This special edition of the Crossroads journal is a reflection of the work presented at the Perspectives on Power conference, held at The University of Queensland in November 2011. The conference sought to explore the various manifestations of a concept that underlies much of the scholarship undertaken within the arts, humanities and social sciences: power. As Foucault says, power infuses every aspect of life: it is the driving force behind historical happenings; the raison d’être of politicos, economists and international relations experts; the subject whose expressions adherents of cultural studies seek to map; a problem for the minds of philosophers and religionists to unravel. Even when not expressly acknowledged, the investigation of power invariably drives contemporary academic explorations, as scholars seek to understand how it is deployed by particular individuals, groups and systems within the context of specific spaces and mediums. For this reason, the concept of power enabled this conference to provide a forum for an empowering interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among postgraduate and early career researchers.

The conference brought together nearly a hundred delegates from a multiplicity of fields, including: political theory; history, both modern and ancient; religion; philosophy; psychology; classics; literature; music; international relations; education; and media and cultural studies. Our four fabulous keynote speakers, Professor Stephen Bell (The University of Queensland), Professor Alan McKee (Queensland University of Technology), Dr Clare Corbould (Monash University) and Dr Michael Ondaatje
(University of Newcastle), reflected this diversity of perspectives. The panel sessions similarly examined a variety of themes that interweave with questions of power and agency, such as: nationalism; violence; militarism; identity; technology; morality; race; gender; body politics; and the methodologies through which these issues can be explored.

We would like to acknowledge the support of many people who were integral to making the Perspectives on Power conference a success. The conference would not have been possible without the work of the conference convenors: Irena Larking, Gemmia Burden, Jack Doig, Jon Piccini, Alana Piper, Chris Salisbury, Ana Stevenson, Hollie Thomas, Kate Walton and Andrew Wiltshire. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the academic and administrative staff of the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics. In regards to this issue of the Crossroads journal edition, we are indebted to the generosity and help of editor-in-chief Julie Washington. We would also like to thank our contributors for their tireless efforts in revising, redrafting and rethinking their papers for this journal.

The following articles all represent longer versions of papers given at the conference, and embody the breadth of research presented there. As a group the papers represent a journey through different spaces (from sixteenth-century churches to twenty-first-century courtrooms) and mediums (including novels, music, billboards and beauty practices) where power can be enacted. By reflecting on issues of gender, class, race, religion or nationality, they also all underscore the power of identity, both personal and communal.

The first selection of articles address how power can be negotiated when individuals occupy an apparently disempowered position, with Helen Fordham conducting a Foucauldian analysis of the strategic transformation of the discourses produced during the trial of David Hicks that was used to secure his release. Di Roy offers a similarly intensive case study by applying the technique of conversation analysis to a broadcast by the ABC to show how fatalistic attitudes towards indigenous health problems are reproduced within the context of a radio interview as a result of the unequal distribution of power between interviewer and interviewee.

From the subject position of the individual, we move to investigations of the power of the nation-state and national identity. Sheilagh Ilona O’Brien investigates the construction of Afrikaner national identity in the early twentieth century, examining how the Afrikaners invoked and reinterpreted history to form a cohesive and powerful national identity that would shape South Africa throughout the century. Robert O’Shea similarly explores the power, or lack of power, of the office of the Governor-General to influence the construction of Australian identity through the annual Vice-Regal public address.

As the next papers demonstrate, issues of State are often closely aligned with the politics of religion. Irena Larking investigates the transformation of English parish churches during Mary I’s counter-Reformation, discussing how these changes signified a gradual shift in power between the individuals who followed Protestant and Catholic worship practices. Moving to a contemporary setting, Eva Leileiyanti’s paper considers how billboards promoting candidates in Indonesia tend to position them ambiguously within the Islamist and nationalist strands of politics.
Power also operates through different cultural forms. Helen English examines the changing power dynamic between the working and middle classes in the realm of public entertainment in the small town of Newcastle, N. S. W., during the late nineteenth century. In the context of post-Soviet Russia, Maria Davidenko considers how media in the increasingly capitalist economy came to promote normalised beauty practices which purportedly sought to empower women. Both articles draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who has been particularly influential in shaping discussions regarding power and culture.

In demonstrations of the power of the page, our last two papers explore construction of gender within particular works of fiction, by two oft-neglected women authors: of the twentieth century Australian author Amy Witting and the nineteenth century American author, Lillie Devereux Blake. Colleen Smee investigates how Witting’s fiction negotiates the disempowerment experienced by Australian women in the domestic sphere of the mid-twentieth century. Ana Stevenson explores literature as a means of nineteenth-century social reform, considering how Blake promoted the ideologies of the women’s rights movement in her writings.

Together, these articles present an over-arching examination of people, power and places, giving insight into their different manifestations throughout the disciplines of the humanities. We are very proud to present to you these various perspectives on power.