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Title

Building bridges: classic Australian texts and critical theory in the senior English classroom

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Abstract

In the past two years much has been said by both media and government, about the role of secondary English teachers in promoting 'classic' Australian literature. Two significant documents have explicitly directed attention towards this issue. The first was a Communiqué, produced by the Australia Council for the Arts, in response to the Australian literature in Education Roundtable, convened on August 7, 2007, and the second was the English Framing Paper produced by the National Curriculum Board in November, 2008. While the English Framing Paper acknowledges a greater diversity of Australian texts than the Communiqué, it also implies that classic Australian literature is a kind of a Bourdieuan 'gift' to be received, untheorised and without critical framing, throughout the years of secondary English (NCB, 2008, p.12). This paper contends that an approach to Australian literature, which emphasises cultural heritage over relational and theorised approaches to texts, fails to recognise the ways in which critical theory can be used to facilitate student connection and engagement with classic works, and thus maintains rather than bridges cultural and historical divides. To explore this argument, this paper draws on a classic Australian text that continues to be much used (and loved) in secondary classrooms: Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River*. My aim is both to explore a theoretical paradigm which will offer a new reading of this significant Australian text, and also to suggest an approach to reading and teaching classic Australian literature which investigates an alternative to the more traditional pedagogies that have dominated media responses to this issue.

Key words

Classic Australian literature, cultural heritage, critical theory, student engagement, theoretical paradigm, teaching approach.

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Reading classic Australian literature in secondary schools: the current debate

In the past eighteen months, much has been said, by both media and government, about the place of 'classic' Australian literature in secondary schools. The first governmentally sanctioned document to direct attention towards this issue was produced by the Australia Council for the Arts, in response to the Australian Literature in Education Roundtable, convened on August 7, 2007. Reacting to media claims of a 'crisis' in Australian literature (Neill, 2006; Topsfield, 2007) the Arts' Council's Communiqué explicitly argues for a return to the teaching of traditional texts, claiming that "[c]lassic works" and "literary works of distinction" should "form a prominent part of English in school and university curricula" (Australia Council for the Arts, 2007). For the writers of the Communiqué, the advocacy of classic works—problematically defined by some as texts written by colonial writers, or contemporary novels by white men (Donnelly, 2007; O'Connor, 2007)¹—is intrinsically linked to the desire for a pedagogical return to a more traditional, Leavisite approach to the teaching of literature. Responding not only to the perceived crisis in Australian literature, but also to the 'crisis' in secondary English, the Communiqué further asserts that "[t]here should be less pressure on teachers to adhere to interpretive [theoretical] frameworks, set out in prescriptive curriculum documents" (ACA, 2007). By presenting critical theory as antithetical to the study of classic texts, the Communiqué echoes the position taken by the conservative daily broadsheet *The Australian*, in their decade long "culture war" against what they describe as the influence of postmodernism on the English teaching profession (cf McLean Davies, 2008b; Snyder, 2008).

Arguably, this conservative argument advanced by the Communiqué has had a significant influence on continuing debate about the teaching of Australian literature in schools. On a state level, this is evident in the New South Wales Board of Studies efforts to strengthen Australian literature in the NSW English Curriculum (NSW, BOS 2008) and on a national level this renaissance of traditional pedagogies and texts resonates with the National English Curriculum Framing Paper produced by the National Curriculum Board (2008). While the English Framing paper affords a broader definition of literature than the Communiqué (National Curriculum Board, 2008, p.3), the influence of this earlier document is evident in the recommendation that in the senior years of schooling, "subject English should provide offerings that focus on analysing both the historical genres and literary traditions of Australian literature and world literature and contemporary texts" (NCB, 2008, p.16). This edict echoes the historical/cultural heritage approach to the study of literature championed by the Communiqué (cf Homer, 2007), and gives tacit support to the erroneous notion that Australian literature is something students receive during secondary school, rather than a diverse body of work which they might explore as they negotiate their own identities as national and global citizens (McLean Davies, 2008a).

Further, although the English Framing Paper does not renounce the theoretical frames that have produced such rich classroom experiences over the past three decades, neither does it explicitly affirm the role of critical frameworks in the teaching of Australian literature (classic or otherwise). Undoubtedly, the writers of the English Framing Paper skirted around issues of critical reading and theoretical frameworks in an attempt to avoid this contentious issue in English teaching and produce a document on which differently interested groups might be able to reach consensus (Emmitt, 2008). However, the advocacy of literary traditions and historical genres in the English Framing Paper, without the suggestion of the diverse ways in which these texts might be read and analysed, allows the regressive pedagogy proposed by the Communiqué to gain tacit support.

