Resourceful Reading: A New Empiricism in the Digital Age?

Katherine Bode and Robert Dixon

In a recent survey of eResearch and the humanities, Paul Longley Arthur invokes the famous title of C.P. Snow's 1959 Rede Lecture, 'The Two Cultures', to characterise the relationship between the arts and humanities, and the sciences and information technologies in Australia today. 'Quite suddenly,' he argues, 'at the end of the twentieth century, the digital environment began to trigger major changes in the knowledge economy, with the result that the humanities were thrown unexpectedly and involuntarily into a close relationship with technology. As one might expect in any forced marriage, it was not a case of love at first sight.'[1] Arthur describes a series of subsequent reactions to this 'forced marriage':

> from totally ignoring the other, through unashamedly raiding their wealth, to whole-heartedly embracing the exciting future they seem to offer. Whatever the reaction, it is clear that the humanities are now inescapably entangled with technology, for better or worse, and the two cultures are connecting more than ever before, notably in the new research activities and spaces signalled by the term 'e-research'.[2]

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[1] C.P. Snow, 'The Two Cultures', The Rede Lecture, Senate House, Cambridge, 1959, cited in Paul Longley, Arthur, 'Virtual Strangers: e-Research and the Humanities', *Australian Cultural History* 27.1 (April 2009): 47.

[2] Ibid., pp. 47–48.

Arthur is by no means first to invoke Snow's two cultures. Since the 1960s, this phrase has stood as a 'popular shorthand' for a perceived 'rift—a matter of incomprehension tinged with hostility'[3]—between scientists and humanities scholars. In recent discussions, however, the gulf between the two cultures is most often used, as it is in Arthur's paper, as a statement about the past—albeit the very recent past—and as a starting point from which to identify and describe new metaphors of connection and collaboration between the arts and humanities, and the sciences and information technologies. The editors of a recent special issue of *American Literature* on Literature and Science contrast the 'two cultures' of the past with a new 'contact zone', a realm of entanglement where the arts and sciences are guests 'seated at the [same] table', and 'dynamic partners rather than … hereditary enemies'.[4] In the same issue, Jay Clayton raises the possibility of a 'convergence' between the two scholarly spheres,[5] while elsewhere, Cathy Davidson speaks of the need to bring the 'two cultures' together with 'a real conversation, rather than a contest, across the humanities and sciences'.[6]

In presenting leading examples of research into Australian literary culture that employ empirical methods and digital technologies once associated with the sciences, *Resourceful Reading* demonstrates the potential and productivity of the conversation and connection these critics describe. The essays in this collection—by twenty-five leading scholars, archivists, publishing industry professionals and information technology

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[3] Roger Kimball, '"The Two Cultures" Today: On the C.P. Snow–F.R. Leavis Controversy', *New Criterion* 12 (February 1994): 10.

[4] Wai Chee Dimock and Priscilla Wald, 'Literature and Science: Cultural Forms, Conceptual Exchanges', *American Literature* 74.4 (December 2002): 807–31.

[5] Jay Clayton, 'Convergence of the Two Cultures: A Geek's Guide to Contemporary Literature', *American Literature* 74.4 (December 2002): 706.

[6] Cathy N. Davidson, 'Humanities 2.0: Promise, Perils, Predictions', *PMLA* 123.3 (2008): 715.

specialists—provide an authoritative overview of the ways in which such methods and technologies are transforming research in Australian literary studies today. We want to begin, though, by complicating the idea that these two cultures have been, until recently, entirely separate. In recalling the long, and generally unrecognised, history of empirical and electronic investigations into literary culture—including Australian literary culture—we instead propose this 'contact zone' as longstanding, this 'conversation' as ongoing, and this sudden 'forced marriage' as an established relationship between research into literature and literary culture, and the empirical methods and information technologies supposedly exclusive to the sciences.

Until recently, this conversation has occurred in areas of research marginal, or largely unknown, to mainstream literary studies. The ways in which empirical and digital methods are becoming part of the mainstream conversation is one reason why we can now speak about a 'new empiricism' or 'empirical turn'.[7] In some cases, scholars are using empirical methods and digital technologies to ask and answer questions of long standing within literary studies. In others, these methods and technologies are being applied to new questions: questions that have become relevant to literary studies due to recent theoretically motivated shifts, particularly those contributing to the denaturalisation of the literary canon in the 1970s and 1980s. Empirical and eResearch methods are not thereby becoming *the* mainstream of literary studies—indeed, they have attracted some resistance both in Australia and in the United States as a distraction from 'evaluative criticism', which for Susan Lever remains 'the

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[7] Cf. Terry Flew, 'The "New Empirics" in Internet Studies', in H. Brown, G. Lovink, H. Merrick, N. Rossiter, D. Teh and M. Wilson, eds, *Politics of a Digital Present* (Melbourne: Fibreculture Publications, 2001).

main game for a literary academic'[8]—but they do constitute an increasingly important domain of research in the discipline. To understand what is new about the way empirical and eResearch methods are now being taken up, it is best to begin with their separate histories in research into literature and literary culture.

