

AUSTRALIAN LITERARY
CRITICISM—1945–1988
An Annotated Bibliography

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to Anita

Preface

...it is arguable that the term "English Literature" ought to be replaced by "Literature in English." It would at least avoid confusion in describing its field and would bypass implications of dependence or inferiority. It would help to underline the fact that the writing produced in Great Britain from this age onwards enjoys no special prestige but is simply one among many branches of a subject defined merely by the language in which it is written.

—A. D. Hope

This bibliographical study takes as its premise that the literature of Australia comprises a part of international literature in English. Once called "dominion literature," then "colonial" and "commonwealth," later "new," this body of writing has long been hidden behind the "imperial curtain," as Stephen Alomes pictures it in his discussion of the "tears" in that once impenetrable barrier (64-72). More accurately, perhaps, the curtain has been rent since the end of World War II, so that not only Australian writers joined in the making of international literature in English but also those from Canada, New Zealand, India, the West Indies, Africa, and thirty or so other countries where English is the first, second, even third language. Depending on how the curtain was torn, the terms "third world" and "post-colonial" have been applied to some of the writing. But like "dominion" and "commonwealth" and "colonial," they are political concepts, not literary, and therefore suggest the kind of "dependence or inferiority" that A.D. Hope mentions in the headnote (10). Joseph Jones, an early proponent of world literature in English, observed not long ago that there are those in literary circles who "continue to see their world as a flat ellipse whose twin centers are London and New York," but, he adds, "this view becomes less and less tenable as evidence filters in from around the whole sphere" (13).

A study such as this one offers some evidence on how a single English literature has developed both artistically and critically since 1945. Certainly, the choice of that date is not meant to imply that nothing happened

beforehand. Much did, practically from the time the first Englishmen landed on the shore of Sydney Harbor. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progress of Australian writing has been documented fully in earlier bibliographies and histories; but the span of years from the end of World War II until the 1988 bicentennial observation of European settlement has not. And what a fascinating story the literary history of that era makes. It opens with critics questioning whether Australian fiction, drama, and poetry serve much purpose beyond the depiction of the country's day to day life, its flora and fauna, its pioneer experience. As well the critics themselves doubted the value of the scant criticism available, describing it as provincial, amateurish, lacking in standards. Then into this vacuum stepped determined creative writers and critics; many combined both arts, so that a vanguard of writer/critics began to treat their literature not as a provincial oddity but as a force in Australian life. Once universities accepted their country's writing into the curriculum—often reluctantly, a few academics in the front rank attended to an English literature other than that originating in Great Britain or the United States.

The fruition, though, did not come about easily or quickly. Disappointment, disillusionment, disputation mark the forty-three years whose efforts this book records. Significantly, most long studies and articles have appeared in the 1970s and 80s. They signify the happy end to a long pursuit—one that commenced in the nineteenth century—for a literature and an informed criticism on it. Never will another era in Australian literary history resemble the one from 1945 to 1988: It was the time of flowering, of emerging, of discovering literary roots and identity.

In 1988 not only an impressive body of Australian literature exists but also extensive criticism on it—both from Australia and abroad, so one needs to ask: Does the criticism serve the literature? After all, critical writing has no other function. By and large, it has fulfilled its purpose, from that early, sometimes tentative work in the late 1940s and early 1950s to the more confident voice that began to speak in the 1960s, then gained fuller force during the following decades. Until recently Australians wrote most of the articles and books, but today more critics from abroad contribute. Although their work usually appears in specialized journals devoted to all the literature in English (other than British and American), or to Australian literature specifically, it can be safely predicted that in a few years articles on Australian writers will appear in general journals devoted to world fiction, drama, and poetry. Some of these publications have in the past occasionally done a "special issue," often placing Australia and New Zealand together; although admirable, that practice will fade and the writing from Australia and New

Zealand, as well as from other parts of the world, will no longer receive "special" treatment but regular attention.

This era's Australian critics, who can justifiably be called pioneers, have performed an admirable service in establishing a critical tradition from which their younger countrymen and overseas colleagues can draw. Yet some of them have approached their craft in ways they and others should avoid in the future. For one thing, Australian critics often attack one another, not just intellectually, but personally, accusing those with whom they disagree of ineptitude, limited vision, lack of discrimination, and so on. Unfortunately, striking examples of such critical grubbiness still appear; mudslinging, no matter how amusing at the moment, has no place in the kind of critical writing that truly fulfills its purpose.

