



Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production

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What I would insist upon is the importance of keeping in mind when doing a local or a national case study the wider frame of reference within which any case can be situated. [. . .] Nothing occurs in a vacuum. (Ian Tyrrell, “New Comparisons” 360)

[. . .] people, ideas, and institutions do not have clear national identities. Rather, people may translate and assemble pieces from different cultures. Instead of assuming that something was distinctively American, we might assume that elements of it began or ended somewhere else. We may discover that what people create between national centres provides a promising way to rethink many topics in American history. (David Thelen, “Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons” 3)

[. . .] the study of Australian history in the near future will be less a single focused entity than it has been, and more a form of scholarship that is diffused through various kinds of transnational histories. (Ann Curthoys 142)

Literary studies have changed. (Ross Harvey 127)

A friend of mine who is a well-known writer told me a few years ago that whenever he goes into a library anywhere in the world, the first thing he does is to go to the catalogue and type in his own name in order to see which of his books the

library holds and how they are organized in its collections. I pretended to be surprised by his confession while secretly wanting to admit that I sometimes do the same thing myself. It can be an interesting window on to the structure of the various disciplinary fields in the humanities and how our own work in Australian literary studies fits within them.

I've always thought of myself as a specialist in Australian literary studies but that is not always the way my work appears in library catalogues. My first book, *The Course of Empire*, is described by its library classification as being about eighteenth and nineteenth-century Australian history. It is actually catalogued in the Dewey system at 994. My second book, *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, is said to be about imperialism in English literature with a Dewey number of 823. My third book, *Prosthetic Gods*—in some ways the least literary of the three—came in closer to home with a Dewey number of A820, the number for Australian literature, and with the subject headings of Australian literature and Australian postcolonialism.

When I look at my own work through published bibliographies and electronic databases, something else happens: only about two thirds of what I have published appears there. What disappears, of course, are the chapters in books edited by professional historians or art historians, and the articles published in journals in fields like cultural studies, postcolonial studies and art history. Perhaps this means that I'm not, after all, a specialist in Australian literary studies. Or it could mean that doing Australian literary studies is a much broader activity than we sometimes think.

What this does suggest, in fact, is that as a disciplinary field, Australian literary studies is neither pure nor autonomous: it exists in relation to a series of distinct though overlapping domains that together make up the total field of knowledge production in the humanities. What I want to reflect on in this paper is the current place of Australian literary studies within that broader field. I'm prompted to do this for two reasons, both historical. On the one hand, and especially since the end of the 1990s, I think we've begun to see Australian literary studies in historical perspective, as a discipline whose origins lie in a period that in certain respects we no longer feel to be contemporary. This has to do, among other things, with our changing attitudes to issues of nation, race and gender. On the other hand, many commentators are now saying that for the last ten years or so we have been living through a major reconfiguration in the broader field of knowledge production, pre-eminently in the sciences and technology, but also in the humanities and social sciences. These two historical trends—our sense of the historical boundedness of Australian literary studies, and of the contemporary dynamism of the field of knowledge production in which it sits—prompt a number of questions. What is the place of Australian literary studies within the changing field of knowledge production? Is it—or should it be—moving forward in the

same direction as these broader changes? If so, what are the apparent trends in the field of knowledge production to whose logic Australian literary studies might now be exposed? And what might this mean for Australian literary studies' relation to its own past, to the various scholarly projects that we have undertaken and many of which we are still engaged upon? Does Australian literary studies as we have known it stand to lose or gain by being subject to the new logic of the field of knowledge production? And anyway, do we have a choice?

THE CONTEMPORARY FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

In using this term “the field of knowledge production” I’m alluding to work done over the last ten years in the discipline of social epistemology or, as it is sometimes called, knowledge studies. Simply put, it refers to the relationship between all of the elements, including institutions, disciplines, policies and practices, that make up the structured and structuring field in which knowledge is both conserved and generated. Whether we like it or not—and I’m not entirely sure that I do—this is increasingly the discourse that is coming to structure the field of the possible in research in both the sciences and humanities in Australia. It now pervades the documents and policy statements not only of the Federal Government, but also of our most important research management institution, the Australian Research Council (ARC). One of the key questions we’ll need to explore is how the older language of Australian literary studies, and the kinds of institutions and research projects it has bequeathed to us, might be made to speak to this new language of pro-active research management. I believe that it can, in ways that can take advantage of the enormously stimulating ideas that are currently being proposed, though the translation will not necessarily be easy.