I have shown elsewhere (McLean Davies, 2008a) that the privileging of classic and canonical works, in conjunction with the denouncement of critical and theoretical frames, effectively reduces the rich field of Australian literature to a problematic list of so-called worthy texts, and presents it as a Bourdieuan gift to be dispensed throughout the years of secondary schooling (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 5-6). In contrast to this view, I have argued that a more productive approach, as we move towards a National English curriculum is to consider the range of practices that will facilitate rigorous, meaningful and lasting student engagement with the national literature. Central to my argument is the notion—drawing on the work of theorists such as Rachael Blau DuPlessis (2007) and Dorothy Smith (2002)—of a nexus or relational approach to literature, which seeks to establish connections between readers, writers and texts, and draws on theoretical paradigms to do so. In this paper, I will develop this argument further and focus on the way that critical theory can be used facilitate students' close reading of classic Australian literature in the senior secondary classroom. In contrast to those who have claimed that critical frameworks create divisions between readers and texts (Lewis & Salusinsky, 2006; Slattery, 2005), I will contend that critical theory can provide a metalanguage which enables students to 'build bridges' between works of classic literature, their own experiences of place and space, and the local and global cultures of which they are a part. I will explore this contention through a discussion of the way in which Michel Foucault's sociological theories can be fruitfully employed to frame a reading of Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River* (1980), a classic text which—as Ivor Indyk's research has shown (2008)—continues to be much used (and loved) in secondary classrooms around Australia.

By presenting *Tirra Lirra by the River* as a classic text, I am broadening the definition of this term offered by some roundtable participants in the weeks following the August meeting (cf Donnelly, 2007; O'Connor, 2007). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss 'classic' literary works by indigenous and migrant writers, it is important to note that a definition of "classic Australian texts" which acknowledges the diversity of Australian writers is essential, if we are to effectively make connections between Australian literature and the students in Australian classrooms.

Anderson and Foucault: a story of praxis

It was not until I was teaching Year 12 Literature students at an outer-suburban Melbourne high school, that I became interested in Jessica Anderson's celebrated novel *Tirra Lirra by the River*, which had won the Miles Franklin Award and the Australian Natives Literature Award in 1978. If I'm honest, this interest was, in the first instance, prompted by pragmatism: I had been introduced to *Tirra Lirra* in my Honours year, and when faced with the prospect of selecting six texts from a rather extensive list for close study and examination, chose one with which I had some familiarity. Then, as now, the final examination for the Victorian Certificate of Education (V.C.E) Literature subject consisted of three or four passages from each of the set texts, preceded by the generic prompt: "use one or more of the passages selected as the basis for a discussion of ..." (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2008, p.4). This open question is designed to allow students to present their own reading of the texts they have studied, instead of asking them to see the text through the lens of a specific essay question – an approach which must surely unsettle those "cultural warriors" who suggest that the meaning of texts is fixed, and that the task of English teachers is simply to make that meaning apparent to those in their charge. It was in the context of preparing for this Literature examination, that my students and I began to explore different ways of reading *Tirra Lirra by the River*. We took it apart and, like a jigsaw puzzle that can be assembled in a variety of ways, reconstructed it according to different themes, characters, motifs, symbols, images and literary devices.

One of the themes we investigated concerned the ways in which Anderson's protagonist, Nora Porteous, attempts to negotiate personal space in each of the houses, gardens and workplaces she occupies over the course of her seventy years. Our investigation was prompted by Nora's declaration, made when she returns to the family home in Brisbane after a long period of expatriation in London, that she intends to create a space of her own: "[s]omewhere in this house ... I shall make my domain. In whatever circumstances I have found myself, I have always managed to devise a little area, camp or covert, that was not too ugly... I have managed to devise it somehow, and no doubt I shall do it again" (Anderson, 1980, p. 19). Over the period of weeks spent studying this text, we examined the "domains" Nora created in her domestic spaces and places of work. We asked why these spaces were important and what function they performed, and noticed the ways in which Nora often had to struggle to establish her personal spaces, and the temporary and vulnerable nature of these sites.