Another recurring problem could be called the "our literature syndrome." Although the appellation is disappearing, Australian critics in the past all too often talked about "our literature," a harmless enough term but one dangerously connotative for the nonAustralian. Does not a country's literature belong to all the world of readers, the ones across the seas and the borders as well as those at home? Calling the writing of Australians "our literature" carries a possessive air as well as an apologetic one, hinting that "our literature" has about it some interesting characteristics, even a uniqueness, yet suggesting that it not be taken all that seriously, not be considered in the larger framework. Leonie Kramer in the introduction to *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* speaks of a "protectionism" still affecting some critics, whom she sees failing to apply comparative standards in their evaluation of Australian writing. This lack, Kramer believes, stems from "a view which was established and promoted in the nineteenth century, namely that Australian writing is a delicate plant, which needs nurturing and sheltering, and cannot be expected to withstand the rough and unpredictable winds from the outside world" (2). Perhaps this tendency toward "protectionism" should take some of the blame for the "our literature syndrome." Whatever the reason, Australian critics must appreciate that nonAustralians are reading *their* literature, making it *theirs*. Those who write about it, whether they be Americans, Europeans, Africans, Indians, or whoever, bring to the texts another literary tradition and culture, which will undoubtedly produce blunders at times, but in many instances a rare objectivity, even a refreshing naivety. In short, Australian literature cannot be protected; further, it need not be.

One other approach that often appears superfluous to a reader abroad can be found in recent Australian journal articles that set out to prove the ways a particular piece of writing is indeed Australian. Now that fiction, plays, and

poems more often forsake Australian settings and subjects, critics seem determined to clarify that these works just happen to take place in foreign lands but once properly understood are in truth somehow local. Or they argue that a particular piece of writing set in Australia is indeed Australian. This is a pointless task, not unlike trying to prove that William Faulkner's fiction is about the southern part of the United States or John Updike's about the upper eastern seaboard. To many American readers Faulkner's and Updike's worlds, rooted as they are in regions of a vast and heterogeneous country, remain as foreign as the suburbs of modern Sydney. But if the human element speaks, which it must in great literature, then belaboring the national or regional application of the text turns meaningless. The Australian writer Thea Astley has made this point infinitely clear in noting that "...literary truth is derived from the parish, and if it is truth it will be universal" (255). Brian Kiernan points out in his 1974 survey of Australian criticism that the conflict between "universalists" and "localists," sometimes called "internationalists" and "nationalists," continues to play a part in Australian cultural life (47). This tension between the two schools of thought most likely manifests itself in the way some critics, perhaps altogether unconsciously, insist on a literary work's "Australianness."

Yet these objections are minor when considering the criticism as a whole and the directions in which it is heading. One trend that holds promise lies in the recent articles using the comparative method, whether limited to two or more Australian works or expanded to embrace other literature in English or that in foreign languages. If Australian literature is truly to be considered part of international English literature, then it can only benefit when analyzed and discussed in this light. Comparative studies, even those between Australian works, have long been absent. Another stimulating sign lies in the project of establishing a theoretical basis for criticism in world English literature that came out of a colonial context. This approach should produce interesting results as long as it does not promote isolationism or ignorance of the British literary tradition, and to some extent the American, to which the newer bodies of literature in English owe their beginnings no matter how originally and independently they have evolved on their own.

Whereas once the writers of articles pretty well followed the dictates of the New Criticism, more recent work has shown attention to feminist concerns, contemporary critical theories, psychology, multiculturalism, and political stances. Still, articles lambasting particular critical approaches appear in Australian periodicals; sadly, their arguments lack reason or substance. The Freudians and Marxists and Jungians, the new critics, the deconstructionists

and the feminists, the multiculturalists, the theorists, after all, can only add to the critical body's diversity and quality.

An annotated bibliography of criticism on Australian literature during the next forty-three years will surely take several volumes, the entries often marked by greater sophistication, enlivened by theoretical approaches not yet thought of, broadened by more contributions from foreign critics, and freed at last from the "our literature syndrome," "protectionism," and the debate between "internationalism" and "nationalism" as a basis for critical standards. Whatever unfolds, future critics will continue to depend on the sometimes stumbling and faltering, often original and occasionally brilliant, and forever sincere work of their predecessors during the formative span from 1945 to 1988.

The following explanations and clarifications are intended to aid the users of this bibliography so that they might understand its scope, the process of selection, extent of the research, availability of materials, method of arrangement, and nature of the annotations.

SCOPE: As I have explained in the foregoing section, the study covers 1945-1988, with the inclusion of some pre-1945 work that seemed especially pertinent. The cut-off date was June 1988, again with exceptions as a few later publications were added. I have attempted to incorporate all the major books and articles, but I have by no means cited everything written in English about Australian literature. I have not included foreign language materials.

PROCESS OF SELECTION: Although I made rules to guide selection, I broke most of them. I intended to include only books and articles from major and accessible journals still in publication, and to exclude newspaper material, articles in organizational newsletters, reprints of articles, book reviews in any kind of publication, and unpublished work. For the most part, I adhered to these principles of selection, but lapsed occasionally in all instances except for organizational newsletters, and even there the temptation arose. Most of the entries do cover books and journal articles. But there are some newspaper pieces cited, mainly from the *New York Times*; these articles I considered important contributions either to the work on a particular writer or to the general subject under consideration. There are also a few reprints of articles that are treated specifically when their original source was no longer available. In some cases reviews do appear, those transcending their original purpose and becoming critical articles that say things significant and original.

