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EMERGING FROM THE RUBBLE OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES: BOOK HISTORY AND AUSTRALIAN LITERARY STUDIES

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Abstract

Scholars of Australian literature have engaged more frequently and enthusiastically with book history approaches than nearly any other postcolonial nation's literary scholars. Several Australian scholars have suggested that book history has taken over where postcolonial studies left off. In their choice of subject matter, however, Australian book historians reinforce the very constructions of literary value they purport to dismantle, similar to how scholars of postcolonial studies have been critiqued for reinforcing the construction of colonial identities. Thus, this article looks to the intellectual history of postcolonial studies for examples of how it has responded to similar critiques. What is revealed is a surprising, and heretofore untold, relationship between book history and postcolonial studies, which focuses on their transnational potential versus their ability to remain firmly grounded in the national.

Keywords: Book History; Australian Literature; Postcolonial Studies; Intellectual History; Transnational Turn

I. Introduction to Australian literary studies

A brilliant and prolific Australian scholar of postcolonial literature once remarked in his private correspondence,

It doesn't matter how well read they are, American and British scholars of postcolonial literature don't know the first thing about Australian literature. They scarcely consider it postcolonial. So if you want to write about Australian literature for this audience, you have to treat them like they're a bit slow.

Clearly, it is in this scholar's best interest that his correspondence be kept private—or, at least, that his name does not come to be publicly associated with this statement. In spite of the insults and cavalier tone, however, he raises some valid concerns. Indeed, these

concerns have been echoed many times over (though mostly outside of the officially published record) by scholars operating simultaneously in the worlds of Australian and postcolonial literatures. Nathanael O'Reilly, an Australian-born academic who has made his career in the United States, offers one of the few on-the-record comments on this subject: "The marginal status of Australian literature within the American academy more broadly and within postcolonial studies specifically is clearly evident in the American academic job market" (3). He goes on to assert, "There is clearly a bias within postcolonial studies against scholars who focus on literature from the settler colonies, especially Australia, Canada, and New Zealand" (O'Reilly 3). O'Reilly's comments are, of course, more carefully modulated than the earlier statement, but the concerns he raises are identical.

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Considering Australian literature's relative obscurity—among academics in the United States, scholars of postcolonial literature, and perhaps even scholars of English-language literary studies more generally—it may be instructive to begin this article with a brief sketch of the history of Australian literature's academic beginnings. This sketch helps set the stage for this article's later attempt to reassess the intellectual history of Australian literary studies by emphasizing postcolonial studies and book history and proposing a very different relationship between them than has been previously suggested.

Published in 2007, Elizabeth Renker's *The Origins of American Literary Studies: An Institutional History* attempts to do something similar for the United States. In other words, Renker's book details the development of "a college subject and field of scholarly expertise" (2). For example, Renker writes,

Published histories of the field typically cite the late 1920s as the turning point toward professionalization: the foundation of the American Literature Group of the Modern Language Association in 1921 was followed by the inauguration of professional journals (*The New England Quarterly* in 1928 and *American Literature* in 1929). (2-3)

Renker uses the establishment of scholarly associations and professional journals as indicators that the academic study of the literature of the United States has achieved institutional status. It is important to note, however, that there are a variety of other coordinates that could serve this same purpose. For example, the first course on the subject or the first published history of the subject could serve as indicators of institutional status just as well as Renker's preferred indicators.

The first course devoted to the subject of Australian literature was "at Adelaide in the 1940s" (Dale 134). The first book-length history of Australian literature was *The Development of Australian Literature* by Henry Gyles Turner and Alexander Sutherland, which was published in 1898. As for the coordinates identified by Renker as "the turning point toward professionalization," the first professional journal devoted to the study of

Australian literature was *Australian Literary Studies*, which continues to be published today, though it was established in 1963. (It was preceded, however, by several journals that devoted considerable space in each issue to scholarly work on Australian literature.) The first scholarly association came a little later: the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (also still in existence) was established in 1977.