There were, of course, other themes and images we mapped through this text. As those familiar with this novel will know, Anderson's use of medieval imagery and references, discussed illuminatingly by Louise D'Arcens (2005) provide another way of drawing aspects of the novel together. Yet, it was the exploration of Nora's spaces that resonated with the small group of students. Perhaps one reason for this is that this cohort, living in the outskirts of suburban Melbourne and attending a small, semi-rural school seemed to relate to, or at least understand, Nora's feeling of confinement. They could imagine her desire for escape from her suburban context, and her efforts to find a room or a garden of her own.

It was in response to these personal connections that my students were making with Anderson's novel, that I began looking for a way in which they might frame their discussions. This is not to say that our work on *Tirra Lirra* had been without a theoretical context; as Ray Misson has observed no readings are 'neutral', or without ideology (1998, p108). Indeed, Anderson's novel, written in 1978 at the beginning of the literary second wave in Australia (Goldsworthy, 1996, p. 22), invites gendered and postcolonial interpretations, even if they are not named as such. Rather, as my students continued to question the ways in which women's spaces were being represented in these texts, it became apparent that they required a specific *metalanguage* through which they could further articulate and contest their ideas. This prompted me investigate critical frameworks concerned with space and place, and ultimately found me drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopias, which he defines as sites of contest and disruption (1986).

In his seminal paper 'Of other spaces', Foucault explains heterotopias as "counter-sites ... in which ... all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (1986, p. 24). Foucault provides material examples of these heterotopic spaces, which include the brothel, the garden, the institution, the library, the colony and the boat, and notes that each of these spaces has a different purpose. Amongst his list of principles of heterotopology, Foucault contends that some heterotopias, like boarding schools, are spaces of "crisis" (the crisis of youth/adolescence); others are spaces of and for "deviation" (like prisons); and still others (like religious colonies) are sites of compensation (pp. 24-27). In the following section, I will show the ways in which Foucault's notion of heterotopias, and the language he uses to define these sites, can be appropriated to facilitate a reading of the spaces represented in *Tirra Lirra by the River* and in doing so, further the assertion, recently advanced by Mark Howie (2009), that critical theory can provide a useful metalanguage for students as they seek to explore and connect with texts.

A nexus approach to classic Australian literature: reading heterotopias in *Tirra Lirra by the River*

Before I explore the ways in which critical theory can facilitate a nexus approach to literature (McLean Davies, 2008a, pp.50) it is important to address any concerns that some might have about the employment of Foucault's sociological framework and terminology in the secondary classroom. While the term 'heterotopia' is one that students are unlikely to find familiar, words such as 'dystopia' and 'utopia' are often featured in discussions of texts at senior level—look no further than the perennial favourite, *Bladerunner* (Scott et al., 1999) for evidence of this—and thus Foucault's term, which is part of this family of words concerned with space and place, is clearly not outside the realms of the secondary English classroom.

Further, any anxiety about this new vocabulary should also be assuaged by the knowledge that in senior secondary school, students are expected to learn a plethora of complex, content specific vocabulary in all the subjects they undertake—the sciences provide a good example

of this—in order to be able to undertake the analysis and reflection that is required at this stage of schooling (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Love, 2008). Indeed, the study of English has always utilised particular metalanguage. Traditionally, poetic and grammatical metalanguages have provided vital frameworks for the analysis of texts, and in more recent times, the language of film has greatly enhanced the study of multimodal texts in the classroom. In the new V.C.E English study design (VCAA, 2006), and in the National English Framing Paper (NCB, 2008), knowledge of appropriate metalanguage is once again being emphasised as integral to successful textual analysis.ⁱⁱ Thus, the argument that I am making here, that critical theory, and more specifically, the theory of heterotopias offered by Foucault, can provide a useful metalanguage for the analysis of Anderson’s classic Australian text, does not represent a significant shift in the way that subject English is being taught and conceived. Rather, it builds on our understanding of the importance of providing students with appropriate linguistic and conceptual frameworks in classrooms that are concerned with the analysis of literature.

