

Ms Cate Blanchett

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon Cate Blanchett by the Chancellor Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO at a special ceremony held in the Great Hall at 5.30pm on Saturday 10 November 2012.

Citation

Presented by the Dean, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Professor Duncan Ivison:

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to commend Cate Blanchett to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa). Her work as an actor and director, on stage and screen, has become a global signature of Australian culture, inspired audiences around the world and enhanced the future of the performing arts in our country, as a means of both entertainment and education.

She has revealed the hidden complexities of modern society through roles as a journalist tackling the drugs trade, and as an embattled inner-city teacher. She has also explored high society: playing historical royalty as Elizabeth I, Hollywood royalty as Katharine Hepburn, and even showed us a glimpse of elven royalty as Galadriel in the trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings* films.

Cate Blanchett studied Economics and Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne before travelling overseas. After returning to Australia, she studied at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. On graduating in 1992, she appeared in several Sydney Theatre Company productions, then after a series of roles in Australian TV shows, made her international film debut in 1997 with a supporting role in *Paradise Road*, directed by Sydney alumnus Bruce Beresford. Her first leading film role, also in 1997, was the title role of Lucinda in the adaptation of Peter Carey's novel *Oscar and Lucinda*.

Her first major international cinema role came in the following year in *Elizabeth*, for which she won a BAFTA and a Golden Globe award for Best Actress, and an Academy Award nomination. Her many subsequent accolades include an Academy Award for her role as Katharine Hepburn in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*.

Cate Blanchett has been at the forefront of theatre in Australia for many years, firstly as an actor and more recently as artistic director of the Sydney Theatre Company, in a joint role with her husband, our former student Andrew Upton. Together, they have attracted an array of international artists to Sydney, greatly enriching our city's cultural life. In addition, they have been engaged in 'greening' the wharf home of the Sydney Theatre Company as part of their strong commitment to preserving the environment for future generations of Australians.

Her impact stretches far beyond the entertainment and edification of film-watchers and theatregoers. Since moving back to Australia from the United Kingdom, she has been a powerful advocate for the importance of the arts in education. With her Sydney Theatre Company colleagues, and in partnership with our own Faculty of Education and Social Work, she and Andrew Upton have promoted drama as a powerful medium for improving school students' English and literacy learning.

The innovative 'School Drama' project harnesses the power of drama as a learning tool for Sydney's school children. By placing experienced actors in schools alongside primary school teachers, the program increases teachers' confidence in and capacity to use drama with contemporary children's literature to improve primary students' literacy outcomes.

When discussing 'School Drama' with the ABC last year, Cate Blanchett spoke about the impact of igniting "a sense of wonderment" by bringing a book to life.

As she explains: "You realise how different children are, and [how] they don't always learn in a conventional way. And it's often a left-of-field approach that will open up the important questions that are going to develop that child's personality and their love of learning."

Chancellor, as we stand in this place devoted to uncovering new ways of enriching our knowledge, I present Cate Blanchett for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.