For the sake of clarity, it might be useful to identify a single decade about which we can say, as Renker did for the academic study of the literature of the United States, "published histories of the field typically cite [this decade]... as the turning point toward professionalization" (2). To this end, noted scholar of Australian literature Robert Dixon lends a hand:

Nation-based studies began—let's say very roughly—in the 1960s; the peak of their growth was probably the decade from 1977 to 1987, which saw the establishment of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) in 1977, the Australian Studies Association (ASA) in 1983-4, and the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education (CRASTE) in 1984-7. ("Internationalising" 128)

Clearly, the establishment of scholarly associations and professional journals mark the 1960s and 1970s as an important threshold for Australian literature. There exists a consensus among scholars of Australian literature that the 1960s and 1970s represent the emergence of Australian literary studies as a field of study.

Now that we understand the relative youth of Australian literary studies, it is possible to make sense of Dixon's assertion, in his article "Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production," that "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" (28). Surely, this same assertion could not be made about the academic study of the literature of the United States, whose origins in the 1920s would have been recognized much earlier as belonging to a period that is no longer contemporary.

Dixon's comment, made in 2004, marked the beginning of a significant moment in the intellectual history of Australian literary studies—when scholars of Australian literature went in search of a new direction for the future of their discipline. The article you are reading is part of this same impulse to reassess the intellectual history of Australian literary studies, but it offers a new take on this history by emphasizing postcolonial studies and book history and proposing a very different relationship between them than has been previously suggested.

But first, it is important to understand how postcolonial studies fits into the intellectual history of Australian literary studies.

II. Postcolonialism and Australian literary studies

As was mentioned earlier, the first professional journal devoted to the study of Australian literature was established in 1963. However, the first mention of postcolonialism in the pages of this journal did not occur until 1978 (Dixon, "Boundary" 40). Of course, it is possible to trace the roots of postcolonial studies back to the field of Commonwealth literary studies, and doing so has the potential to significantly advance the date when a connection with Australian literary studies was first established. The origin of Commonwealth literary studies is "normally traced back to the first Commonwealth Literature Conference at Leeds in 1964, at which the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) was formed" (Dixon, "Australian Literary Studies" 111). Clearly, the institutionalization of Commonwealth literary studies (in 1964) syncs up much more precisely with the origin of Australian literary studies (in the 1960s and 1970s) than does the institutionalization of postcolonial studies (in 1989, as the subsequent paragraph will demonstrate). Or, in other words, "the development of Australian literary studies [...] paralleled the emergence of post-colonialism's disciplinary precursor, Commonwealth literary studies" (Dixon, "Australian Literary Studies" 108).

But it is common knowledge that there are important distinctions between the fields of Commonwealth literary studies and postcolonial

studies—not least of which are respective emphases on literary texts and nation-based studies versus theory and historical/discursive analysis—so what of postcolonial studies itself? When do we see postcolonial approaches emerge from the shadow of Commonwealth literary studies and assert themselves within Australian literary studies? The most common date ascribed to this significant event in the intellectual history of Australian literary studies is 1989. There are a couple reasons this date has been identified: The first reason is that 1989 marks the date of the "ACLALS conference and its significantly titled proceedings, *From Commonwealth to Post-colonial*" (Dixon, "Australian Literary Studies" 111). The second reason, however, is arguably more compelling: 1989 marks the publication date of *The Empire Writes Back*, which not only popularized the shift from Commonwealth to postcolonial for the field at large, but also included significantly more coverage of Australian literature than had been seen to date in publications of its type (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin). The Australian origins of the book's three authors undoubtedly had something to do with this choice, but the international success of the book was what made it truly remarkable; Australian literature has not often enjoyed such a visible profile in the international community of literary scholars. Of course, the focus on Australia's literary output, as well as that of other settler colonies, later gave rise to criticisms that the book improperly conflated settler and non-settler colonies. However, by the time this criticism surfaced, much less gained traction, *The Empire Writes Back* had already irrevocably shifted the tide of Australian literary studies.

