

英文原版文学理论丛书 (7)

# Modern Australian Criticism and Theory

## 澳大利亚文学批评和理论

Edited by David Carter & Wang Guanglin



中国海洋大学出版社  
China Ocean University Press

中国现代文学研究丛书

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Criticism and Theory

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Edited and Translated by Li Hong (李洪)



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# 英文原版文学理论丛书

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# 出版前言

经过一段时间的酝酿,这套英文原版文学理论丛书终于陆续和读者见面了。我们出版这套丛书的初衷主要有以下两个方面:(1)我国的外国文学研究有两条战线,两支队伍,一支在文学院,一支在外语学院。改革开放以来,由于国内外交流的推进和学科研究的发展,两支队伍逐渐靠拢,比较文学的队伍在渐渐扩大。高等院校外国文学专业不但有很多本科生,而且建设了许多硕士点和博士点。文学理论(通常叫西方文论)是该专业的主干课程之一,但国内过去引进的这类外文原版书很少,有的(包括某些教材)文字太难,师生反映这方面的参考书太少,尤其是适合中文系该专业师生阅读的此类书更少。我们引进这套丛书,就是为了满足广大师生教学科研的迫切需要。(2)随着全球化的到来,国内外的学术交流越来越快地向深广发展。要进一步促进这种交流的发展,需要做好三个方面的工作,一要较快地提高广大师生的外语能力,达到用外语进行学术交流的水平;二要深入了解国外该学术领域的最新研究成果和发展动态与趋势;三要有目的有计划地将我们国内的研究成果介绍给国外的同行。我们引进的这套丛书可以在这三个方面发挥很有效的作用,尤其是在提高用外语撰写专业论文与学术著作的水平方面,最有效的方法就是研读该专业国外原版著作,因为这样既能较深入地了解外国同行的研究成果,同时又能潜移默化地提高使用外语的水平。

在确定书目时,我们的原则是先介绍基础理论方面的著作和最新研究成果,再介绍专题研究,着重从国外主要学术出版社中进行选择。丛书的读者对象是外语学院与文学院外国文学专业和比较文学专业的教师、研究生和相关研究者。必须指出的是,我们介绍国外的文学理论,并不表明我们完全赞同其观点。有了解才有继承与批判。我们希望读者诸君在全面了解国外同行研究成果的基础上,吸收其有益的成分,摒弃其片面甚至错误的成分,促进文学理论研究在我国的健康发展。

丛书的第7本《澳大利亚文学批评和理论》为我社首次出版,从出版的角度上来说并不属于原版书,但是,该书不但与《当代北美批评与理论导读》《当

代英国及爱尔兰批评与理论导读》《当代欧洲批评和理论导读》一起构成了西方文学批评和理论研究的整体,而且作者多为国外著名学者,对澳大利亚文学批评和理论颇有研究,因此,我们也收入本丛书,以飨读者。

在出版过程中,杨自俭教授生前从学科建设的高度提出了指导性意见,左金梅教授协助我们确定了部分出版书目,邓红风教授提供了宝贵的技术支持,丛书诸位学术顾问给予了无私的帮助和鼓励,在此谨致谢意。我们迫切希望更多的文学理论研究者加入到这套丛书的引进中来,使我们这套书的规模越来越大,质量越来越高。

# Preface

*Modern Australian Criticism and Theory* brings together a selection of contemporary essays on Australian literature and cultural studies written by leading Australian critics and theorists. Unlike other volumes in the Modern Criticism and Theory series such as Julian Wolfreys's *Modern North American Criticism and Theory*, the present book does not focus on particular schools or movements in criticism but rather on key issues for understanding Australian literature and its situation within Australian culture more broadly. Australia has been a significant site for both the importation and the generation of critical cultural theory; indeed, Australia has been an 'exporter' of theory to the rest of the world in some key areas, including feminism, postcolonialism, cultural studies (especially in the form of cultural policy studies), and, more recently, race and whiteness studies. It might be argued that import/export metaphors are in effect no longer adequate to the present situation in which Australia is one node, or rather a series of nodes, in a transnational, global network through which publications, ideas and personnel circulate.