Prehistories 1: Empiricism and Literary Studies

As it is widely understood, empirical research uses observation, experience and experiment, as opposed to theory, to access the presumed 'facts' and 'objects' of its inquiry, and is most commonly identified with scientific disciplines like chemistry, mathematics and medicine. While theory has occupied a privileged position in literary studies over the last thirty years, different forms of evidence- or information-based literary research preceded, persisted throughout, and emerged during this period.

For literary scholars, the most obvious and visible forms of empirical research are bibliography and scholarly editing. Research in both fields is fundamentally evidence- or fact-based: bibliography describes the material forms and publishing histories of literary works, while scholarly editing identifies and collates the different forms in which a literary work is published. These kinds of empirical research provided the infrastructure necessary for modern scholarship in literary studies. But they have often been characterised as subservient to the practice of literary criticism and, later, theory.

Speaking before the emergence of 'theory' as a separate pursuit within literary studies, G.A. Wilkes, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney in 1964, clearly demonstrates both the foundational importance, but also the perceived

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[8] Susan Lever, 'Criticism and Fiction in Australia', *Overland* 193 (Summer 2008): 64–7, 67; see also Jane Gallop, 'The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading', *Profession* 121.5 (2007): 181–86.

subservience, of what he terms 'the associated disciplines and techniques—bibliographical, editorial, biographical':

> The University study of [Australian literature] means … that it is brought into closer contact with the associated disciplines and techniques—bibliographical, editorial, biographical—on which the study of any literature at University level must rely. These may be disciplines that are transcended in the process of criticism and discrimination, but those further processes are apt to go awry … in the absence of a foundation of this kind.[9]

As a further indicator of the perceived subservience of these 'associated fields', some of the most important early works of Australian scholarship were compiled not by literary scholars but by librarians, amateur bibliophiles and book collectors, including the foundational reference works by J.A. Ferguson, E. Morris Miller and H.M. Green.[10] As both Paul Eggert and Carol Hetherington argue in this collection, a primary condition of the success of 'new' empirical methods is overcoming 'the lingering effects', in Eggert's words, 'of the division of the

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[9] G.A. Wilkes, *The University and Australian Literature: An Inaugural Lecture* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964), p. 20.

[10] J.A. Ferguson, *Bibliography of Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1941–69); E. Morris Miller, *Bibliography of Australian Literature 1795–1938* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1940); H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961). More recent bibliographic projects in Australian literature include D.H. Borchardt and W. Kirsop, eds, *The Book in Australia* (Monash University Historical Monograph no. 16, 1988); and *The Bibliography of Australian Literature* edited by John Arnold and John Hay (Kew, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing; St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001–). Major outlets for bibliographic research include *La Trobe Journal* and *Script and Print*, the journal of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand.

kingdom' of English departments between criticism and theory, and editing and bibliography.[11]

Emerging internationally within the discipline of history in the 1980s, the various histories of the book, publishing, print and reading represent another form of empirical research into literary culture. As the editors of *The Book History Reader* assert, this field inherited from bibliography 'the very recognition that a book is a result of a collaborative, albeit for bibliographers an often corrupting, process; and a detailed system for describing books on the basis of their production attributes which provided a universal standard for drawing attention to the material object rather than its contents'.[12] But rather than seeking to establish 'stable texts and precise textual intentions', book historians are concerned with the complex social life of books: the interactive processes whereby books are produced, distributed and consumed.[13] Statistical or quantitative research—a scientific tool, according to the paradigm of the two cultures—has been a central method in book history. Research into the history of the book in Australia—using empirical methods such as bibliographic description, publishing history and oral history interviews—includes *Australian Readers Remember* (1992), by Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, and *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945* (2001), edited by Martyn Lyons and John Arnold, one of three volumes (two published so far) arising from The History of the Book in Australia project, initiated in 1993.

Although book history draws on a core aspect of literary studies—bibliography—and although book historians are often housed in literature departments, until quite recently the theoretical orientation of

[11] Paul Eggert, 'The Book, Scholarly Editing and the Electronic Edition', p. 68.
[12] David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 'Introduction', in David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds, *The Book History Reader*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.
[13] Ibid., p. 3.

literary studies prompted harsh criticism from book historians, and led to a surprising disengagement between literary studies and histories of the book, publishing and print culture. Writing in 1996, Jonathan Rose describes the disenchantment of book historians with the more theoretically oriented literary studies, noting the contrast between Robert Darnton's 1986 vision of a future of 'fruitful collaboration between reader-response critics and historians of reading', and his 1994 perception that literary studies was built on unstable theoretical foundations: 'It is easy to issue programmatic statements. I think we need to work through the theoretical issues by incorporating them more thoroughly in more research of a concrete, empirical character.'[14] More pointedly, Nicolas Barker asserts, 'It is difficult not to regard the theorizing, the controversy, the construction of elaborate models of response, as activities detached from the texts to which they have been applied.'[15] Closer to home, the resistance to theory by empirical scholars was played out in debates at conferences of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) in the late 1970s and 1980s, and reflected in the *Meridian* editing debate of the mid-1980s.[16]

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[14] Jonathan Rose, 'How Historians Teach the History of the Book', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature—Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 23.1 (1996): 219. Rose is comparing Darnton's perspective in the following two publications: Robert Darnton, 'First Steps Toward a History of Reading', *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23 (1986): 5–30; and Krassimira Daskalova, 'Book History, the State of Play: An Interview with Robert Darnton', *SHARP News* 3 (1994): 2–4.