This development in the intellectual history of Australian literary studies was enabled by a contemporary sense of disillusionment with established modes of literary criticism. In particular, the body of criticism that most directly supported the formation of Australian literary studies was falling out of favor as Australia approached the 1988 bicentenary of its "settlement" by European colonizers. This still-fledgling body of literary criticism, which came to be known as radical nationalism, was "rejected as reducing Australian literature to certain presumed distinctive characteristics of popular consciousness and the environment" (Docker

84). This rejection and the accompanying movement away from radical nationalism was, of course, part of the “shift in the 1980s [...] from literary criticism to textual politics” (Carter, “After” 118). In other words, it was symptomatic of the rise of theory that was seen in English departments around the world. In describing this historical moment, Carter writes, “The kinds of literary criticism traditionally practiced have been overtaken by successive waves of post-structuralism, cultural studies, identity politics and postcolonialism” (“After” 114). The article you are reading is, of course, most interested in the rise of *postcolonial* approaches to Australian literary studies, which has been shown to have occurred near the end of the 1980s, at the same time as the body of criticism that most directly supported the formation of Australian literary studies was losing its battle for intellectual real estate.

This timeline becomes a source of mystery and intrigue when it is contrasted with Dixon’s aforementioned assertion that it was not until “the end of the 1990s... [when] we’ve begun to see Australian literary studies [...] as a discipline whose origins lie in a period that in certain respects we no longer feel to be contemporary” (“Boundary” 28). If radical nationalism died out at the end of the 1980s and was replaced almost immediately by the rise of theory—and postcolonial theory, in particular—then how do we account for the ten-year gap between this date and the date Dixon identifies? In other words, why does Dixon not identify the end of the 1980s as signaling a break between Australian literary studies’ origins and a more contemporary incarnation of the field, since this date is generally agreed to represent the demise of radical nationalism (i.e., the critical approach that most directly supported the formation of Australian literary studies)? There are really only two possible answers to this question: either postcolonial studies was applied by Australian literary scholars during this ten-year period in a manner that was virtually identical to their application of radical nationalism (thus, it could be said that postcolonial studies signaled no break from Australian literary studies’ origins), or Australian literary scholars did not really engage much with postcolonial studies (in which case, again, no break).

The former possibility—that Australian literary scholars used postcolonial studies in a manner that was remarkably similar to how they used radical nationalism—wins the day in light of observations such as this one: “As late as 1999, after some twenty-five years of work [...] from a post-colonial perspective”—here, the author is likely incorporating work done under the mantle of Commonwealth literary studies—“[scholars] again called for a broadening of the national paradigm that had manifestly not taken place in Australian Literary Studies” (Dixon, “Australian Literary Studies” 114). Clearly, this excerpt testifies to Australian literary scholars’ sustained engagement with postcolonial studies, thus ruling out the possible explanation that they did not really engage much with postcolonial studies. This leaves as the only possible explanation for the ten-year gap noted above that Australian literary scholars’ applications of postcolonial studies did not really represent as stark a break from the radical nationalist tradition as might be expected. Indeed, Dixon’s “[call] for a broadening of the national paradigm” reveals the failure of postcolonial studies to achieve one of its signal claims: to remove the study of Australian literature from its exclusively national context and embed it in a transnational and cross-culturally comparative context.

As should be evident by now, the article you are reading is not the first to observe that postcolonial approaches to Australian literary studies are no longer seen to be in vogue. (See, for example, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower and Nathanael O’Reilly’s assertion that “the disassociation of postcolonial studies with Australia is increasingly evident in Australia [...] where postcolonialism is receiving less and less attention and support in the university system” [4].) Nor is this article the first to make a connection between the fall from favor of postcolonial approaches to Australian literary studies and the rise of book history approaches. Indeed, a small but significant number of overviews of the field of Australian book history positing exactly this connection to postcolonial studies have been published in the last decade. The authors of these articles include some of Australia’s most distinguished scholars: Katherine Bode (“Beyond”), Carter (“Structures”), Dixon (“Australian Literature and the New Empiricism”), Paul Eggert,