By general consensus, the book that initiated the present debate in knowledge studies is *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*. Written by an international team led by Michael Gibbons, it was published in 1994 and has since been very widely cited in the literature on research management, not only in Britain and the United States, but also in Australia. Gibbons draws much of his evidence from the sciences, and his chapter on the humanities is perhaps the least convincing in his book. Yet he and his colleagues believe that the trends they describe amount to nothing less than a paradigm shift across the entire field of knowledge production.

Perhaps the most influential aspect of Gibbons’ book has been its terminology, which has been widely taken up in the literature. He argues that the traditional form of knowledge production, which he calls Mode 1, is progressively being replaced by a new form, which he calls Mode 2. Whatever reservations we might have about Gibbons’ argument, these terms are actually quite useful for descrip-

tive purposes. Mode 1 is largely the system we know, although it is increasingly, according to Gibbons, a residual formation. It is academic and discipline-based, prefers pure to applied research, and its institutional forms tend to be hierarchical, centered and relatively stable over time. In Mode 1, “individual creativity is emphasized as the driving force of development and quality control operating through disciplinary structures organized to identify and enhance it”; knowledge is “accumulated through the professionalization of specialization largely institutionalized in universities” (9).

Mode 2 is the emergent form of knowledge production and its features are the opposite of of Mode 1. In Mode 2, the universities and the disciplines no longer set the agenda for innovative research: knowledge production is now dispersed outside the academy in broader social contexts; people other than academics take part in it and judge its outcomes; it tends to be applied rather than pure, driven by a series of individual contexts of application; it is inter- or transdisciplinary; it is heterogeneous in its forms of organization and these tend to be transient and dynamic rather than enduring.

Central to Gibbons’ argument is that transdisciplinarity is “the privileged form of knowledge production in Mode 2.” New knowledge emerges not from the core of disciplines, but in the “interstices” between them, the pressure of innovation causing their boundaries to become increasingly “fuzzy” (147). This unsettles not only the authority of disciplines, but also the explanatory power of discipline-specific theories and bodies of knowledge. Gibbons, then, is at once postmodern and post-theoretical, seeing disciplines and the master theories they have built up as outmoded—barriers, in fact, to new knowledge. What comes first is the project and it is that which determines both theory and practice, neither of which can necessarily be carried across whole to the next project, which will generate its own new theory and practice: “Its theoretical-methodological core [. . .] is [. . .] locally driven and locally constituted” (29–30).

In its demand for personnel, too, this new field is highly dynamic, each new problem requiring its own particular cluster of researchers from across the disciplines, no one of which sets the theoretical agenda. Such a field is not best served by enduring institutional arrangements, including discipline-based departments, professional bodies and learned academies. Rather, networks of researchers will form and reform in ever-changing contexts of application. This challenges not only what have been the key institutional sites of disciplinarity in departments and professional bodies, but also what has been, in the humanities at least, an ideal of excellence: the individual researcher writing a monograph. In Mode 2, then, a research career is at once more social and more entrepreneurial, demanding participation in multiple networks and serial collaborations. More important than the monograph will be the symposium on a “hot topic,” bringing together researchers from various knowledge domains, and perhaps resulting in a series of

reports or collaborative publications in more than one medium and with more than one type of audience. The members of a network will soon migrate to different problems, reconfiguring into new networks with other personnel. A discipline, a professional body or a learned academy may be too stable, too inflexible to contribute to this kind of research unless it can become a broker in mobility, or learn itself to network with other institutions.

In reflecting on the kinds of institutional reconfigurations required for Mode 2, Gibbons recognizes that individuals and institutions tend toward inertia. Despite the growing “fuzziness” at their edges, “disciplinary structures are long-term and relatively stable” (149). This inertia is also present in the habitus of our profession. The careers of Mode 1 researchers are often “embedded” in national systems and disciplinary identities (40). For these reasons, Gibbons advocates that governments and research management bodies be pro-active in stimulating Mode 2 characteristics, including the development of dynamic networks, transdisciplinarity and mobility beyond national boundaries. “National institutions,” he argues, “need to be de-centered—to be made more permeable—and governments through their policies can promote change in this direction.” If necessary, governments should “punch holes” in the very institutions they have previously supported (15).