[15] Nicolas Barker, 'Intentionality and Reception Theory', in Nicolas Barker, ed., A *Potencie of Life: Books in Society* (London: British Library, 1993), p. 199.

[16] See articles on editing, theory and editorial theory in *Meridian: The La Trobe University English Review* by K.K. Ruthven, 4 (1985): 85–87; F.H. Mares, 4 (1985): 88–91; Stephanie Trigg, 5 (1986): 169–74; Paul Eggert, 5 (1986): 175–81; and Jenna Mead, 10 (1991): 81–88; and Paul Eggert, ed., *Editing in Australia* (Can-

If bibliography and scholarly editing were once regarded as subservient to literary criticism and theory, and if book history initially distanced itself from theoretically oriented forms of literary studies, another form of empirical research has been essentially invisible to literary scholars (as well as bibliographers and book historians). Since the 1960s, an interdisciplinary field called 'empirical literary studies' has investigated

a broad range of topics: reading processes, the conditions of literary production and reception, literary education and socialization, the social and cultural contexts of literature, the effects of literature and other media, the role of institutions in the field of literature and the media, and the social history of literature.[17]

This area of study has its own journals, societies, and international conferences, and includes scholars from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, education, history, medicine, linguistics and sociology.[18]

In his opening speech at the first International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature and Media conference in 1987, the founder of the society, Siegfried J. Schmidt, defined the empirical study of literature in terms reminiscent not only of book history's interest in the complex relations of production and consumption, but Franco Moretti's recent

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berra: English Department, University College ADFA, 1990. Occasional Paper No. 17).

[17] Susanne Janssen and Nel van Dijk, 'Introduction', in Susanne Janssen and Nel van Dijk, eds, *The Empirical Study of Literature and The Media: Current Approaches and Perspectives* (Rotterdam: Waalwijk van Doorn, 1998), p. 7.

[18] Journals dedicated to 'empirical literary studies' include *Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, the Media and the Arts* (1971–) and *Empirical Studies of the Arts* (1983–). Professional bodies in this interdisciplinary field include the International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature and Media (IGEL), founded in 1987, and the International Association of Empirical Aesthetics (IAEA), established in 1965 (www.science-of-aesthetics.org/index.html).

assertion of a shift of literary studies to 'distant reading': 'The focal shift from isolated literary texts to activities by producers, mediators, recipients and post-processors of literary phenomena in their respective social contexts can be regarded as the common denominator'.[19] Like the evidence-based research in bibliography and scholarly editing, and the more recent quantitative, data-based analyses prevalent in book history, the stated aim of empirical literary studies—'to carry on literary studies in a scientific way'[20]—challenges the view that the humanities and sciences have been two separate cultures.

Prehistories 2: eResearch and Literary Studies

The use of information technologies in literary research is also of longer standing than is generally acknowledged. Where Snow characterises literary scholars as 'natural luddites',[21] and Arthur more diplomatically depicts them as 'virtual strangers' to technology,[22] Susan Hockey identifies them as the first humanities researchers to employ information technologies, beginning more than fifty years ago.[23] But as with much empirical research, until recently the application of information technologies to literature has occurred in a discipline quite separate from mainstream literary studies: literary and linguistic computing, including computational stylistics. Almost since computers were invented, scholars in this discipline have used the technology to analyse literary texts (for example, to measure the frequency of certain words or word combinations, or to compare different editions of a text). While literary and

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[19] Cited in Janssen and Dijk, 'Introduction', p. 7.

[20] Ibid., p. 10.

[21] Snow, p. 22.

[22] Arthur, p. 47.

[23] Susan Hockey, 'The History of Humanities Computing', in Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens and John Unsworth, eds, *A Companion to the Digital Humanities* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), p. 3.

linguistic computing is an international discipline, one of its major centres, with some of its highest-profile researchers, is the Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing at the University of Newcastle, Australia.[24]

The longstanding use of information technologies in the analysis of literary texts gives rise to some surprising historical facts: for instance, one of the first conferences hosted by IBM, in 1964, concerned Literary Data Processing.[25] The second Roberto Busa Award for 'outstanding achievement in the application of information technology to humanistic research', made jointly in the US and UK by the Association for Computing in the Humanities and the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing, was awarded in 2001 to John Burrows, then director of the University of Newcastle's Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing.[26] Although literary and linguistic computing has long been an established discipline—again with its own journals, associations and international conferences[27]—scholars in the field are well aware of, and frequently comment on, their marginal position in relation to mainstream literary studies. As Thomas Rommel laments,

> literary computing still remains a marginal pursuit … rarely mak[ing] an
> impact on mainstream scholarship … [E]ven the most sophisticated elec-

[24] www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/groups/cllc.

[25] Hockey, p. 7.