Carol Hetherington, and Philip Mead. Their nuanced analysis of this development successfully demonstrates that book history is a benefactor of the insights derived from postcolonial studies and other “theoretically driven modes of textual interpretation” (Dixon, “Australian Literature and the New Empiricism” 158). For example, Bode writes,

Over the past three decades [...] the broad school of identity politics has exposed the relations of race, gender, class and sexuality underlying supposedly universal notions of aesthetic and literary value and authorship [...]. Impacted by individual, social, cultural, political, economic, environmental and geographical factors, no text—like no author—stands outside its particular and complex milieu. As an outcome of these insights, and a measure of their influence, Australian literary studies has gravitated toward a cultural materialist approach. (Bode, “Beyond” 184-85)

Where Bode writes “cultural materialist approach,” it is possible to substitute “book history” (“Beyond” 185). In other words, as a measure of the influence of theory—including postcolonial theory—Australian literary studies has gravitated toward book history.

But what is book history? And what does it have to do with Australian literary studies?

III. Book history and Australian literary studies

Book history is both a field of study and a research method that is finding its way into the curricula of a growing number of international universities and the research agendas of a wide variety of scholars. Whereas most literary scholarship concentrates on what is printed in the pages of a book as the key to the book’s role in the development and transmission of culture, book history considers those other aspects of the book that inform this process. Noted book historian James L. W. West, III, has observed that book history “usually [...] concentrate[s] on a group of related topics: authorship, bookselling, printing, publishing, distribution, and reading.” Each of these six topics crucially informs the meaning-making potential of the book. In other words,

book history studies all those aspects of the book that have historically been seen as incidental to the main purpose of the book, which is to transmit ideas, but in fact crucially inform this process. Furthermore, the “book” portion of “book history” has been broadly interpreted to include “the entire history of written communication,” rather than merely those objects we (presently) commonly identify as comprising this category of “the book” (Greenspan and Rose ix).

Australian scholars have engaged more frequently and enthusiastically with book history approaches than nearly any other postcolonial nation’s scholars. Outside of Australia (and perhaps also Canada), book historians tend to cluster in the colonial centers (both new and old), including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Furthermore, book history seems to have a disciplinary obsession with literature from the United Kingdom and the United States from the Gutenberg era through to the end of the nineteenth century; it is uncommon to find book history scholarship about more recent developments in the book, and less common still to find it about the subject of a postcolonial nation’s literature.

Chronicling the rise of book history approaches in Australian literary studies is complicated, however, by the variety of names by which this field of study/research method goes. The following list of names that are either virtually synonymous with the term “book history,” or at least implicated by the broadest reaches of this term, is incomplete even as it tips twenty names: bibliography (including textual, descriptive, analytical, historical, and physical bibliography), codicology, textual criticism, textual and scholarly editing, print culture studies, manuscript studies, new empiricism, distant reading, publishing history, printing history, library history, and the history of reading. There has been disagreement about the proper term to describe this field of study since book history had its beginnings in France with the French *Annales* school of historians, from which “the discipline spread to England and Germany in the 1960s and 1970s and began to make its appearance in [the United States], as a formally recognized field of study, in the late 1970s” (West). This disagreement about names is borne only in small part

due to issues of translation; it has much more to do with methodological disagreements that there is neither the time nor space to explore in this article. Nonetheless, it is particularly notable that the term “book history” is underutilized by Australian scholars, even as they employ its research methods.

Australian scholars’ hesitancy to embrace the term “book history” is particularly noticeable in light of international consensus building around this term. Central to this development was the establishment in 1991 of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP), an international scholarly organization that plays host to what is arguably the premier annual conference in the field, not to mention a journal by the name of *Book History*. SHARP’s use of the term “book history” in a variety of forums—as well as the term’s use by scholars associated with SHARP—has, with increasing frequency, been to the exclusion of many of the synonyms or near-synonyms mentioned above.