Connecting self and text

Although the term heterotopia may seem, in the first instance, foreign to secondary students, Foucault’s notion of these sitesⁱⁱⁱ—summarised by Kevin Hetherington as “spaces of alternate ordering [that] organize a bit of the social world in a different way to that which surrounds them” (1997, p. viii)—has particular resonance for teenagers, who often create an alternative landscape in their bedroom within the family home. Indeed, the adolescent bedroom can be understood as a crisis heterotopia, a space so-called because it is reserved for individuals who are, “in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (Foucault, 1986, p.24). By way of preparation for a discussion of alternative spaces in *Tirra Lirra*, it is valuable for students to reflect on the ways in which they lay claim to their personal heterotopic Australian spaces and to consider the role that texts play in appropriating these sites. I have a cousin who, during his years in secondary school, papered his wall with quirky articles from daily newspapers, and a niece who covered ‘her’ half of the room which she shared with her sister with posters of celebrities that her sister didn’t much like. In both these cases, texts provided a way of negotiating heterotopias of deviation and compensation for the lives lived and identities expected outside the sanctuary of the adolescent bedroom. As is implied by these examples, rather than distancing students from the text they are set for study, using Foucault’s concept of heterotopias in the manner outlined here has the potential to facilitate a rich connection between students’ lived experience and Anderson’s classic Australian text.

Connecting with(in) text

While Foucault’s critical framework offers a means by which students might experience a personal connection with *Tirra Lirra by the River*, it also affords a metalanguage for undertaking a detailed, close reading of space in Anderson’s narrative. In the early pages of

the novel, Anderson introduces the reader to Nora's first heterotopic space. Arriving home in Brisbane after her long journey from London, Anderson's elderly protagonist finds herself looking through the window in the main living room, attempting to find something from the past. Her neighbour Jack Cust's suggestion, "You must be thinking of the flower beds that used to be there" (p.5), does not help her, and it is only when she is left alone and returns to the window that she rediscovers "a country as beautiful as those in [her] childhood books" (p.8). As she looks through "distortions in the cheap thick glass", she sees miniature landscapes with "serpentine rivulets, and flashing lakes", a world which, as a child, she identified as the mythical Camelot, introduced to her through Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shallot'. Roslynn Haynes notes that for Nora, the intangible imagined Camelot landscape is "more real than the objective reality in the yard" (Haynes, 1986, p. 319). Although Nora remains disconnected from her parental house and frequently leaves it to "outrun oppression" (p. 11), her imaginary, compensatory landscape "absorbs" her and becomes a region of [her] mind, where infinite expansion was possible, and where no obstruction, such as the discomfort of knees imprinted by the cane of a chair ... could prevent the emergence of Sir Lancelot. (p.9)

As she does in the passage quoted above, Anderson juxtaposes Nora with Tennyson's Lady of Shallot throughout *Tirra Lirra* in order to refigure women's relationship with patriarchal spaces. On one level, Anderson's heroine and The Lady of Shallot face similar situations. Like the Lady of Shallot, Nora is trapped by her circumstances and surroundings, and embroiders to pass the time. While Tennyson's protagonist is literally incarcerated, Nora is held hostage by an Australian society where women are forced to remain at home until marriage or an inheritance enables them to leave. Yet, on another level, Nora's negotiation of space distinguishes her from Tennyson's tragic heroine. Unlike the lady of Shallot, who "delights" to weave the reflections of Camelot through the "mirror's magic sights" (Tennyson, 1988, pp. 64-65), Nora does not eulogise the patriarchal order that confines her. The three tapestries that Betty Cust arranges for Nora to see create heterotopic spaces within the traditional domestic interior. While the first two tapestries of an orange tree and a magpie reflect the "natural" world, the third depicts "swirling suns, moons, and stars" (p.128). Considered in this way, Nora's tapestries enable her to "negotiate the constraints of femininity" (Parker, 1984, p. 11). Through Betty, Nora learns that the "celestial" tapestry hangs over Mrs Partridge's writing desk (129), symbolically marking a space of creativity away from the utilitarian parts of the house. This passing comment suggests that Nora's art has also had an impact on other women similarly confined to domestic space. Nora alludes to this when she insists on returning the tapestry to Mrs Partridge, even though the elderly woman's eyesight is failing and she feels she can no longer appreciate it.