The essays selected for this volume reflect and reflect upon the main critical and theoretical influences on the study of Australian literature and culture since the 1980s. In Chapter Seven, David Carter describes the background to this 'theoretical turn' in Australian literary studies; the struggle to establish Australian literature in the university; the institutionalisation of Australian literary studies through what I call 'ethico-formalist' critical practices, imprecisely aligned with Leavisite and/or the New Criticism; the emergence of counter-currents, as a younger generation entered the universities, sometimes armed with a form of new critical nationalism (a critique which could later emerge as postcolonialism and a heightened awareness of gender and race issues); and the belated impact of structuralist and post-structuralist theories—not least via the rapid impact of cultural studies—from the early 1980s. These developments have not merely been sequential or evolutionary. Older practices have continued alongside and



often in conflict with newer kinds of work on literature. Much of the critique has been militant in contesting earlier exclusions and the forms of power and privilege enacted through canonisation. Particularly in the 1980s, the debates were intense. Paradoxically perhaps, the politicisation or radicalisation of criticism went hand in hand with its professionalisation, as Australian literary studies, for the first time, became an arena where the full array of theoretical, scholarly and professional capacities could be exercised within the university.

The changes in Australian literary studies brought about by the impact of post-structuralism, cultural studies and identity politics over the last two or three decades are those familiar from across the English-speaking world: the rise of *theory* over criticism; of *textuality* over literature; and of textual *politics* over textual formalism. But there are certain distinctive features of the Australian context affecting the uptake of theoretical paradigms and the current disposition of the field, both intellectually and institutionally. The position of most literature departments in Australian universities, and especially of Australian literary studies, has always been defined by what we might call an 'institutional thinness'. The number of students and scholars working in this field has never been large, the sheer availability of texts remains a major issue, and institutional continuity has seldom been assured (the exception might be the period of the 1970s and 1980s when student numbers swelled, staff numbers increased accordingly, and the publishing of Australian literature itself experienced a boom).

The negative side of this uncertain situation is clear. There is little continuity or institutional density for the publication of Australian literary criticism—it is as if each book of criticism that appears is a 'one-off' and it is never certain where the next book will appear from. But perhaps there is also a positive side, in that literary studies in Australia has often been forced or been willing to look beyond its own disciplinary and institutional boundaries, to become interdisciplinary and engaged directly in social and political debates. The 'membrane' between literary studies and broader engagements in the public sphere, especially around issues of nation, race and colonisation, has been thin and porous; and these issues have become increasingly central and urgent since the late 1980s.

The tendency of much Anglophone poststructuralist criticism to become a form of 'textual politics' thus found a ready uptake in Australia, in a local context already undergoing transformation through the impact of feminism

and neo-Marxist theories in the 1970s. Of course, the ‘politics’ of textual politics have often been limited to claims about the purported subversive nature of certain forms of literariness; but there *was* also a major revision of the fields of Australian culture and Australian history, affecting not just academic debate but public, political and popular understandings in relation to the issues of indigeneity, colonial dispossession and the politics of national belonging.

The authors represented in the volume were invited to engage with one or more of the theoretical influences which have shaped their own work and to demonstrate just how those influences have been taken up and given a distinctive Australian inflection. This ‘Australian accent’ derives from Australia’s colonial history, its distinctive environments, its geographical and geo-political location, and patterns of settlement and immigration. Postcolonialism, for example, does not look the same from an Australian perspective (indigenous or non-indigenous) as from a European or North American perspective. Gillian Whitlock has made this point by reflecting on her response to Robert Young’s *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. For Young, postcolonialism means ‘looking at things from the other side of the photograph, experiencing how differently things look when you live in Baghdad or Benin rather than Berlin or Boston’. An effective image in its own way, but for Whitlock, writing from Australia, what’s striking is the spatial organisation of the postcolonial in Young’s imaginary, wholly in terms of the West and the Rest, of *here* and elsewhere. Where do Brisbane or Borroloola—where in short do the white settler societies and their indigenous populations—fit into this scheme? By contrast, Whitlock writes: ‘For contemporary intellectuals in South Africa and Australia, “looking at things from the other side of the photograph” brings into view images much closer to home. . . . One challenge here is to understand what it means to be white *without leaving home at all*’.<sup>①</sup>

The first three essays in the volume, by Bill Ashcroft, Leigh Dale, and Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, pick up on this issue and consider the question posed—and answered in the affirmative—in Ashcroft’s title: ‘Is Australian Literature Post-Colonial?’. The question of Australia’s