A second influential writer on knowledge studies is the American scholar Julie Thompson Klein. She is the author of two frequently cited books: *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (1990), and *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity* (1996). Although much of what Klein has to say is based on the American academy and on the sciences, her second book, *Crossing Boundaries*, draws extensively upon work in the humanities, includes a major case study on the interdisciplinary history of literary studies, and also refers to a number of Australian examples. Her methodology is wide ranging, including interviews, surveys, ethnography, citation analysis, archival research and bibliometric analysis. I want to look briefly at Klein’s work because, like Gibbons, she offers some extremely useful terms.

The organizing concept of *Crossing Boundaries* is “boundary work.” This is a term that emerged in studies of scientific disciplines in the 1980s and 1990s. It refers to “the composite set of claims, activities and institutional structures that define and protect knowledge practices” (1). Klein’s innovation on previous studies is that she views boundary work positively as well as negatively. That is, instead of emphasizing only the processes of boundary policing, which treat boundary crossing as an anomaly, Klein argues that “the interactions and reorganizations that boundary crossing creates are as central to the production and organization of knowledge as boundary formation and maintenance” (2). The institutional expression of this trend is an historic shift from what she calls the surface to the shadow structures within and between our institutions. Surface structures include the relatively stable organiza-

tional units like discipline-based departments, faculties, learned academies and professional bodies—these are Gibbons' Mode 1 institutions. Klein's argument is that at present new knowledge is most often produced by boundary crossing in the form of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research, and that this tends to be located in the shadow structures—the dynamic, informal networks and collaborations that form beneath and across the surface structures. These networks are Gibbons' Mode 2 institutions. They form what systems theory calls a messy or complex system rather than a neat or simple one (21).

One of the reasons Klein uses interviews, citation analysis and other empirical techniques to map the complex system of Mode 2 is because activities in the shadow structures are not always visible to Mode 1 institutions. This is why some of our own publications in fields like cultural studies, cultural history or feminist studies do not show up in Australian literature bibliographies. Klein makes the point that we need to distinguish between the surface organizational structures of academic life and what we actually do as researchers. Interviews and citation analysis show that in practice “individual faculty members embody [. . .] the complexity of the system” (21). Although we tend to think of disciplinarity in terms of stable boundaries, Klein's evidence suggests that the opposite is true: that “boundaries are [. . .] also permeable membranes” (38). It is in the very nature of humanities disciplines, she argues, that their boundaries are open, their cognitive border zones ragged and ill-defined. Discipline is not a “neat” category: “on closer inspection, disciplines are actually fissured sites comprising multiple strata and influenced by other disciplines” (55). One symptom of this permeability is cross-disciplinary citation, which quantitative analysis reveals to be the rule rather than the exception in the humanities. For example, articles in the two or three most recent issues of *Australian Literary Studies* draw frequently for their key concepts on cultural studies, women's studies and several kinds of history, including urban history, the history of public memory, and the new imperial history. Equally, historians make direct, even foundational contributions to Australian literary studies. I'm thinking, for example, of the work of Richard White and Ros Pressman on travel writing, Martyn Lyons on the history of reading, Richard Nile and David Walker on the history of publishing, Tom Griffiths on nature writing, Hsu-Ming Teo on romance fiction, and feminist historians such as Jill Roe, Kate Darian-Smith, Angela Woollacott and Fiona Paisley on Australian women writers.

A second symptom of boundary permeation is “speciality migration,” which is closely tied to innovation (42). Here is one of Klein's examples: “A member of a French department who was educated in traditional models of reading literary texts may migrate to a new specialism such as interpretive theory or contribute to an established hybrid field such as women's studies or move on to a new hybrid field such as cultural studies” (43). We might think here of Meaghan Morris and Stephen Muecke, both trained in French, who played a pivotal role in introduc-

ing poststructuralism into the humanities in Australia in the 1980s, and have gone on to make major contributions to Australian literary studies, cultural studies and cinema studies. We might think of Paul Eggert, a speciality migrant from the field of scholarly editing, not originally an Australianist, who is now General Editor of the Australian Academy of the Humanities series. French cultural historian Martyn Lyons is General Editor of the History of the Book in Australia Project. And Graeme Turner's frequent observations on Australian literary studies, such as his 1998 keynote address on "Australian Literature and the Public Sphere," are illuminating precisely because of his cross-disciplinary borrowing from the field of cultural studies.