Through Nora's fond memory of her Camelot landscape, and her reunion with the tapestries that enabled her to survive in parochial, patriarchal pre-war Brisbane, Anderson seems to be affirming the capacity of art and text to sustain an alternative imagined site for her frustrated protagonist. However, further examination of Nora's subsequent heterotopias according to Foucault's paradigm reveals both the potential and limitation of art to negotiate space. When

Nora moves to Sydney—the city that had long stood proxy for Camelot” (p.18)—she discovers her that she is in close proximity to a house inhabited by artists and the dress maker Ida Mayo, and within a short time, this house become a heterotopic sanctuary for Nora. While Nora’s previous alternative landscapes can be understood as a site of compensation for life in Brisbane, Ida Mayo’s workroom becomes a heterotopia of deviation for Nora, as it is in this space that she subverts society’s expectations of middle class young married women. In this felicitous space, Nora becomes a model for the artists, learns to cut and fashion a garment, and immerses herself in Ida’s European magazines, texts which further facilitate an imaginary escape from her life as a house-wife waiting to become pregnant.

However, although Nora experiences happiness for the first time in her “limited”, appropriated “territory” in Sydney (p.37), she is unable to maintain this space, and must agree to move to Colin’s mother’s house in an “iron-grey and terracotta” suburb (p.36) when the depression begins to impact on life in Sydney. Profoundly disempowered by her new living spaces, Nora once again turns to the aesthetic in an attempt to negotiate a “domain” (p.52) in the bedroom she shares with Colin: “I made white curtains and a yellow bedcover, and varnished the floor black.... I polished the brass bedstead and painted a honey jar white and filled it with flowers from the garden (p.52). In her appropriated bedroom, Nora refigures not only the physical space but also her relationship with her husband, recasting him as her lover rather than her keeper: “My half-room and my husband became my only pleasures” (p.52). While she is submissive and subservient in the communal spaces of the house, for a short time she is sexually assertive in her bedroom heterotopia of deviation: “Lying under the yellow bedcover, I would watch Colin undress, and as he was getting into bed I would reach out, and pull him down towards me” (p.52).

Ultimately, though, art and texts are unable to sustain Nora’s alternative space in Una Porteous’s house. We see the waning potential of art when Nora finds that her poetry books offer her no respite (p.55), and she turns instead to Colin’s school French and geometry text books, as a means by which she maintain a material distance from Colin and his overbearing mother. However, when Colin begins to notice signs of age in Nora (p.60), she finds that her domain is dangerously under siege and we are reminded again of the tenuous nature of her alternative landscapes:

I would wake to find that he had turned his head on the pillow and was staring at me with hatred, and I would turn away or leap out of bed... It was an invasion. My enemy had entered my hut and was squatting in a corner, waiting. (p.60)

Even when Colin divorces Nora, and she receives some compensation for his infidelity, her heterotopic spaces remain vulnerable. This is evident when Nora travels from Sydney to her new life in London on board a passenger ship. Initially, the ship appears, as Foucault observes, to be a “heterotopia par excellence” (Foucault, 1986, 27). In this “floating piece of space...that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea.... (1986, p. 27), Nora embarks on a romance with a married fellow traveller (p.73) and enjoys all the spatial and moral freedom made possible by this “place without a

place” (Foucault, 1986, p.27). Nora and her lover make love in his cabin, walk on the deck and sit together in one of the “great public rooms” (p.74). While she inhabits this floating heterotopia, the social expectations that dominate patriarchally sanctioned relationships are noticeably absent from their interactions.

Although literary texts have previously acted as a means of spatial negotiation for Nora, her experiences on the ship render fiction unnecessary and even irrelevant; she reflects: “it came as a great surprise to me that the reality far surpassed the theory” (74). Yet, although Anderson’s narrative presents this heterotopia as a desirable space for Nora, it also reinforces Foucault’s fourth principle of heterotopology, that “Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time ... they open onto what might be termed ... heterochronies” (1986, p.26). Nora “the preservationist” (Anderson, 1980, p.75) recognises the temporal nature of this ideal alternative space, and thus insists on a “definite break on arrival—goodbye and no addresses” (p.74) when the American suggests they might pursue their relationship beyond the journey to London. Further, even though the narrative supports the moral/sexual freedom Nora enjoys whilst on board the ship, her subsequent pregnancy and botched abortion indicate that in the early decades of the twentieth century, liberating female space comes at a considerable price.