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<sup>①</sup> Gillian Whitlock, ‘Becoming Migloo’, in *The Ideas Market: An Alternative Take on Australia’s Intellectual Life*, ed. David Carter (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 239.

ambiguous post-coloniality is a theme that recurs, inescapably, throughout many of the chapters, those on landscape, colonial literature, and whiteness especially. Susan Martin's essay, following the opening three chapters, considers the central role played in Australian literature and its criticism by ideas about the land and environment, from colonial images of conquering or domesticating the land, to heroic or anti-heroic ideas of a nation-forming bush, to the increasing sense of an Aboriginal land, to new postcolonial forms of spatial history and contemporary eco-criticism.

Andrew McCann and Simon During represent the recent strong revival of interest in and revisionary approaches towards colonial literary culture. McCann shows how the poet Henry Kendall's dreams of establishing an Australian landscape are haunted at every turn by the indigenous presence, while During traces the formation and transformation of 'modern literary subjectivity' in the distinctive conditions of nineteenth century Australia. Both essays continue the consideration of Australia's post-coloniality without necessarily drawing on the more familiar terms of international postcolonial literary theory.

David Carter's essay introduces a series of chapters concerned with the institutions of Australian literary and cultural studies and some of the key areas of critical practice. Susan Sheridan traces the influence and varieties of feminism and feminist criticism in Australia, arguably the major influence in transforming Australian literary studies in the 1980s and 1990s. John Frow traces the places, people and intellectual influences that severally and collectively built the distinctive forms of Australian cultural studies. Robert Dixon focuses on the present as a key moment of transformation in Australian literary studies as it moves from its founding 'nationalist' moment into a transnational framing of key issues. Coinciding with this move and in some ways allied to it is the recent influence of 'book history' or 'print culture studies'. In part this represents a move beyond the now dominant practices of textual politics towards a new historical or sociological approach to books, print and reading, and an interest not just in 'Australian literature' but also in 'literature in Australia'. This new cultural history is represented by two essays in one of its most interesting fields—the study of reading practices—by Tim Dolin and Patrick Buckridge.

Ken Gelder and Gillian Whitlock introduce specific genres which have been particularly significant in Australian literature over the last two decades, and which, in critical terms, produce a distinctive Australian engagement with

emerging theoretical trends. Gelder, the author of *Popular Fiction* (Routledge 2004), examines Australian crime writing, a marked success story in Australian publishing in recent times, and one that invites engagement with theories of genre, popular culture and publishing studies. Whitlock examines life writing, both biographical and autobiographical, another field which has boomed in recent years in Australia, as has the theoretical engagement with and contribution to international studies in the field. Indigenous life writing and questions of race and ethnicity emerge as central in this field too. Stephen Muecke introduces a different but related emerging practice, that of 'fictocriticism', writing which frees itself from some of the formal constraints of academic critical work and opens itself up to more experimental modes (including fiction and the autobiographical); his essay also returns us to questions of 'environmental criticism' or, in this case, the nature/culture divide—central to all western metaphysics but with a specific 'bite' in the case of environments where the indigenous-settler confrontation and ideas of a 'new land' have been formative.

Concerns with Australia's history of colonial dispossession and racial violence (not least at the level of discursive or symbolic violence) have been central to the rise of whiteness studies in Australia, also known as 'critical race and whiteness studies'. The three essays by Anne Brewster, Alison Ravenscroft and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey engage with aspects of whiteness theory, indigenous literature and race relations. Central to all is the question of how non-indigenous Australian readers (and, we might add, non-Australian readers) can or should read indigenous writing. What kinds of identification, estrangement or complicity does such a process involve? Related questions are posed by Ian Henderson who offers (at least) two alternative readings of Jack Davis's play *The Dreamers* which bring into conversation divergent ideas of Aboriginal authenticity and modernity.

The final four essays cover aspects of multicultural or 'ethnic minority' writing in Australia. Wenche Ommundsen offers a broad overview of the key issues and debates which have shaped our understandings of this field and hence of Australian literature itself. Peta Stephenson and Tseen Khoo focus on different aspects of the Chinese-Australian experience and the interactions between writing, self and citizenship (and critical reception). Sneja Gunew asks the reader to focus on the specific meanings of multiculturalism in a settler or immigrant nation like Australia and returns us to the opening essays in the volume by addressing the relationship between multiculturalism

and postcolonialism.