At the conclusion of her book, Klein distances herself from an earlier, utopian form of interdisciplinarity that had sought the collapse of boundaries in the quest for a unified knowledge. In contrast to Gibbons, her preference is for a field in which boundaries are not dissolved, but maintained and at the same time constantly transgressed. Understanding the boundary better, she argues, is likely to produce more informed collaboration, not a wide-scale breakdown of boundaries (74). The term "boundary work" as Klein uses it, then, does not simply mean either the policing of disciplinary boundaries or their collapse, but is meant positively to embrace the sum-total of all boundary work, including boundary crossings, especially between disciplinary neighbours. Drawing on the lessons of interdisciplinary women's studies, Klein advocates what she calls the "professional paradox of being 'both in the disciplines and in opposition to them'"; "scholars [. . .] work with the grain and against it, operating both inside and outside [their] discipline" (119).

THE AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL: INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND RESEARCH NETWORKS

Anyone even passingly familiar with the literature on research management will already have recognized that these ideas from the field of knowledge studies have begun to have a powerful impact in the Australian academy. In this section I want to look briefly at the way these ideas have shaped the rhetoric and research policy of the ARC, since this is the institution that has the most direct role in determining the environment in which we conduct research in Australian literary studies. If we were to sum up the ARC's situation simply, it would be this: that it is, in Gibbons' handy terms, a classic Mode 1 institution rapidly transforming itself by fostering Mode 2 practices, many of which are already present in the shadow structures of our institutions. And two of the definitive Mode 2 issues that have been taken up in recent ARC position papers are inter- or transdisciplinarity and research networks.

The ARC recognizes that the evidence in knowledge studies suggests that advances in both pure and applied research now take place through interdisciplinarity. Yet its own internal administrative structure and assessment processes are still discipline-based. In 1997, it therefore commissioned a review of how it deals with cross-disciplinary applications. The result was the 1999 discussion paper, *Cross-Disciplinary Research*. The paper begins by outlining the standard definitions of interdisciplinarity and surveying the standard texts in the field. These include the 1972 and 1998 OECD reports on *Interdisciplinarity*, and the work of Michael Gibbons and Julie Thompson Klein. While acknowledging that there are some differences of definition, the ARC basically accepts postmodern accounts of knowledge production which identify the “disintegration of knowledge” as a key driver of research. This is manifest in the genesis of hybrid disciplines, new research paradigms, new cross-disciplinary fields arising from particular problems and applications, and from the diffusion of research methodologies and techniques (5). While different disciplines are differently implicated in these activities, citation analysis suggests that they are endemic, with some disciplines being especially permeable to outside influence. Significantly, the ARC regards some fields, including literary studies, history, anthropology and geography, as “intrinsically cross-disciplinary” (6). While it accepts the view that interdisciplinarity drives new knowledge, it does retain one important qualification derived from the 1998 OECD report; namely, that “the researcher who conducts inter-disciplinary research should be ‘an excellent specialist of a discipline’”; again, “highly competent proficiency in a single discipline is the only acceptable basis for inter-disciplinary success” (xii). This puts the ARC paper closer to Klein, who argues for both the retention and crossing of boundaries, than to Gibbons, who implicitly favours their dissolution. While stressing the importance of collaborative networks, the ARC also continues to acknowledge the role of individual researchers. The “defining core” of inter-disciplinarity lies in the process of confrontation between different knowledge paradigms. This confrontation, the ARC insists, “may take place in the mind of an individual researcher” as well as between practitioners in collaborative research” (8–9).

Implicit in the ARC documents is also an understanding that interdisciplinarity means something different in the sciences and the humanities. In the sciences, it does not necessarily mean “punching holes” in disciplines, but collaborating with other disciplines on a project that is not amenable to a single approach. The problems of the Murray-Darling river system, for example, will involve teams of scientists from several disciplines. In the humanities, by contrast, new research actually does punch holes in the disciplines, though it is often the individual researcher who performs the migration. What this means is that the Gibbons model is perhaps more strongly biased toward the sciences, and that Klein’s account is more responsive to the fact that the field of knowledge production is not homogeneous, and that

any predictions of trends should acknowledge these differences across the field.