Yet, among Australian scholars in the field, one is more likely to encounter a term such as “new empiricism.” The status of this term in Australian literary studies was formalized by the publication of *Resourceful Reading: The New Empiricism, eResearch, and Australian Literary Culture*, a collection of essays edited by Bode and Dixon. Australian scholars will also use the term “bibliography” to describe the field of study known elsewhere as “book history,” perhaps because Australia’s premier scholarly organization devoted to the study of book history is called the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand. Other terms you will see used by Australian scholars of book history include “textual and scholarly editing” (brought to prominence by the individuals at the Australian Scholarly Editions Centre), “publishing history” (the significance of which is explored in a highly recommended essay by Simone Murray, “Publishing Studies: Critically Mapping Research in Search of a Discipline”), and “the history of reading.”

Clearly, book history in Australia is an odd beast that does not quite meet expectations formed by practice and terminology in other parts of the world. This is not necessarily a weakness but rather a

sign of the distinctiveness of Australian book history scholarship (though, as is discussed later in this article, it has the potential to undermine certain claims related to the transnational potential of Australian literary studies). The last two terms mentioned in the previous paragraph—in other words, “publishing history” and “the history of reading”—suggest that part of this distinctiveness is due to a concentration in Australian book history scholarship around only two of the aforementioned six topics that make up book history. These topics are, once again, “authorship, bookselling, printing, publishing, distribution, and reading” (West).

Looking first at the subject of publishing, the most obvious evidence of this preoccupation among Australian literary scholars is the publication of *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, a collection of essays edited by David Carter and Anne Galligan. It is also possible to trace its influence in an extensive series of publishing history research projects funded by the Australian Research Council. Furthermore, on the subject of Australian scholars’ focused interest on publishing history, mention must be made of Louise Poland’s work as co-founder and coordinator of the (now defunct) Publishing Research List (Pu-R-L), “an electronic forum for postgraduate [...] postdoctoral [and early career] researchers working in the area of Australian books and book publishing.” In her unpublished “Bibliography of Australian-Originated Theses on Publishing,” compiled in 2007 with the assistance of the 34 current members and 12 former members of Pu-R-L, Poland identified nearly 100 “Australian-originated higher degree theses” on the subject of book publishing.

The other topic that has commanded the attention of Australian scholars of book history is the history of reading. Peter Kirkpatrick and Robert Dixon’s 2012 edited collection *Republics of Letters: Literary Communities in Australia*, as well as Dixon and Brigid Rooney’s 2013 edited collection *Scenes of Reading: Is Australian Literature a World Literature?*, are important texts in this field. Yet, in his contribution to *Resourceful Reading*, Carter suggests that Australian scholars are responsible for a much smaller footprint in this field in comparison to the field of publishing history: “We’ve

had both publishing history and literary history, but we're still learning how to bring them together beyond the individual case: perhaps even more so with studies of reading" ("Structures" 41). He also writes, "I suspect that studies of reading have the greatest potential to transform the field" (Carter, "Structures" 51). In both of these excerpts, it is clear Australian scholars are relatively new to the study of the history of reading, while the former excerpt establishes publishing history's relatively longer timeline.

The preceding analysis of this subject is slightly complicated by the existence of the highly influential History of the Book in Australia (HOBAs) project. Volume I of this project, covering the period up to 1890, has yet to be published, but Volume II, *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, edited by Martyn Lyons and John Arnold, was published by University of Queensland Press in 2001. Volume III, *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946–2005*, edited by Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright, was subsequently published in 2006. These two volumes complicate this article's analysis of Australian book history scholars' proclivities since they are, in many ways, the authoritative volumes in the Australian book history field, and their coverage runs the gamut of the six topics that make up the field and beyond. Yet, of the four section headings in Volume II of the HOBAs project, one is devoted to publishing and another to reading—that is to say, roughly half of its content; in Volume III, there are only three section headings, and again one is devoted to publishing and another to reading. In spite of the HOBAs project's generous coverage of all six of the aforementioned categories, this breakdown makes it abundantly clear that, for Australian scholars, publishing history and the history of reading are the most significant areas of book history interest.