[26] 'Roberto Busa Award for 2001', www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/cllc/busaaward.html. See John Burrows, *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[27] Computer-based analyses of literary texts have been a key feature of the journal *Computers and the Humanities* since its formation in the mid-1960s, and *Literary and Linguistic Computing* is entirely devoted to such research. The Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing (ALLC) and the Association for Computers and the Humanities (ACH) host regular international conferences.

tronic studies of canonical works of literature failed to be seen as contributions to the discourse of literary theory and method.[28]

Somewhat surprisingly—given the perception of eResearch as a new and entirely foreign interloper in literary studies—it is often information technologies that are enabling established or traditional research tasks and questions. eResearch—in the sense that Arthur defines it, as 'the *activity* of using new technology, rather than naming what appears to be a separate field, as indicated, for example, by the terms "digital humanities" or "humanities computing"'[29]—has been facilitating traditional forms of literary scholarship since the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Eggert notes, scholarly editing (notwithstanding initial teething issues) has been greatly assisted by digital technologies. Similarly, the digitalisation of library catalogues in the early 1990s, and significant capital investment in the creation of online bibliographies and archives in the late 1990s and 2000s, has facilitated traditional forms of literary scholarship by greatly expanding the material available to literary scholars.[30]

Since at least the beginning of the new millennium, there has been a concerted effort throughout the industrialised world to build capacity in eResearch, and this is now transforming the research environment in Australia and internationally. Key national funding bodies, including the

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[28] Thomas Rommel, 'Literary Studies', in Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens and John Unsworth, eds, *A Companion to the Digital Humanities* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), p. 92.

[29] Arthur, p. 51.

[30] An example is the *Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals 1800–1900*, a digital bibliography with advanced search facilities. The next generation is represented by NINES (Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship), a federated, digitally organised Virtual Research Environment (VRE). See Patrick Leary, 'Googling the Victorians', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 10 (2005): 72–86; Jerome McGann, 'The Future is Digital', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 13 (2008): 80–88.

National Endowment for the Humanities in the United States, the British Research Councils, and Australia's various agencies for research, education and training, have driven this investment at a time when overall funding for the humanities has otherwise declined. The outcomes of investment in eResearch are significant, and in Australia include a number of key reports,[31] online databases,[32] and conferences.[33] In relation to Australian literary studies, a key development in eResearch infrastructure was the establishment of AustLit: The Resource for Australian Literature in 2002. This database was created with funding from the Australian Research Council, the Australian Academy of the Humanities and eleven Australian universities. Its mission was to consolidate all online resources and generate a comprehensive bibliography of Australian literature and its scholarship.[34]

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[31] The Australian e-Humanities Research Network: Leveraging Digital Scholarship in the Humanities in 2004 (Australian Research Council, 2004; Report on the ARC Special Research Initiatives Scheme. www.ehum.edu.au/arc-report/opportunities.html); An Australian e-Research Strategy and Implementation Framework (Department of Education, Science and Training & Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Canberra: AGPS, 2006).

[32] For instance, in 2002, the Australian e-Humanities Gateway launched a major online database of Australian digital projects (www.ehum.ed.au).

[33] In 2007, the Academy of the Humanities based its annual symposium on the theme of Humanities Futures: New Methods and Technologies for Humanities Research (symposium.humanities.org.au). Also in 2007, the inaugural 'eResearch Australasia' conference was held at the University of Queensland. In its first year and subsequently, this conference has featured a number of papers from the humanities alongside eResearch investigations in the sciences and information technology (Humanities Technologies: Research Methods and ICT Use in Australian Humanities Research [2006–7]. See www.humanities.org.au/Policy/HumTech/default.htm).

[34] www.austlit.edu.au.

Research projects in Australian literature now frequently involve both new-empirical and eResearch techniques. Increasingly, the gathering and processing of information either draws upon new electronic archives and datasets, or uses eResearch techniques such as databasing, data mining, geo-spatial mapping and computer visualisation. This shift in research methods is accompanied and often enabled by the coming to maturity of databases such as AustLit and SETIS (Scholarly Electronic Text and Imaging Service), and the rise of new online projects such as the Australian Poetry Resource Internet Library (APRIL), AusStage and AusRED (the Australian Reading Experience Database). But as the Project Reports in Section 3 of this collection demonstrate, these large online projects do more than support research in Australian literary studies; they are changing the type of research conducted in the discipline. This suggests that eResearch in Australian literature may be at an important moment of transition. As Cathy Davidson argues, 'the first generation of digital humanities was all about data', while the next generation developments, facilitated by the capacities of Web 2.0, will see increased collaboration and repurposing of data through the creation of Virtual Research Environments (VREs).[35]

Commenting on these developments in 2007, David Carter noted 'a kind of "new empiricism"' as a direction of research developing 'precisely through engagement with theories of text and culture that point beyond literary autonomy'.[36] The ARC-funded Resourceful Reading project (2007–10) responds to and develops this new empiricism by using em-

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[35] C.N. Davidson, 'Data Mining, Collaboration, and Institutional Infrastructure for Transforming Research and Teaching in the Human Sciences and Beyond', in David Theo Goldberg and Kevin D. Franklin, eds, *Socialising Cyberinfrastructure Watch* 3.2 (May 2007): 3–6. This quote p. 3.