A survey of currently funded ARC Discovery Projects confirms that the overwhelming majority in the field of Australian literary studies are indeed interdisciplinary, at least in Klein's sense, and even when mainly literary involve some form of comparative, cross-cultural research. Let me cite some figures that convey the extent of boundary work taking place in these projects. I've gone through the grants commencing in 2002 and 2003 respectively, marking them according to four criteria: whether they identify as being about Australian literature; as having an interdisciplinary method; as having a cross-cultural, international or imperial context; or as being purely literary. In the year commencing 2002 there were 719 grants, of which 13 were in Literature Studies. Of those 13, 4 dealt with Australian literature, 9 involved some form of interdisciplinarity, 5 involved some form of cross-cultural comparison and only one was purely literary. Looking just at those in Australian literature, 3 of the 4 were explicitly interdisciplinary and cross-cultural. In the year commencing 2003 there were 921 grants, of which 16 were in Literature Studies. Of those 16, 5 dealt with Australian literature, 11 involved some form of interdisciplinarity, 7 involved some form of cross-cultural comparison, while only 4 were purely literary. Looking again just at those in Australian literature, in 2003, 5 out of 5 involved some kind of interdisciplinary research or cross-cultural comparison. If anything these figures understate the extent of boundary work, since several grants involving substantial literary research are actually listed under categories other than Literature Studies, such as Historical and Cultural Studies.

What these statistics mean is that while we continue to work inside the surface structure of Australian literary studies bequeathed to us by the period of cultural nationalism, the discipline is increasingly being driven by and, at the same time, dispersed into, other, neighbouring forms of scholarship. Although I haven't the space here to characterize individual projects in detail, the chief investigators of currently funded projects involving some form of boundary work are Mary Besemeres, Patrick Buckridge, Ken Gelder, Robert Dixon, Lucy Frost, Helen Gilbert, Ian Henderson, Andrew McCann, Wenche Ommundsen, Kay Schaffer, Meg Tasker, Hsu-Ming Teo, Elizabeth Webby and Gillian Whitlock. These projects are innovative because they involve boundary work across the three major axes that transect the discipline of Australian literary studies as it developed during the cultural nationalist period: that is, they go beyond the national paradigm, placing Australian literary culture in national-comparative, transnational, imperial or global contexts; they go beyond the literary by drawing upon the discourses and in many cases the methodologies of neighbouring disciplines, including history, cultural studies, art history, politics, ethics and anthropology. And some go beyond the academy, involving collaboration with non-academic personnel. My own project on Frank Hurley, for example, requires intensive collaboration with staff at the Mitchell

and National Libraries responsible for the digitization of the Hurley diaries. At a later stage I will work with library exhibition staff on a multi-media exhibition of Hurley's photography, cinematography and writing which will, in turn, generate navigational pathways through a planned internet site.

In its most recent discussion paper, the 2003 *ARC Research Networks*, the ARC has again drawn on the work of Michael Gibbons and Julie Thompson Klein. The paper explains that the ARC has identified a "structural gap" in its National Competitive Grants Program above the level of Discovery and Linkage Grants, but below the level of research centres: this is the level of "network formation." In Gibbons' phrase, the ARC has decided to "punch holes" in existing institutional arrangements which are embedded in national and disciplinary paradigms, and encourage the development of Mode 2 forms and practices. The proposed selection criteria are strongly biased toward Mode 2 values. The new ARC research networks will cut across existing institutions, encourage the dispersal of knowledge production beyond universities, privilege interdisciplinarity, and focus on research problems with an emphasis on application rather than *a priori* theories. They will "assist groups of researchers to coordinate and communicate their research activities across disciplinary, organizational, institutional and geographical boundaries" (2). It is not a question of either Mode 1 or Mode 2, but of both; of what Klein calls the "professional paradox" of being both inside the discipline and outside it; of being an individual researcher in a network. As I understand it, however, the ARC's intention is that these networks will not simply pool together Mode 1 practices and institutions: they must also generate new knowledge. In other words, they will be required to produce something greater than the sum of their parts.

The scale of these networks will not be easy for researchers in Australian literary studies to achieve. As it stands, the proposal is that networks will be funded at up to \$500,000 per annum for up to 5 years. Approximately 15 networks will be funded at this level. The ARC believes that "the level of research activity embraced within a Network generally will correspond to at least 25 projects currently funded under the ARC's Discovery Project and Linkage Project programs" (10). I believe that the ARC has erred here, basing the projected scale of networks too much on the science and technology examples that dominate knowledge studies. At this rate, only one or perhaps two projects in the humanities may succeed. In reality, we might expect numerous networks to emerge in fields such as cultural studies, history, Australian studies, postcolonial studies, feminist studies and, of course, Australian literary studies. It may be that the ARC will have to modify its scale for the humanities. Rather than forcing several projects together to form one or two large aggregations, as is currently proposed, it may find that aggregations in the humanities reach their optimal level well below the projected equivalent of 25 grants, and that it is more appropriate to support several networks in the humanities, though on a reduced scale.