IV. Connections and disconnections between book history and postcolonial studies

So what accounts for Australian scholars' enthusiastic uptake of book history? Also, what can book history contribute to Australian literary studies

that postcolonial studies could not? When it comes to answering these sorts of questions, most of the previously cited scholars seem content to conclude that postcolonial studies has done its work and is now exhausted; not that it has nothing more to offer, but that, after an initial flurry of productive energy, its yield per ounce of scholarly sweat has dropped off to such a degree that we need to consider other options. In response to the question, "What can book history contribute to Australian literary studies that postcolonial studies could not?" this is a conclusion that answers only the non-site specific aspects of this question. In other words, it reformulates the question as, "How does book history benefit literary studies?" It does not tell us much about what book history can contribute to *Australian* studies; rather, it tells us about what book history can contribute to *literary* studies.

The question of book history's benefit for *Australian* literary studies is less often explored. However, Bode has identified one possible benefit of book history over other approaches: "Traditional approaches to literature can discuss [only] individual texts and authors in relation to [...] international movements and trends," while book history can identify "trends, shapes and cycles within the national literature" and relate these to "other-national, multinational and trans-national trends, shapes and cycles" ("Beyond" 189). Carter also implies that book history is appropriate to an understanding of an "Australian literature [that] has emerged into something transnational and transdisciplinary" ("After" 114). In fact, this claim that book history has played an integral role in removing Australian literary studies from its isolationist, national context and transforming it into something "transnational" is so widespread that an article was published documenting this trend; Michael Jacklin's "The Transnational Turn in Australian Literary Studies" asserts that "in the past five years [2004–2009] there have been a cluster of articles by leading scholars in the discipline who all point towards this transnational turn in the study of Australian literature" (1). Even as recently as 2015, scholars are still writing about "the 'transnational turn' in the study of Australian literature of the last decade" (Zhong and Ommundsen 1). Indeed, also in 2015, Nicholas Birns

writes, “Academia has decreed that, as opposed to the [...] transnational, the national is no longer chic or trendy the way it was in previous generations, such as the era when organisations such as ASAL were founded” (238). Notably, Jacklin and others, including Bode, identify this “transnational turn” in Australian literary studies as having occurred within the bounds of book history’s disciplinary influence: “Over the last decade, Australian literary studies has undergone a ‘transnational turn’[...]. Book histories have been at the forefront of this process” (Bode, *Reading* 27). Jacklin also quotes Carter’s claim that book history redirects attention to “the circulation of cultures beneath and beyond the level of the nation” (Carter, “After” 119, qtd. in Jacklin 2).

Of course, similar claims were made about the potential of postcolonial studies to “[shift] Australian literary studies beyond the national frame” (Carter, “After” 115). Most scholars believe, however, that this potential remained unrealized. It has been remarked that “even arguments for postcolonial approaches by Australian scholars [...] have the parochial edge of cultural nationalism: they tend to presume that debates about Australian literature are conducted amongst Australians” (Whitlock 193). This failure suggests that Australian scholars’ current predictions about the future of book history might be specious, since these predictions are virtually identical to their earlier predictions about postcolonial studies and its transnational potential. In order to put this issue to rest, we would need to see a scholar demonstrate, based on a survey of current book history scholarship in the field of Australian literary studies, that this scholarship is indeed taking the field in a transnational direction. In the absence of this, there is a lesson to be learned; indeed, this just might be one of the more important lessons that scholars of Australian literature can learn from the intellectual history of postcolonial studies, which can be used to ensure that the application of book history approaches to Australian literary studies moves the discipline in a positive direction. That lesson is: do not take for granted the transnational potential of a given scholarly method.