[36] David Carter, 'After Postcolonialism', *Meanjin* 66.2 (2007): 118; see also Robert Dixon 'Australian Literature and the New Empiricism', *JASAL: The Colonial Present* (2008): 158–62.

pirical methods and digital archives to revise the legacy of theoretically driven literary history and criticism, and to generate new ways of writing literary history and reading texts.[37] The term 'resourceful reading' was meant deliberately to combine the information-rich, often computational techniques of what has come to be known, after Franco Moretti, as 'distant reading' with close reading's attention to the internal features of individual literary texts: their settings, idioms, themes and patterns of allusion. The chapters gathered here are intended to provide the first comprehensive account of the new empiricism and eResearch as they are converging in, and transforming, the field of Australian literary criticism and history in the twenty-first century. The essays range from synoptic accounts of the state of the discipline in its international contexts with a particular focus on future directions (Section 1), to exemplary applications of empirical methods by leading critics and scholars (Section 2), to reports on large-scale online projects that represent a significant future direction of literary studies in Australia (Section 3).

A New Empiricism? The State and Future of the Discipline

Given the prehistories of empirical and eResearch, it is obvious that defining the new empiricism is not as simple as pointing to the purportedly 'new' use of empirical or eResearch methods. What *is* new is their potential for application to questions of deep relevance to contemporary literary studies 'after theory'. Outside Australian literature, prominent examples of the new empirical turn include Franco Moretti's method of

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[37] The Resourceful Reading project is an ARC Discovery Project funded from 2007 to 2010. The four investigators are Katherine Bode (University of Tasmania), Leigh Dale (University of Wollongong), Robert Dixon (University of Sydney) and Gillian Whitlock (University of Queensland).

'distant reading' and William St Clair's 'political economy of reading'.[38] These works herald a shift away from textual critique as the sole raison d'être of literary studies, and towards analysis of the political, economic, cultural and material contexts in which books are produced, circulated and received. But they present their findings in ways that are of interest to textual scholars and literary theorists alike.

The new empiricism might therefore be seen as a loose confluence of approaches and methods that bring a renewed recognition of the value of archival research, while also bringing information and datasets into conversation with questions that have been raised by theoretical work in literary studies during the last quarter century, especially through the application of eResearch methodologies such as databasing, data mining and geo-spatial mapping. These methods are valuable to the extent that they productively address in new ways some of the questions that mainstream literary studies has been unable to explore due to its investment in theoretical and textual analysis. The new empiricism expresses itself as a spectrum of work, from traditional forms of archival research to the mining and manipulation of data from new online datasets. While information can be used in traditional forms, eResearch enhances our access to that information as well as our ability to use it in new and innovative ways. At whatever point of the spectrum it might be located, such research brings theory into contact with the oxygen of rich data.

David Carter opens the collection with an overview of 'the different kinds of work on culture'—both in Australia and internationally—'that might be hidden in that not-quite innocent phase, "the new empiricism".'

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[38] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005) (these essays originally appeared in *New Left Review* in 2003–04); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and 'The Political Economy of Reading', *The John Coffin Memorial Lecture in the History of the Book*, 12 May 2006, ies.sas.ac.uk/Publications/johncoffin/stclair.pdf.

In particular, he emphasises the status of the new empiricism as 'post-' rather than 'anti-theoretical':

> If the new cultural history has grown negatively out of a certain weariness with the subversive paradigm and the routines of contemporary critique … it has also grown positively out of engagement with cultural studies and poststructuralist critical theory, as much as with empirical forms of book history.[39]

In other words, and as the chapters in this collection demonstrate, while the new empiricism announces a shift from theoretically-driven criticism to information-driven histories of books, print cultures and reading, it nevertheless addresses some of the larger questions about production, distribution and reception, institutions and subjectivities, and cultural systems, networks and fields that have characterised post-structuralist theory as well as some versions of cultural studies. In situating books within a larger cultural, political and economic field, the new empiricism directs us beyond the 'intense investment in the *literariness* of the literary texts' that has characterised literary studies. It is this tactical deferral or suspension of 'our interest in the literary text' that allows the literary to 'emerge strategically in a new context, its cultural dynamics, meanings and effects better situated, and better *connected* to other media forms and social interactions'.[40]

While Carter emphasises what is 'new' about the new empiricism, Eggert and Hetherington demonstrate the continuing importance of established empirical practices in literary studies to these current disciplinary shifts. Their chapters point to a fundamental feature of the new empiricism—and of this collection: the way it brings together the essentially distinct, though occasionally entangled, traditions of literary scholarship and criticism. Literary scholarship has generally been seen as

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[39] David Carter, 'Structures, Networks, Institutions', p. 42.
[40] Ibid., p. 36.

inferior to the primary act of literary criticism, and has often been carried out by non-academic personnel. This hierarchical division was exacerbated by the belated arrival and subsequent reification of theory in Australian literary studies from the 1980s. The new empiricism not only unites theory and criticism through historical, sociological and cultural approaches, but in its focus on evidence it brings the activities of scholarship to a new prominence.

