

## LAUNCH OF *ROBBERY UNDER ARMS*

HIGH COURT OF AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA

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*Paul Eggert*

As general editor of the Academy Editions of Australian Literature series, I'm used at our launches to giving a short speech of thanks to the supporters of the series. I do that of course. I thank first, and thank warmly, Justice Kirby who has done a fine job with his verbal champagne in launching the good ship *Robbery*. I thank too the principal sponsor of the series the Australian Academy of the Humanities, together with the publisher the University of Queensland Press, and also the Australian Research Council and the Government of Canada for their financial support. I'd particularly like to thank my own institution, the University of NSW at the Defence Force Academy and colleagues there for consistent support for the Academy Editions project over many years. The English program at ADFA is well known around Canberra.

And I thank for his wonderful generosity the private owner of the Kelly Gang armour that we see here this afternoon. I can't describe the strange pleasure, the thrill, it gives me to see it here in the High Court at a launch of a bushranging novel by a High Court judge. It's not Ned Kelly's armour. This armour was worn at Glenrowan 127 years ago by Kelly Gang member Joe Byrne. I am glad it's Joe Byrne's armour we have today. It's more appropriate than Ned's. Joe Byrne was the scribe of the famous Jerilderie Letter in 1879. He edited Ned Kelly's voice, Kelly's account of his life, and they tried in vain to get it published. Elizabeth and I were luckier. We edited the voice of Boldrewood's fictional bushranger Dick Marston and we *have* got it published. And for the first time since 1882 in an unabridged form. Neither of us got shot in the cause as poor Joe did, although we'd both have to admit we took some pain along the way.

We see here the ninth title in this series that started in 1992. Sometimes I scratch my head and wonder how we've managed it. Many balls have had to be kept in the air

simultaneously to keep a series like this going when clearly it was going to be anything but a money spinner.

One of the things that *has* kept it going has been the camaraderie and shrewd advice I've had as general editor from my fellow members of the Editorial Board: Harold Love, Virginia Blain, Chris Tiffin and Elizabeth Webby. I'd also thank Craig Munro from the Press, Bruce Moore from the Australian National Dictionary Centre and John Byron from the Academy. The series typesetter Caren Florance does a highly skilled job for us right here in Canberra. There is no one who sets scholarly editions in Australia better than she.

I don't know how many thousands of individual pieces of information there are in this volume, but you'll appreciate that we received assistance from many scholars, librarians and our own postgraduate students and part-time research assistants along the way: they are all thanked in the volume's Acknowledgements but this afternoon I'd like to mention Roger Osborne, Therese Weber, Elizabeth Morrison, Tessa Wooldridge, Susan Cowan, Lesley Banson, Philippa Wicks, Jenny Huntley, Jane Rankin, Phill Berrie and Jennifer Berrie. As I'm the general editor whose job it is to keep my editors honest, I needed someone for this volume to keep *me* honest: for this I thank Alan Brissenden, pioneering Boldrewood scholar in Adelaide and Lin Vasey, a specialist scholarly edition copy-editor in London.

The production values that the series has been able to maintain are pretty remarkable given the difficult climate for scholarly publishing in Australia. I say that because I want to thank you too in advance for deciding to buy a copy. I believe the Press has only printed 150 copies of the hardback and we have nine or ten of them here tonight for sale. It's a rare book in the making. There are brochures as well. And a discount. What more incentive do you need?

Seriously though, I make this shameless plug because the Press needs supporting so that scholarly ventures like the Academy Editions series can continue to be commissioned and prosper. There's a paperback as well, and it's a lovely production too.

I said this is the ninth title. In fact 2005 and 2006 have been bumper years for the Academy Editions of Australian Literature. In 2005 volume 1 of *The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore 1887-1929*, ed. Jennifer Strauss, was released, with launches in (appropriately) Wagga Wagga by Rodney Hall and in Melbourne by Stuart McIntyre.

This seventh title in the Academy Editions was followed earlier this year by the eighth, Richard Fotheringham's splendid edition of *Australian Plays for the Australian Stage 1834-1899*. A mammoth volume, it received appropriately stagey launches in Brisbane (by Justice Margaret McMurdo) and at NIDA in Sydney by Aubrey Mellor), with actors performing readings from each of the nine plays. In some cases these voices hadn't been heard for a hundred years or more.

*Robbery Under Arms* is the ninth, as I said, and the tenth, volume 2 of the Mary Gilmore *Complete Verse*, is due out next year. There are people slaving away on the proofs at Monash as I speak. Or, if they are not, they should be!

Neither Elizabeth nor I originally intended to edit this massive tome. But we've both learnt a lot about Boldrewood, about how his contemporaries read serialised novels and Empire classics, and about colonial Australia in general. When the first copy arrived and I opened the parcel I was reminded why we stuck to the job. It was a great feeling that has come home again to me this afternoon.

Thank you all for coming along to help us celebrate this latest edition in the Academy Editions series. The dedicated people responsible for organising the launch are Christine Barnicoat at the Academy of the Humanities and Shirley Ramsay and Jo Muggelton in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at ADFA. I thank them and I thank staff here at the High Court for their assistance, in particular Chris doogan, Joe Pelle and their colleagues.

Do salute Joe Byrne before you go. First though Elizabeth wishes to say a few words.