While the volume cannot give a comprehensive account of modern Australian criticism and theory, it does offer readers a cross-section of that work, at once wide-ranging and concentrated on key questions. Australian criticism and theory is, on the one hand, quite distinctive, shaped by its engagement with its own literature and its social and political context; on the other hand, what it *shares* with other literatures and cultures, especially with the other white settler, colonising or immigrant nations, is as significant as what makes it distinctive. If it is intensely concerned with accounting for its own past and present, it is also international or transnational in its engagement with theoretical movements and political developments within its region and across the world. It is this conversation within Australian criticism—with itself and with other voices from other places—that we have highlighted in *Modern Australian Criticism and Theory*.

**David Carter**  
**Wang Guanglin**

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# 1. Is Australian Literature Post-Colonial?

*Bill Ashcroft*

The story of the complex relationship between Australian literary criticism and post-colonial studies begins in 1977 at the SPACLALS (South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies) conference at the University of Queensland. This regional conference of Commonwealth literatures was attended by—in fact, the papers were dominated by—Australian literature specialists. Four of these, Mary Lord, Barry Andrews, Ken Stewart and Julian Croft, with a certain postgraduate student called Ashcroft looking on, wondered why there was no regular forum for Australian literature. At that conference ASAL, the Association for the Study of Australian Literature was born. It was born out of nationalist enthusiasm in a transnational, comparativist environment.

1978 was an interesting year. The first ASAL conference was held at Monash University. The feeling of euphoria was patent and underpinned by a question: This is so good, how could it have taken so long? In the same year *New Literatures Review* edited by a group of postgraduate students: Ashcroft, Michael Cotter, John Docker and Satendra Nandan, produced its second issue on post-colonial literatures, and a Palestinian American academic called Edward Said published *Orientalism*. In other words the birth of ASAL, a moment when Australian literary studies seemed to stand on its feet, a moment charged with a spirit of excitement that is hard to recapture, occurred at the same time as the seeds of *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989; 2002) were being planted.

To truly understand this you need to have tried to be a student of Australian literature in the previous decade. Nobody who went to an Australian university in the 1960s could be in any doubt about the *post-*



*colonial* struggle that was engaged at the very heart of Australian literature, although we didn't call it that then. It took until the mid-1960s for a Professorship of Australian Literature to be established in an Australian university, and the attitude to that literature even as late as the 1960s could still be summed up in the words of a Professor of English at the University of Melbourne in the 1930s, G. M. Cowling, who published an article in the *Age* on 16 February 1935 in which he claimed, among other things: 'Good Australian novels which are entirely Australian are bound to be few... Australian life is too lacking in tradition, and too confused, to make many first class novels' (Barnes 1969, 210). By 1970 we had still not progressed much past this. In an Honours course on the Australian Short Story in which I was enrolled, half the course consisted of Russian short stories because the Professor of Australian Literature didn't think we could get enough substance out of the Australian ones.

This prejudice is a direct consequence of the spectacularly effective establishment of the teaching of English literature as a dissemination of English national culture throughout the empire. Lord Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Indian Education, a century before Professor Cowling's article in the *Age*, led to the invention of the discipline of English literature as a way of producing an elite class of Indians capable of disseminating English civilisation. This strategy was so effective that English became the centre of the British and Imperial education system and local literatures were forever marginalised. At its very inception the study of English literature was conceived as an imperial civilizing process, a process that diminished Australian literature just as effectively it marginalised Indian, African or Caribbean literatures. Ironically, the first English Association in the world was established in Australia—a classic demonstration of its post-colonial ambivalence.

To understand the feeling of scholars and academics who specialised in Australian literature in the years leading up to 1978 is to feel the weight of an imperial marginalisation, and subsequently, to feel the power of a re-emergent nationalism. The institutional history of Australian Literary Studies is a microcosm of the decolonisation of former colonies at the break-up of empire. While nationalism focuses anti-colonial resistance, the institution of literature has focused anti-imperial resistance like few other forces. So the question posed by Robert Dixon (2004) and echoed by David Carter (2007): 'Why has there been so little contact between Australian