If we take the scale as presently predicted, what might it look like if we were to map the current content of actual research in Australian literary studies over the ARC's template? The scale—equivalent to 25 current projects—is so large that we might at first consider it necessary to imagine the entire ASAL membership as a single network. But in reality we do not have as many as 25 current projects specifically in Australian literary studies. And in any case, ASAL in the past has behaved mainly as a Mode 1 institution. One recent research project that does have Mode 2 features of interdisciplinarity and network formation is the History of the Book in Australia (HOBAs) project. Its agenda did not come exclusively from within Australian literary studies, and its personnel include historians, librarians, literary scholars, booksellers and publishers who came together in a collaborative network around a suite of research problems.

My guess, however, is that even the HOBAs project would fall short of the entry threshold. Unless the rules are modified, we may need to think even bigger by speculating on what all of the recent projects in Australian literary studies might add up to. It seems to me that one of the most likely areas is the sociology and history of print culture conceived in the broadest possible way, and including present research networks and existing electronic data bases. This might include, in no particular order, current work in the following areas:

- the history of the book
- the history of reading
- the history of Australian publishing in its international contexts
- the history of modes of literary sociability, including personal networks and literary societies
- the history of literary magazines
- the international transmission and reception of Australian literature
- the relationship between literature, electronic publishing and multimedia
- the relationships between literature and the law, including issues of ethics, intellectual property and censorship
- the place of Australian literature in public culture and the public sphere
- the theory and practice of editing in Australia
- extending the links and refining the navigational possibilities of existing data bases like the already multi-institutional Austlit Gateway
- on-going collaboration with librarians on the digitization of books and manuscripts and the creation of virtual sites for physically dispersed materials
- project-based collaborations between ASAL and other professional bodies both in Australia and internationally—in such a network, ASAL might act as a Mode 2 broker of personnel and intellectual capital

BOUNDARY WORK IN AUSTRALIAN LITERARY STUDIES

Implicit in what I've been arguing about Australian literary studies is that boundary work takes place along three principle axes: the disciplinary, the institutional and the national. On the disciplinary axis, we have by and large remained literature specialists while drawing many of our new and best ideas and even some methodologies from neighbouring disciplines such as history, cultural studies, women's studies and anthropology—though without necessarily advancing the field that is the source of the borrowing. On the institutional axis, we have gone beyond the academy to form vital collaborations with librarians, publishers, arts administrators, creative writers and school teachers, many of whom have made important and lasting contributions to the discipline—think for example of John Ferguson, H.M. Green, A.A. Phillips and E. Morris Miller. On the national axis, we have worked within but also gone beyond the paradigm of the nation, placing it in a series of broader contexts of comparison, originally with English and European literature, later with Commonwealth literature, and most recently in relation to ideas of the postcolonial, the international and the global. What I want to do in this final section is to suggest that these productive forms of boundary work that are currently being promoted as something totally new have in fact been present as a tendency within our discipline throughout its entire history. Australian literary studies was formed during a period of cultural nationalism and disciplinary specialization. It began—let us say very roughly—in the 1950s; the peak of its influence was probably in the mid to late 1970s; and we can sense its end, or at least its active transformation into new forms, during the years between the Bicentenary in 1988 and the end of the twentieth century. Throughout this period, I want to argue, boundary work has been constantly performed, but has always played a subsidiary role to the dominant narratives of cultural nationalism, academic professionalism and disciplinary specialization. I haven't the space to develop this historical argument properly and can only refer to a few indicative moments in what I suspect is a submerged history of boundary work. These moments are 1954, 1976 and 1999.