In fact, the appeal of book history methods for Australian literary scholars may run precisely contrary

to this assumed transnational potential. In other words, while Australian scholars are touting book history’s transnational potential, its greatest strength (and the source of its appeal) may, in fact, be that it keeps things more firmly grounded in the national than almost any other form of contextualist criticism. It enables the conception of a national literature in the face of so many forces that seem to be working against just such an understanding. In this sense, it shares a common cause with a less frequently mentioned body of contextualist criticism: radical nationalism. Of course, as was mentioned earlier, the radical nationalist approach to literary criticism has been widely “rejected as reducing Australian literature to certain presumed distinctive characteristics of popular consciousness and the environment” (Docker 84). Due to its reliance on empirical data, however, book history avoids these accusations. Rather than conceptualizing a national identity as formed through something as fuzzy and hard-to-define as “popular consciousness and the environment,” book history understands that national identity (indeed, the popular consciousness) can be shaped by, for example, the Berne International Book Copyright Agreement of 1886, the growth of public libraries, the “school reader series and school newspapers in various states,” and the parallel importation of books (Mead 4). All of these events have specifically, demonstrably national implications that help explain Australian literary scholars’ relatively recent and high-pitched preoccupation with book history—because it allows scholars to reach beyond Australia’s borders without devaluing the impulse to study *Australian* literature.

So even as Australian scholars cite the transnational potential of book history, we can see a variety of evidence suggesting their focus is on the national at the expense of the transnational. Firstly, without attempting a comprehensive survey of book history scholarship in the field of Australian literary studies, the unscientific impression of this author is that most such scholarship remains exclusively focused on the national subject. Secondly, there is the continued reluctance among Australian book history scholars to embrace the term “book history,” which has clearly

gained international market share. The third and final piece of evidence that suggests Australian book history scholars are focused on the national at the expense of the transnational is their focus on publishing history. None of the aforementioned overviews of Australian book history scholarship mentioned the dominance of publishing history. Nonetheless, publishing history clearly comprises a much bigger slice of the pie that is Australian book history scholarship than it does, for example, the pie that is book history scholarship in the United States (in which printing and other aspects of traditional bibliographical study are more prominent ingredients). This focus on publishing history is indicative of Australian book history scholars' disconnect from their international counterparts. To suggest a disconnect is not intended as a criticism; instead, it is simply an observation about the continued distinctiveness of Australian literary studies, as well as the challenge for Australian scholars to establish transnational connections when they are not even using the same terms (e.g., "book history" vs. "new empiricism") as their international counterparts or studying the same topics (e.g., printing vs. publishing).

Indeed, in response to the aforementioned question, "What can book history contribute to Australian literary studies that postcolonial studies could not?" the answer may very well have nothing to do with transnational potential. Instead, it is that book history recognizes, rather than undermines—some may even say it reinforces—the national context in literary study. This focus may actually help book history succeed where postcolonial studies—as practiced by Australian literary scholars—failed to accomplish its objectives. After all, postcolonial studies was criticized (unfairly, in some instances, but that matters little) for attempting to subsume the national into the postcolonial, such that all postcolonial literatures were said to progress through the same stages, embody the same characteristics, and so forth. The grounding of Australian book history scholarship in the national may help this scholarly method avoid the fate of postcolonial studies, though it will be important for Australian scholars to acknowledge this trend and perhaps temper their comments about the transnational potential of book history.

For scholars of Australian literature, this article suggests that the intellectual history of postcolonial studies in Australia is a fruitful place to look for insights into the possible futures of book history in Australia. Studying the intellectual history of postcolonial studies enables scholars to anticipate criticisms that might arise as a result of new intellectual developments. For example, when Australians employ book history approaches to study their own literature, they mostly analyze those versions of their literature that are otherwise seen to be lacking cultural capital. That is, Australian book historians seem particularly inclined toward popular literature as a subject of analysis; Aboriginal literature is another common research topic. In their choice of subject matter, Australian book historians reinforce the very constructions of literary value they purport to deconstruct and dismantle, similar to how scholars of postcolonial literary studies have been criticized for reinforcing the construction of colonial identities. Due regard for intellectual history could assist book historians to navigate this tricky territory. If done properly, we will, perhaps, see the rise and rise of book history approaches in Australian literary studies until that time when, as with postcolonial studies, lazy scholars are tempted to look elsewhere.

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