Eggert discusses what he calls 'the oldest empirical form of literary scholarship': scholarly editing. Through an account of his involvement in the Colonial Texts Series and its development of systems for electronic scholarly editions, Eggert explores the 'different logics' of the book and the e-text. While he embraces the possibilities of new electronic editions, he also argues for the continuing importance of the printed scholarly edition. He then reflects on the conditions necessary for realising 'the benefits of empirical, electronically enabled methodologies in the literary field' and preventing the new empiricism becoming just another 'catastrophic', short-lived event in the history of literary studies. Among these conditions are the need to foster collaboration, to create an appropriate rewards structure for the different types of scholarly activity involved in new empirical and eResearch, and to maintain a 'continuous tension' between both 'the empirical and theoretical' and 'sensitised close reading'.[41] This is another version of resourceful reading. Overcoming longstanding divisions within literary studies is also the focus of Hetherington's chapter. Describing the marginalisation of bibliography since the 1970s—its virtual exclusion from university courses, funding eligibility and conference programs—she asserts the vital importance of 're-instat[ing] bibliography as the cornerstone of literary studies', including

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[41] Eggert, pp. 53–69.

the undergraduate curriculum, if the 'possibilities of the digital and electronic revolutions in literary studies are to be fully realised'.[42]

The Case Studies

The second section of *Resourceful Reading* provides a series of exemplary case studies in the new empiricism and eResearch. These chapters investigate various aspects of what Robert Thomson and Leigh Dale describe as the 'ecology' of literary culture, and include studies in the history of the book, print culture, publishing history and histories of reading.[43] Although very different, they share a number of characteristics indicative of the new empiricism. All embody the shift from textual and ideological critique to a consideration of the place of books and print culture in their historical, economic and social contexts. For most, the consideration of these questions is enriched by archival research, often supplemented by digitally enabled forms of data mining or data analysis. For some, this trend is manifest in what Julieanne Lamond and Mark Reid describe as 'a shift in focus … from canonical texts and authors towards an examination of Australian literature as a field, a network, a broader structure'.[44] However, in the double relation of literary studies to empirical methods that Carter describes, other chapters reposition canonical literary texts within publishing, print cultural and transnational networks and cultural contexts.

Many of these chapters use empirical methods to interrogate received findings about literary history produced in association with theoretically motivated forms of close reading, and to offer new interpretations of the place of books in relation to publishing and reading, and both Australian and transnational cultural formations. Gillian Whitlock's return to her

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[42] Hetherington, p. 83.
[43] Thomson and Dale, p. 119.
[44] Lamond and Reid, p. 225.

own feminist work of the late 1980s is exemplary. Typically, the authors ask what Carter describes as 'those stubbornly particular "wise idiot" questions about books and texts, the radically simple questions we're now familiar with, but which reconfigure the field':[45] what books were actually available at the time, who published them, how much did they cost, how and where were they distributed, and what kinds of readers bought them?

A number of the case studies also contain warnings about potential pitfalls of the empirical turn. This is bound up with the question of whether the new empiricism is best understood as post-theoretical, as Carter and Dixon suggest, or a move beyond and 'after' the divisive moment of theory as Eggert, perhaps, implies. This is part of a wider perception that the moment of theory, which swept through the social sciences and humanities in the 1970s and 1980s, has now passed. It was announced initially in the 1990s, then more decisively in the 2000s.[46] And yet, as Colin Davis puts it in relation to the corpus of high theoretical texts and authors, 'we may come after them but we are not yet over them'.[47] Similarly, James Wood observes, 'No university teacher of literature has been untouched by theory; even its enemies speak some of its language'.[48] One of the legacies of theory is a continuing suspicion that a new empiricism might reinstate positivistic claims to objectivity that ignore the mediation of language, ideology, or the unconscious. Accordingly, Mark Davis perceives in some uses of empirical methods a 'temptation … to rediscover social criticism as a search for "facts"' and to construct 'data' and 'theory' as antithetical.[49] His warning that 'Mere data

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[45] Carter, p. 39.

[46] Cf. Thomas Docherty, *After Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

[47] Colin Davis, *After Poststructuralism: Reading, Stories and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 28.

[48] James Wood, 'Textual Harassment', *New Republic* (7, 14 July 2004): 28–35.

[49] Davis, p. 193.

… can't stand in for analysis of the institutional forces by which books are received, read, and sometimes remembered' is echoed by a number of other contributors, including Ivor Indyk and Jason Ensor, who point to possible affinities between empirical approaches to literary studies and the economic rationalism of political culture, which attempts to reduce questions of value to quantifiable data.