The building blocks of Australian literary studies were laid down in the so-called *Meanjin* debate in 1954, whose protagonists were A.D. Hope, Wesley Milgate, A. Norman Jeffares, Vincent Buckley, E. Morris Miller and Vance Palmer. Although, as we will see, there were differences among them, a consensus formed around four issues which together constitute, in Klein's sense, the "surface" principles of Australian literary studies as a national and disciplinary institution. First was a nationalist justification for the subject and the nation as its horizon of enquiry. As Hope put it, "it is the peculiar right and the duty of each country to establish and to foster the study of its own writers" (165). Second, the emergence of Australian literary studies required the foundation of courses in the national

literature. For Hope, these should be separate from the mainstream work in English literature. Third, there was need for the formation of a canon of Australian writers whose works were both excellent and nationally distinctive. Devising this canon was the work of professional academic critics. Finally, a mature national literature required a basic scholarly apparatus including bibliographies, biographies, literary histories, scholarly journals, critical monographs and standard editions. This work was ranked as ancillary, or secondary to the work of the critics, and was sometimes undertaken by non-academic personnel. Ironically, it is arguably the works of literary scholarship, not the criticism, that are now cultural nationalism's most enduring legacy.

Beneath the rhetoric of nationalism and disciplinary specialization, however, we can discern other possibilities. One was that Australian literary studies might develop a comparative methodology. Presciently, Wes Milgate warned that if scholars confined themselves to Australian literature and spoke only to each other, they would risk isolation and may have no audience or reputation overseas. As A. Norman Jeffares pointed out, the most likely comparative framework at this time was in Commonwealth literary studies. I was surprised to find even E. Morris Miller, in his foundational bibliography, *Australian Literature from its Beginnings to 1935*, which I'd regarded as a monument to cultural nationalism, also assuming that his task was part of a comparative project. In the preface, written in 1940, he describes the bibliography as "a modest contribution towards a comparative study of Imperial literature" (vol. 1, vii). In a remarkable passage he warns, "we may claim sovereignty, but are not an *imperium*. And although we aspire to a measure of independence as a nation, we do so as a unit within a larger whole" (14). Miller—who, I remind you, was a librarian—returned to these issues in his *Meanjin* essay, recommending a series of ever-widening frames for the study of Australian literature, from the national to the Pacific, to the Imperial and the international.

A second alternative present in the *Meanjin* debate was the possibility of an interdisciplinary Australian studies. This was suggested in a couple of contributions, but most strongly by Vance Palmer. Concerned that Hope's insistence on a separate course would isolate Australian literature from its social background, Palmer asked, "why not a department of Australian studies, where the literature of the country would be dealt with against the background of its own social and historical development?" (598).

When Bruce Bennett returned to the subject of "Australian Literature and the Universities" in 1976, he found that by and large the four goals expressed in the *Meanjin* debate twenty years earlier were close to being achieved. Looking back on Bennett's essay now, perhaps the most striking thing about it is its optimism about the growth of the discipline. Bennett was writing at the climax of the long post-war boom in university growth, and also at the height of Australian literary studies' aspirations to disciplinarity, one year before the formation of ASAL in

1977. Yet despite his investment in the surface structures, Bennett also found room to imagine other possibilities, and there is a remarkable continuity with 1954. First, Bennett cautions against over specialization and separatism. When he surveyed staff on the question of specialization, most indicated that they preferred also to continue working in other areas: “teachers of Australian literature in Australian universities are also involved in teaching other courses, since the usual policy in Australian English departments is to encourage proficiency across a range of subject areas. This policy (which, in my opinion, is to be applauded) affects the forward thinking of several teachers. [. . .] They are concerned that, as Australian literature courses increase in number and scope, the demands of an ‘industry’ should not isolate them in a specialism” (131).

Second, expressing his disappointment at the failure to establish a comparative method, Bennett argued that “The opportunities are wide open for important comparative work between Australian and European literatures and between Australian and other literatures which have a colonial experience in the recent past, such as those of America, Canada and New Zealand” (153). The call for a comparative method was soon repeated by Helen Tiffin, who in 1978 became the first to use the term “post-colonialism” in the journal *Australian Literary Studies*. And third, on the question of interdisciplinarity, Bennett noted that “the tendency toward inter-disciplinary studies [. . .] makes the idea of centres for Australian studies more feasible than it was when departmental divisions were more rigidly defined” (154).

