

“Performing 1971: Dorothy Hewett’s *The Chapel Perilous*”

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 19 April 2016, 4.15 – 5.30pm

Speaker

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HRC Conference Rm 128, A.D. Hope Bldg 14, ANU



In a preface to the first published edition of Dorothy Hewett’s *The Chapel Perilous*, she notes of its heroine: “For many young women Sally Banner is the first modern liberated feminist in our literature: I believe this is an historical and literary accident” (Hewett, xix). In this paper I investigate the performative moment of *The Chapel Perilous*, which premiered at the Fortune Theatre in Perth on 21 January, 1971, in order to think further about the relationship between this complexly explosive play and its explosive times. 1971 is at the apex of the period described by historian Donald Horne as Australia’s *Time of Hope*: the year when the new social movements, including feminism and sexual liberation, gained mainstream consensus for transformative political and cultural change. I tease out the ways in which such an ahistorical play, with its mythic structures, inter-medial experimentation and iconoclastic theatricality, becomes history, and precisely performative history, in so far as we can conceive such. Simultaneously, we can ask how this play represents, perhaps oppositely, a “literary accident”. What might we mean by the accidental literary? Developing these ideas for an essay in the *Reading Australia* project, this paper situates *The Chapel Perilous* in a complex of debates about the contemporary teaching canon, at once contesting and making the recent past for literary and performative history.

Associate Professor Moore is Associate Professor in the English Program at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, ADFA, University of New South Wales and her main research interests are in Australian literature, broadly defined, with a specific focus on the history of book censorship and literary publishing. See website for additional information. She is the author of *The Censor’s Library: Literary Censorship in Twentieth-Century Australia* (forthcoming with University of Queensland Press) and co-author (with Marita Bullock) of *Banned in Australia*, an electronic bibliography of literary titles banned in Australia from 1901-1973 hosted by AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource at www.austlit.edu.au. More information on website

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