

Sydney Studies in English 36

Special Edition: The Texts of Contemporary English Studies

This volume of *Sydney Studies in English* is concerned with the changing nature of the text for the study of English. It was not that long ago that, even in the midst of debates about canons, canon formations and ‘the great tradition’, the object of English study remained unquestioned: it was that reassuringly familiar thing beside you on the desk—a book. However, just as the limits of the orthodox canon were expanded and largely obliterated over the last 30 years, so too the forms of the object of analytical interest for English Studies underwent a significant change—a change that is reflected in the following essays. Here, distinguished Shakespearean scholar Penny Gay turns her attention to the bard as filtered through the forms and styles of the pre-War Hollywood musical; Ben Juers explores the Modernist and Surrealist underpinnings of slapstick in George Herriman’s mid-century comic strip *Krazy Kat*; Julian Murphet considers the novelistic dimensions of David Simon’s award-winning television series *The Wire*; Luke Harley engages with poetry rendered in a language that not only aspires to the condition of music, but requires a cultural and aesthetic sense of that music for its full poetic character to be realised; Rebecca Johnke analyses Peter Weir’s early *The Cars That Ate Paris* in the context of the Australian Gothic and conceptions of the uncanny; Peter Kirpatrick considers the aesthetics and cultural role of the retrieved historical form of the recitation piece and popular ballad; Mark Byron takes up the problematic issue of what actually constitutes a definitive literary text in the digital age; and I consider narrative and narrational aspects of the popular western film in John Ford’s epic *The Searchers*.

The essays in this volume offer theoretically informed but practical demonstrations of ways in which English Studies might engage with textual forms that challenge traditional conceptions of the discipline. Together, these essays represent an affirmation of the idea that the view from English Studies provides its own particular insights on a variety of textual forms at a time when the object of English study, in every sense of the term, remains as contentious as ever.

David Kelly