Ensor, along with Thomson and Dale, also raises concerns about the ways in which literary scholars collect and interpret data in the absence of established methodological and disciplinary protocols. In expressing their unease, these contributors refer to what might be described as the negative side of empiricism: the possibility that, as Hetherington identifies it, empirical studies might fall into the trap of dismissing 'theoretical abstraction in the belief that texts (or facts of history or biography) can "speak for themselves" without the intervention of analysis and interpretation'.[50] Such a version of empiricism would not be post-theoretical but constitute a return to earlier, more positivistic forms of literary scholarship. In placing the pitfalls of empirical analysis front and centre, these contributors demonstrate Eggert's point that 'humanities types … will wish to understand the intellectual baggage that their methodological conceptions may contain'.[51]

The first two case studies explore, from different perspectives, the position of Australian literature in its transnational contexts. Robert Dixon applies the techniques of both close and distant reading to explore contemporary Australian literature in what Emily Apter calls 'the translation zone', 'a broad intellectual topography' in and between the spaces of national literatures.[52] While the 'translation zone' is a spatial metaphor, Dixon uses data mining to visualise the cultural and commercial econo-

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[50] Hetherington, p. 70.
[51] Eggert, p. 60.
[52] Cited in Dixon, p. 88.

mies of that space. Is there a single translation zone, or are there multiple translation zones between Australian literature and other languages? Beyond English, does the reputation of an Australian book or writer spread from one foreign language to another, or are individual translations siloed, communicating back through English? How important is the agency of the author and the translator? More fundamentally, who *are* the often invisible translators of Australian literature?

Roger Osborne also situates Australian literature in a transnational context through a case study of the first edition of Kylie Tennant's novel, *The Battlers*, as it 'travelled the trade routes of a transnational print culture' from London to New York and then Sydney. He reflects on the various people who 'made *The Battlers*', and the 'multi-faceted cultural and economic network' in which this occurred. In this way, he illuminates the 'Australian presence in a transnational history of books' and enhances our understanding of 'how Australian fiction is positioned beyond our shores'.[53]

Thomson and Dale return us to Australia, but in a way that shifts the focus from the study of Australian literature to the study of literature in Australia.[54] By examining references to books (both Australian and non-Australian) in Australian newspapers in December 1930, they test existing accounts of interwar culture that have focused on subsequently canonical literature. In emphasising the important role economics and geography play in the creation of Australian literary culture, they reveal a very different picture to the prevalent canonical view, one that foregrounds 'the enormous diversity and range of books discussed in

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[53] Osborne, p. 118.

[54] Cf. Robert Dixon, 'Australian Literature—International Contexts', *Southerly* 67.1–2 (2007): 23.

Australian newspapers', as well as the 'previously under-reported significance of the regional press'.[55]

Not surprisingly, given the importance of book history to the emergence of the new empiricism, a number of chapters in this section investigate the history of publishing using a wide range of empirical sources, including the AustLit database, library catalogues, and publishers' archives for data on print runs and sales figures. Ivor Indyk uses a case study of three Australian literary texts—Gerald Murnane's *Tamarisk Row*, Peter Skrzynecki's *Immigrant Chronicle* and Rosa Cappiello's *Oh Lucky Country*—to complicate what he calls the 'baseline reality of literary publishing—its unprofitability, its fundamentally uncommercial nature'. These three texts are exceptional in different ways: one lost money but has been published and republished in multiple editions; one was a belated commercial success after its adoption on high-school curricula; while the third received excellent reviews and was subsidised by two university presses, but had slow sales. Indyk suggests that the fate of these books is determined not solely by their literary appeal 'but the operation of public, educational or institutional forces, which suddenly change the scale of things, or produce unexpected surges of interest'. It is in relation to such factors 'that one has to seek the real sources of the literary economy'.[56]

Deborah Jordan presents a history of the University of Queensland Press's publishing of Indigenous and Black writers in the context of the David Unaipon Award and the subsequent formation of its Black Australian Writers Series. The 'case of Indigenous authors' challenged 'notions of value and difference, of motivation and intention, of agency and reception'.[57] Through archival research, Jordan develops a thick institutional

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[55] Thomson and Dale, p. 120.

[56] Indyk, p. 147.

[57] Jordan, p. 157.

history of the personalities, as well as the political, aesthetic and economic factors involved in establishing a canon in Aboriginal writing. The tension between a publisher's social responsibilities and commercial imperatives is also the focus of Mark Davis's chapter. Drawing on the Penguin archives, among other sources, Davis examines the complex pre- and post-publication history of Henry Reynolds's landmark book, *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981), in the context of the 'rise and decline', from the 1960s to the mid-1990s, of what he calls the 'cultural mission' in Australian book publishing.[58]

Katherine Bode takes a quantitative approach to Australian publishing history in second half of the twentieth century. In contrast to the prevalent view of a British-dominated industry, she argues that Australian novel publishing in the 1950s and 1960s was dominated by a handful of Australian mass-market publishers. In the 1970s and 1980s, the number and diversity of Australian publishers of Australian novels increased, confirming the general perception of these decades as a nationalist period in Australian publishing history, but this growth was accompanied by the entry of multinational conglomerates into the field, a phenomenon commonly identified with the 1990s and 2000s.

The use of digitally enabled quantitative analysis is also a feature of the two final chapters in this section, which additionally employ more sophisticated eResearch methods and visualisation techniques. They represent the point at which eResearch moves, in Arthur's words, beyond 'the *activity* of using new technology' to something like a newly distinctive field of 'humanities computing'.[59] Ensor argues that eResearch methods are producing a 'new ontology' of Australian literary history. Due to the newness of this endeavour and the methodological uncertainties it involves, he advocates the creation of an eResearch charter,

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[58] Davis, p. 178.
[59] Arthur, pp. 50–51.

providing a best-practice model for computer-assisted research that articulates 'consensus on meaningful standards for experimental evidence provided by data mining' and builds a bridge between new empirical methods and the 'aims, objectives and methods of Australian literary history'.[60] Whether such a charter could—or even should—aim to regulate the diverse manifestations of eResearch exemplified in this collection is a matter for future debate.