Most recently, in 1999, when the journal *Australian Literary Studies* published a forum on the history and future of the discipline, there were again calls for a return to boundary work. In her introduction to the volume, Leigh Dale wrote with great sensitivity to the aspirations of the discipline’s founders, yet was equally aware that the discipline is an historical artifact formed, as I have argued here, in a period which we no longer feel to be contemporary:

For those who fought so very hard for the establishment of subjects in Australian literature [. . .] arguing for the distinctiveness of Australian literary culture was part of a broader strategy of cultural assertion which was appropriate to its time. With a couple of notable exceptions, it was those who argued for separatism [. . .] who took control of the discipline as a whole [. . .] My suggestion is that the isolationism seen as necessary to the foundation of the discipline has been perpetuated long beyond the time of its usefulness. (134)

In conclusion, then, let me return to Julie Thompson Klein’s argument that the field of knowledge production is a complex, not a simple system. The problem for regional, area and nation-based disciplines, as Klein points out, is to

“unreify” the founding category, “to realize that the *it* in question is not a singular phenomenon” (111). This is not to abandon the founding category of the nation altogether, but to be attentive to the many themes and issues that transect it, and of the wider frames of reference in which it can be situated. As historian Ian Tyrrell points out, “Nothing occurs in a vacuum” (360). The reality is that Australian literary studies is no longer, if in fact it ever was, a separate field whose logic is self-determining. It exists in a series of complex, usually productive relations with numerous neighbouring disciplines and projects. It is both a structured and a structuring field. Recognizing this complexity may require us to re-think our research projects, and our own professional identities and practices. One of my former teachers, Andrew Riemer, has written, “Perhaps the most harmful consequence of the growth of Australian literary studies in academic institutions all over the country was the encouragement of an essentially philistine isolationism. By the nineties a generation of academic ‘experts’ in Australian literature had emerged who were far less literate than the writers whose work they wished to subject to critical [. . .] scrutiny” (192). Yes, this is malicious and deliberately ignores the positive achievements. But we need only think of Henry Handel Richardson to realize that Riemer is partly right. Remember, Richardson is the subject of the only current ARC research project that did not identify itself as either interdisciplinary or cross-cultural. The point is, of course, that it didn’t have to—it already was. We can only begin to understand this greatest of Australian writers if we are prepared, as Clive Probyn and his colleagues have found, to think beyond the boundaries of both the national and the literary—beyond the boundaries, in fact, of Anglophone culture.

To be a specialist in Australian literary studies in 2003 does not, indeed cannot mean the same thing that it did in 1954 or 1976. It is to inhabit a complex system whose driving principle is boundary work, conceived in Klein’s sense as both a positive and negative force, a centripetal but also centrifugal energy. Let me put it this way. Imagine I am conducting an interview for an academic appointment, and I ask the applicant, “What is your field of specialization?” If they were to answer “Australian literary studies,” my next question would immediately be something like, “yes, and what are your other interests?” If they had none, I would regard them as being too narrow. All of us, I believe, however much we are committed to Australian literary studies, should have at least one answer to that follow-up question. As Klein puts it, boundary work implies “a professional paradox” of being both in a discipline and outside it (119). This means that in the future those of us doing Australian literary studies may also find ourselves reading other things: history, cultural studies, media studies, women’s studies, or comparative postcolonial studies. We may find ourselves working in research networks alongside librarians, designers of school curricula, arts administrators, historians or specialists in the literatures of other countries such as Canada, New Zealand or

South Africa. Recent work by Michael Ackland on Richardson and Ian Henderson on Marcus Clarke suggests that it may become necessary to have a second language. As an organization, ASAL may find itself holding more conferences like the present one, in which it forms creative linkages with other professional bodies. Future conferences might be held in Sydney or Melbourne, but also in Boston, Christchurch or Johannesburg. As for the published outcomes of our research, it may be that work in Australian literary studies in the future will become, as Ann Curthoys predicts for Australian history, “less a single focused entity than it has been” (142), and more a form of scholarship that is folded and diffused through various kinds of transnational and transdisciplinary work. We may otherwise find ourselves facing an insoluble crisis in scholarly publishing and even reputation, which Milgate had foreseen in 1954. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the market for criticism of Australian literature had contracted to the point where virtually no major international press was interested in publishing it. Australian literary studies’ future, I believe, lies in understanding both the strengths and weakness inherited from its quarter century or so of cultural nationalism and disciplinary specialization, and in the discovery—or, I would argue, the re-discovery—of its vigorous connections across the boundaries built up around it in the past.

Thanks to David Carter, Graeme Turner and Gillian Whitlock for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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