Of course, additional citations of reviews can be located easily through the various book review indexes and bibliographies. Although not officially published, dissertations indexed in *Dissertation Abstracts* are available on microfilm, and I included only those; I did not, however, annotate them because they are not generally accessible. Their titles have a way of revealing the contents, and *Dissertation Abstracts* provides full descriptions. Except for the dissertations, I did examine each item I included, even those not annotated.

RESEARCH: I carried out all of the research in the United States. This does prove that abundant materials are available, if not always readily accessible, which is an important consideration when establishing Australian literature courses in American universities. The bibliography may also serve to point out the gaps in library holdings. I depended most fully on the Perry-Castañeda Library and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRHRC) at The University of Texas at Austin. In addition, I made use of the extensive holdings of The Pennsylvania State University Library at University Park, as well as those in the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and the Australian Embassy Library in Washington, D.C. The scouring of university and public libraries in the Dallas area, dependence on interlibrary loans, and reference to my own collection of Australian materials rounded out the research.

AUSTRALIAN COLLECTIONS IN THE U.S.: According to the American Library Association, which has added a session at its annual meeting on acquisition of Australian materials, libraries in addition to the ones mentioned above that hold creditable amounts of Australian materials include those at the University of Oregon, University of Iowa, Cornell University, University of Minnesota, Duke University, Indiana University, and University of North Carolina. The most impressive Australian collection is held by The University of Texas, Austin, in the HRHRC, including the C. Hartley Grattan Collection (around 20,000 items on all aspects of Australia and the South Pacific region), the Guy Howarth Collection (in part Australian), and related materials (such as D.H. Lawrence's Australian papers and a group of Christina Stead's letters). *The Library Chronicle*, HRHRC's journal, will publish in the fall of 1988 a bibliography on the literary portion of the Grattan Collection along with articles describing some of the Center's major Australian holdings. The Pennsylvania State University Library ranks next in this field, and has recently updated a bibliography of its materials. Of course, Australian libraries would be the ideal places for research; naturally various university

and public libraries have extensive holdings, and in recent years have made concerted efforts to increase their literary works, criticism, manuscripts, and letters. The establishment of several Australian studies centers at universities will assure that future collections are built. Projects to place bibliographical information into a data base are well underway. As international communication advances, the scholar far from Australia will find that materials available only there becoming more easily accessible.

ARRANGEMENT: Most likely the compiler of a bibliographer always formulates a master plan and knows why things are arranged in a way that might well mystify someone else. All entries—except for those in the bibliographical and reference sections under “General Materials”—appear chronologically, which is intended to show the development of the criticism. Also, in some instances an article is dependent on a previous one, perhaps disputing or amplifying the original argument. (I like to think that, in part, the annotations tell the story of the way Australian literary criticism developed and matured in this period.) The overall plan calls first for a broad look at the general history and criticism, then for an investigation of the international attention to Australian literature, followed by a section devoted to background material on literary trends, recurrent themes, historical connections, and other related topics. Next, the three major genres receive separate treatment, each introduced by a historical survey of its development. In a final move toward specificity, bibliographical studies of forty-two major writers appear, each with a brief bibliographical note. Unfortunately, the criticism does not always separate itself into such neat and theoretical categories; the indexes will assist the user in locating related materials in other parts of the book. The introduction to each section explains the particulars governing the nature, selection, arrangement, and treatment of the materials cited.

ANNOTATIONS: First, and most importantly, I have made every effort to remain objective in the annotations; whether I have succeeded may be open to question, because some articles naturally impress more than others. I have, though, tried diligently to set aside my own bent toward comparative practice and what one Australian critic calls “withered new criticism,” and to treat all approaches equally. An irony of annotating lies in the practice of allowing equal words for both books and articles; but if one were to summarize all the parts of a book the annotation would turn into an abstract. For a book, then, I set out to give an accurate picture of its major premise and overall content, realizing that I had not done it justice. Some items, namely interviews and

anthologies, lack annotations. Interviews usually cover the same kinds of material, so summarizing seemed redundant; if necessary for clarification, I did add explanatory notes in some instances. When an anthology revealed its contents and approach through the title, I decided not to repeat the obvious. Finally, I had not planned to annotate any literary works, because this is, after all, a bibliographical study of criticism; but the section on literature about the convict period offers a notable exception. To justify this fall into creative writing, I can only say that it seems to me these novels in their treatment of historical matter provide an outstanding example—a kind of lesson in miniature—of Australian fiction's progress from a primarily realistic and literal stance, so very typical before 1945, to the metaphysical strain that dominates today. Might not a work devoted to criticism be permitted at least one divergence into that creative art without which there would be no such thing as criticism? Certainly, it will never be the other way around.

Dallas, Texas
August 1988

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Finally, I owe the greatest debt to those critics who broke ground in Australian literary studies—and continue to do so. Their names appear next to their articles and books. I trust I have done them justice.

Abbreviations

All journal titles are given in full each time they are cited except for the following ones, which are abbreviated because of their frequency of citation and their long titles:

Australasian Drama Studies—ADS

Australian Literary Studies—ALS

Journal of Commonwealth Literature—JCL

Texas Studies in Language and Literature—TSLL

World Literature Written in English—WLWE

Australian Literary
Criticism—1945–1988

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