Lamond and Reid employ techniques from statistical machine learning to develop a new history of reading in Australia. By applying these techniques to datasets derived from the Australian Common Reader project, they create a visual summary of the database that reveals culturally significant patterns in the readership data. In this process, eResearch methods alter the kinds of questions literary scholars are able to ask of data, while answering them frequently involves a turn from the quantitative back to the qualitative—to the specific texts and readers, and the specialised skills of the literary critic.

The Project Reports

The project reports in Section 3 record the current state of development of the most important large-scale eResearch projects in Australian literature today: namely, AustLit, including its new Aus-e-Lit project and the Literature of Tasmania subset of the database; the Australian Poetry Resource Internet Library (APRIL); AusStage; and the Australian Reading Experience Database (AusRED). Reports on research infrastructure projects are not usually included in publications of this kind. However, as the reports demonstrate, and as many of the previous chapters confirm, the future of new-empirical approaches to research in Australian literary culture is inherently bound up with the success of these large-scale online initiatives. While they typically began as infrastructure projects, serving

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[60] Ensor, p. 249.

the classical functions of supporting and enhancing the research projects to which they are articulated, they are now at a point of transformation where they are developing research agendas of their own. This represents a dramatic and historic displacement of the hierarchisation of criticism, research and scholarship prevailing since the 1950s. Rather than merely being supplementary to 'pure' research projects, in other words, these online initiatives are increasingly behaving like research projects in their own right. One consequence of this shift—as Anthony Gibbons predicted in his widely influential definition of 'Mode 2' research—is the coming together around a central 'problem' of the different kinds of personnel represented by the contributors to this book, who include academic scholars, archivists, librarians and IT professionals.[61] Our inclusion of these project reports is therefore a sign of the transformation of research in Australian literary culture in the digital age. It is also a further instance of the difficulty of defining eResearch as either 'the *activity* of using new technology' or a distinct field of 'humanities computing'.[62]

AustLit, the oldest and most mature of the projects reported here, has become a foundational tool for research in Australian literary studies and is now an integral component of many successful applications for Australian Research Council Discovery Projects, including Resourceful Reading (Dale, Dixon, Bode and Whitlock), America Publishes Australia (Carter) and Australian Literary Publishing and its Economies, 1965–1995 (Carter and Indyk). Kerry Kilner reflects on the changing nature of research in an eResearch environment, and on the impact AustLit has had on Australian literary studies. She also speculates on the potential of the proposed Ause-Lit project to further transform research practice by adapting 'traditional scholarly activities' to the digital environment.

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[61] See Robert Dixon, 'Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production', *JASAL* 3 (2004): 27–43.
[62] Arthur, pp. 50–51.

Tony Stagg and Philip Mead describe a bibliographic and geographic subset of AustLit dedicated to the literature of Tasmania. The intersection of theoretical perspectives, historical inflections, database methodologies and limitations, visualisation technologies, cognitive mapping and insider knowledge implicated in the creation of their AustLit subset is a further example of the coming together of the previously separate spheres of scholarship, criticism and theory in the creation of eResearch infrastructure. Their discussion also reflects the way that changing technology is motivating methodological and theoretical debate from inside research projects and not merely as a supplement to them.

The other online initiatives detailed in these reports are not yet as established as AustLit, but promise to have as significant an impact on research practice in Australian literary and cultural studies. APRIL, discussed here by its creators, John Tranter and Elizabeth Webby, brings together a wide range of contemporary and earlier Australian poetry, as well as critical and contextual materials, to readers via the internet, and is poised to develop new research questions. Neal Harvey, Helena Grehan and Joanne Tompkins describe AusStage, an online database of live, Australian theatre performances and event-related data. In bringing such data together with 'the wider sociological and historical context in which the event existed', AusStage enables a new, empirical research practice in Australian theatre studies—one that will make 'research in the performing arts … more dynamic and far-reaching'.[63] This potential to transform research by uniting the particular and the general will also be a feature of AusRED, the Australian Reading Experience Database. As Patrick Buckridge explains, once launched, it will significantly expand research into the history of readers and reading in Australia as an emerging field related to yet distinct from the history of writers and writing. It will also

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[63] Harvey, Grehan and Tompkins, p. 326.

function interoperably with other national REDs, such as the British Reading Experience Database, to enable transnational studies of reading.

Implicit in all of these reports on large-scale eResearch infrastructure initiatives, and in some of the essays in the preceding sections, are implications for the management and policies of research funding and reward: that is, the problematic distinction in research funding criteria between 'pure research' and 'scholarship', which may well reflect earlier assumptions about the hierarchisation of research practice. The potential for these large-scale eResearch initiatives to secure adequate levels of funding, to access research—as distinct from research infrastructure—funding, and for their outputs to be recognised as contributing to a research track record, are perhaps destined to become major issues in determining how well the new empiricism fares in the future, and how successfully collaborative research can be effected and sustained.