

Introduction to Food for Afterthought

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As the guest editor of the present issue of *Coolabah* (No. 5, 2011), entitled *Food for Afterthought*, I have had the honour and pleasure of dealing with a series of challenging essays derived from the congress *Food for Thought*, held from 1st to 5th February 2010 at the University of Barcelona. This event was organised by the Australian Studies Centre of the University of Barcelona, Spain, together with the Centre for Peace and Social Justice of the University of Southern Cross, Lismore, Australia, directed by Dr Susan Ballyn and Dr Baden Offord respectively. Their commitment and work front and backstage both in Barcelona as well as in Australia are responsible for the range and depth of this international conference. Indeed, *Food for Thought* forms part of a cycle of congresses on Australian Studies that started out commuting between Australia and Spain, but since 2008 have had Barcelona as their one and only venue, without losing their original international and interdisciplinary appeal and objective.

In line with this broad focus, the 2010 edition of the cycle gathered an international group of scholars from different academic backgrounds who exchanged professional expertise and points of view on a great variety of topics, thematically linked as 'food for thought'. Nearly fifty papers were read in single panel sessions, of which nine were key notes by renowned intellectuals—Bill Ashcroft, John Dowd, Lucy Frost, Marcia Langton, Gloria Montero, Baden Offord, Cynthia vanden Driesen, Terri-ann White with Joan London, and Adrien Wing. A special note should be made of the presence of Indigenous-Australian subject matter in the congress, addressed by 40% of the delegates as Bill Ashcroft calculated, showing that the field of Indigenous Studies is at the thriving centre of Australian academic attention. Therefore, I would especially like to acknowledge Dr Marcia Langton's presence at, and contribution to *Food for Thought*.

All congress delegates received an invitation to rework their papers into journal-length articles incorporating the comments and feedback they had received during the event, and submit them for publication in a double-blind peer-reviewed volume. Nearly half responded, and the result of their effort is the present *Coolabah* issue, *Food for Afterthought*, which mostly elaborates on material presented at the congress, although two contributions (Maccallum, Offord) represent completely new material. To cater for this quantity and variety, the *Coolabah* review board was expanded accordingly. I

would like to thank all our contributors and peer reviewers for their time and effort to make the publication of this selection of essays possible.

Organising these essays into discrete blocks for publication proves delicate and somewhat at odds with the boundary-crossing spirit of the congress. 'Food for thought' as a scholarly theme lends itself to literal as well as figurative interpretations, and contributions have played along this continuum. Some contributions take food as their point of departure for academic research and assessment, be they reflections on agriculture, cooking, herbalism, political activism or philosophy (Avila e.a., Brien, Camps & Grau, Llauradó, Maccallum, Serra, Wessel). Others consider food as a basic ingredient of the literary entourage, tracing and analysing the role it plays in different genres of fiction (Alonso, Holden, Rahbek, Morera de la Vall, Phillips). A last group uses the conference theme to produce food for thought in an abstract sense, provoking reflection on a variety of themes relating to the Humanities; they address linguistics, music history, world literature, Indigenous studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies and anthropology, and are not limited to Australia's geographical scope (Baumer & van Rensburg, Bonastre, Bosch, Conway, Everett, Gibson, Mallari, Offord, Seguro, vanden Driesen). Yet, connections among these three groups of texts are also easily established, be they geographical, cultural, political etc., which would justify any other kind of regrouping.

Following up on the interdisciplinary and transcultural character of the congress, it seems logical therefore to serve the articles written for this volume non-hierarchically as a kind of buffet in which each can make their own pick and enjoy those combinations of texts that result most nourishing to them. The essays come provided with abstracts, so that one can have a preliminary taste before reading, and make the most convenient choices so as to fill their plate with food for afterthought. Please be our guest and savour the flavours and textures of rich thinking.

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Martin Renes holds a PhD in English by the University of Barcelona and is assistant lecturer for the literature section of its Department of English. His main area of interest is the study of film and novels from a postcolonial point of view. He dedicated his minor thesis to contemporary mainstream fiction dealing with the cultural interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, and his doctoral thesis explored the uncanny aspects of rewriting Australianness through Indigenous literature. He is vice-director of the University of Barcelona's interdisciplinary *Observatory: Australian Studies Centre*.