feature writer, recipient of the German Grant for Journalism in 2002 and author of *An Eloquent Sufficiency*, spoke for the graduates of the 1970s. She said:

'At a dinner held at the University several years ago, I gave a talk to the graduating class of my old eastern suburbs 'girls' school. I told them that university was a different world from school, less protected, less restricted, and as stimulating as you allowed it to be. I revealed that here I had discovered American literature, cappuccinos, and people from the western suburbs. It was, I said, four years well invested. All that remains true but my attachment goes a bit deeper. I may be the only one here who had an entirely free university education. I don't think it made me value the experience any less. But it enabled me to do an honours degree, with a year off after third year travelling and working in Europe.

'I started out doing English, French, Modern History and Government. I dropped Government, despite lecturers such as Henry Mayer and, occasionally, Donald Horne, when I realised there were better political minds than mine. And History went because my classes were held in an icy room in the beautiful old Quad building, where it sometimes felt as if we were living in the fourteenth century. With no wars or student fees to protest about, it was a fairly apolitical period. We had to make do with the

political economy students occupying the Vice-Chancellor's office until they decided to go to the beach instead. And my friend Helen once had a heated argument with Tony Abbott over abortion. I won't bother telling you who was on which side.

Culturally, the place was vibrant. The talent at Sydney University Dramatic Society included Neil Armfield, Dennis Watkins and David Marr, and I saw some bitingly clever theatre.

'As a budding journalist I did some work for the *Union Recorder*, the less confronting of the campus newspapers in the days when *Honi Soit* was run by the separatist feminists. My first book review was published in the *Recorder*. I'd been in London the previous year when the tabloid newspapers were dominated by the trial of Conservative MP Jeremy Thorpe for conspiring to murder his alleged lover, a male model called Norman Scott (he was found not guilty). My diligent slaving over the case made me the office expert and I got to review Thorpe's book.

'So my time here has had a direct and concrete impact on my life, especially in the past seven years since my career as a journalist unexpectedly swung right back to literature. After a stint as the *Australian's* New York correspondent, I came back to be literary editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and now I write mainly about books, writers and publishing. As literary editor I reconnected with many of my old English lecturers as book reviewers—people such as Penny Gay, Margaret Harris, Dame Leonie Kramer, Elizabeth Webby, Michael Wilding. I was able to give them deadlines. Andrew Riemer, who had lectured to me so eloquently on Shakespeare, became the *Herald's* chief book reviewer, and I've had the pleasure of a continuing education through many conversations about books with him. Don Anderson's seminar on American literature had set me on a lifetime course of reading—the *New Yorker* writer and novelist Renata Adler was my great discovery—and another seminar he gave on James Joyce's *Ulysses* put me in that smallish club of people who enjoy and even vaguely understand the book. Like Andrew, he is one of our most erudite and prolific reviewers, and neither of them ever misses a deadline.

‘Several of my French teachers are here tonight. They didn’t quite manage to make me fluent in French but they forged my enduring love of the language and culture, and they gave me my best friend. Helen Jenkins and I met in a second year French class taught with panache by Ross Steele. We have stayed the closest of friends for 25 years even though she became a lawyer and earned much more money than I did. Another classmate who wisely took French seriously has invited me to stay in one of her four houses in Provence. I highly recommend taking French.

‘Sometimes it seems as though all roads lead back to Sydney University and I could talk at length about the personal and professional connections I have here. I’ve had some wonderful evenings here at dinners and at talks by people such as Clive James and Jeffrey Smart, and in particular at poetry readings by the actor and old boy John Bell. So my memories of examinations in this hall have almost been obliterated. But it was only last week, almost 23 years since I was a student, that I took a walk along the path I used to take most days, past Fisher Library, the Brennan Building where I had French classes, Manning House where I drank cappuccinos, and the Woolley Building where I did English. Surprisingly little had changed. ‘Thomas Mallory’ and *Morte d’Arthur* were still written on the blackboard in lecture hall N395 of Woolley. Many of the same names were on the doors. But they were joined by the names of three of Australia’s most acclaimed writers, Kate Grenville, John Tranter and Drusilla Modjeska. Lucky students who encounter them.

‘Manning has had a bit of a face-lift. The coffee shop is now called Café tra Baci—coffee between kisses—which I think the engineering students must find a bit effete. And I suppose lattes and macchiatos have replaced cappuccinos. The student clubs now include a Buffy Society and the *Union Recorder* was hard to find. But *Honi Soit*—an issue devoted to religion – didn’t look as intimidating as it used to. ‘That little visit, and being here tonight, fill me with gratitude for a time that helped to form my way of making sense of the world and gave me an extended community that continues to enrich my life.’



**Marion Potts**, director of over 30 plays, notably with the Sydney Theatre Company, conference curator for the National Playwrights' Centre, and member of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, spoke extempore for the graduates of the 1980s. She saw the University as 'a thoroughly inspiring place to be'. Being among a group of talented and like-minded people had allowed her to articulate her aspirations. She remained grateful that Sydney academics allowed her to drink from the fountain of knowledge. In a dangerous political and economic climate, she said, she hoped that 'we can safeguard this sense of the collegial and our respect for knowledge ... and keep this [Faculty] as a repository of knowledge and expertise'.

**Jack Manning Bancroft**, a first year Arts student undertaking Media Studies and holder of the inaugural Australia and New Zealand indigenous scholarship, representing the present generation of Arts students, spoke for graduates to come. He was thoroughly enjoying the challenge of learning new concepts and ideas. He affirmed his belief in the importance of 'challenging people's concepts and values'.

**Angus Martin**, Emeritus Professor of French Studies and Arts Association President, closed the evening. He said 'the need to promote the interests of the Faculty of Arts, and the relevance of a humanist tradition in an increasingly diverse and competitive tertiary sector, resonate even more strongly in this Jubilee year than they did in 1953'.