

Occasional Address
Royal Exhibition Building, 12 December 2018, 11.00am

Professor Barbara Creed
Faculty of Arts 2018 T.G. Tucker Medalist

Presiding Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, Graduands, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted and privileged to be speaking here this morning. I would like to begin by congratulating all graduands on this impressive achievement – truly a milestone. When I was invited to present this address, I thought about my own graduation in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University in the sixties. I also thought about the importance of the arts – of literature, poetry, painting, film, history, philosophy and the media – in helping us make sense of our lives, our journey in life, and the decisions we make.

This leads me to the main topic – the importance of one’s journey in life. We might all have different goals but we are all journeying – travelling along different roads, lanes, paths, tracks, byways, boulevards and highways. I am not just talking about physical journeys, but about emotional, philosophical, intellectual and spiritual journeys. From Odysseus to Joan of Arc – even to Little Red Riding Hood – we are all on a voyage. Here I would like to tell you a short anecdote about a very small journey of my own as a new graduate.

I took up a teaching position at Koo-wee-rup High School in south-east Victoria. Home of the Bunurong people, ‘Koo-wee-rup’ I was told meant ‘black fish swimming’. I soon realised its significance. The area was very swampy.

In the 60s a new fashion object was just becoming very popular with women – boots. So I bought myself a pair of knee-high boots. I thought might help in negotiating the muddy terrain. One morning, I was walking down the corridor in my new boots to teach the class of 4CR boys. They were a rather rowdy group and I was their only female teacher as I had managed to keep them fairly quiet – even interested in what they were learning. Suddenly, my journey was interrupted. I was called to the Principal’s office. It turned out that he objected to my boots. He said if I wore boots I would lose all control over 4CR boys. I protested. I even said I thought the boots might – on the contrary – help keep discipline. In the end we agreed to compromise. I could wear my new boots outside the classroom but I would have to leave them at the door and change into shoes before entering. Although a new teacher, I did not want to give in. Then fate intervened. The Year 12 results came out. My literature group had done extremely well. Almost all had gained honours. So the Principal called me back into his office, expressed his delight over the results, and said that perhaps he had been too hasty and I could wear my boots after all. I am happy to report that 4CR boys continued to behave – even better than usual. So perhaps I was right about the boots.

In the Arts, almost all narrative forms – novels, films, paintings and plays – create characters who are journeying. From the travels of Buddha, *The Pilgrims Progress* and *The Canterbury Tales* to *The Wizard of Oz* and *Rabbit Proof Fence* these tales are about coming to a crossroads, usually a symbolic crossroads, where the main character must make an important and transformative decision. This is the key point – transformation.

As I lecture in film studies, I know one of the most important and socially-aware film genres is the 'road movie' – a popular subject with film students.

- The first *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979) film started out being a hero story about injustice and went on to explore Australia's masculine car culture and anxieties about social breakdown, and the energy crisis of the 70s and early 80s. These themes are incredibly topical today particularly in relation to the Anthropocene and global warming.
- *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) started out as a story of two women, best friends, who decide to go away for a fun weekend without their husbands. The film became so controversial in the United States some husbands banded together to try and stop their wives going to see it! Along the way it explored gender, and the empowerment of women. I could see why the husbands were worried back then. The film also showed the importance of keeping a sense of humour. Recently, Geena Davis, one of the stars, discussed the role the film played in the empowerment of women & the development of the #MeToo movement today.
- *Popeye*: One of my favourite road films directed by Kirsten Tan, *Popeye* is set in Thailand. It tells the story of a famous but depressed architect who encounters an elephant he grew up with as a child. He buys Popeye & decides to take him back to their country town. As they walk the highways, they develop a close emotional bond. As we watch, we see that the film is also about the extinction of species. For Popeye is alone – there are no other elephants to be seen.

The arts continue to explore pressing social issues, many encapsulated in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, of 1948, and new ones such as the rights of people with a mental illness or a disability – also the rights of other species, the environment and Mother Earth. Peter Singer, a Professorial Fellow in the Arts Faculty, wrote an important book called: *How Are We To Live?* This is the **key** question for you. Once again, congratulations. And of course, the other most important thing is that, like *Thelma and Louise*, you keep a sense of humour as you travel forward!

Professor Barbara Creed
December 12, 2018.

Faculty of Arts 2018 T.G. Tucker Medal for Outstanding Achievement

Chancellor,

Professor Barbara Creed has achieved a distinguished record in scholarship, leadership and teaching during her career at the University of Melbourne.

She has held positions as Head of the School of Culture and Communication, and inaugural Associate Dean of Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace, and in 2015 was recognised as a Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor for pre-eminence in research and teaching.

Professor Creed's research has been in the areas of film and media, feminist studies, gender studies and social justice issues. She was a key figure in the establishment of film studies as an academic discipline in Australia and taught the first University courses on feminist film theory, gender and psychoanalytic theory. She is the author of six monographs, including the internationally acclaimed, 'The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis' (Routledge 1993).

Professor Creed's recent research is in the field of human-animal studies, and she is co-founder and director of the Human Rights and Animal Ethics Research Network funded by the Faculty of Arts.

Professor Creed is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and past President of the Australian Screen Studies Association. She was recipient of the inaugural Rainbow Media Award for the promotion of sexuality and gender equality in the media. Her books and articles have been translated into 10 languages, and she is a member of many international and national boards, including the Melbourne International Film Festival, the Board of Writers Week, and the judging panel of the United Nations Australian Media Peace Awards.

Professor Creed has been a film critic for Radio National and The Age Newspaper, and has presented keynote lectures at international institutions including the Universities of Paris, Oxford, Manchester, Utrecht, Frankfurt, Hanoi, and UCLA.

Chancellor, I present to you **PROFESSOR BARBARA CREED** for the Faculty of Arts T.G. Tucker Medal for Outstanding Achievement.