This sentiment is echoed in the somewhat elliptic conclusion to Anderson’s narrative. While Nora’s return to Brisbane, her occupation of Grace’s beautiful glass room and garden, and her subsequent revelation of those aspects of her life that she has hidden, such as her father’s funeral, indicate that her life will conclude satisfactorily, a spatial reading of the text reminds the reader that Nora’s (and Grace’s) final heterotopia remains deliberately limited. As Nora settles back to “find things” (p.140) it is only one part of the family home that she will (symbolically) occupy: “none of the other rooms will be opened except for professional inspection for pests” (p.136). This reduction of living space reminds the reader that Nora can experience her domain only in a reduced capacity. Despite her age, her ownership of the family home, and the changing times, a female heterotopia can be sustained only in a portion of the house. Consequently, although this final scene in *Tirra Lirra by the River* can be read as a moment of resolution for Nora, considered in the light of Foucault’s paradigm, it also reinforces the spatial limitations experienced by some women in 20th century Australian society.

Connecting beyond text

Just as Foucault’s critical theory provides a suitable framework for an analysis of the spaces represented within *Tirra Lirra by the River*, the metalanguage outlined in this paper also facilitates students’ connections with literature beyond Anderson’s classic text, and thus with international as well as local concerns. Although it is not possible to explore these connections in detail here, it is worth noting that Foucault’s notion of heterotopias can be used to compare Anderson’s Nora with another famous, fictional Nora who struggles to negotiate space: Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen’s much studied play *The Doll’s House*. Written a century

earlier than *Tirra Lirra, A Doll's House* concludes when Nora Helmer, the indulged and infantilised wife of Torvald and mother of three children, realises that she must leave the house, and negotiate her own space, if she is to have some autonomy in her life: "our home has been nothing but a playroom", she informs Torvald, "I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was father's doll-child..." (1958, p. 67). For students studying both Ibsen's controversial play and *Tirra Lirra*, Foucault's paradigm provides a paradigm for exploring and comparing representations of space in these texts published a century apart and on different continents.

While my focus thus far has been on ways in which Foucault's critical framework can provide a useful metalanguage for reading and analysis, it is important to acknowledge that this approach is also valuable in assisting students move from the receptive to the productive mode. In 2010, *Tirra Lirra by the River* returns to the VCE English syllabus as part of Area Study 2: Creating and Presenting (VCAA, 2009, p.3). This part of the course is concerned with the interconnection between reading and writing and arranges texts according to 'Contexts' (VCAA, 2006, p. 24). In contrast to the more traditional text response essay required in Area of Study 1, Area of Study 2 offers students the opportunity to write creatively and imaginatively in response to the focus of the study. *Tirra Lirra* has been assigned to the context 'The imaginative landscape', a theme which clearly resonates with the reading of Anderson's text offered in this paper. It is my hope that students and teachers working with Anderson's novel in 2010, and considering imaginative ways of responding to this classic Australian text will continue the conversation about metalanguage, connection and critical theory that has been started in this paper.

Building bridges with Australian literature

In this paper, I have argued that far from being an anathema to close reading and the enjoyment of classic Australian texts, critical theory can be used to provide a framework and metalanguage through which students can make meaningful connections between themselves and the national literature they are studying, and texts beyond Australian shores. Further, I have shown that appropriating theory in this manner draws attention to the ways in which literature can reflect, negotiate and contest the practices and beliefs of a society; arguably, these connections between fiction, politics and history are vital for students to interrogate and explore, as they become both readers and writers of Australian literature.

It is worth noting, by way of a coda, that the reading of *Tirra Lirra by the River* offered here in the context of the current debate about classic Australian literature, also endeavours to bridge another significant metaphorical divide. Since the publication of the Arts Council's Communiqué, which recommended that "professional scholars of literature and contemporary Australian writers should be involved in the designing and supervision of English curricula in schools" (ACA, 2007), much has been made of the importance of a connection between secondary English teachers and scholars in the field of Australian literature. For the most part, calls for this connection, couched in condescending and even insulting terms (O'Connor,

2007; Slausinsky, 2007) have simply managed to inspire resistance and incredulity from the English teaching profession (cf Homer, 2007).

It is important to remember, in the context of this so-called “culture wars” against the English teaching profession that have effectively divided secondary and tertiary teachers of texts, that connection and collaboration between these sectors is both necessary and mutually beneficial. Further, such collaboration is not without precedent: as Brenton Doecke writes, early editions of *English in Australia* saw contributions by academics A.D Hope, Leonie Kramer and James McAuley - Kramer and McAuley were also both Presidents of AATE (Doecke, 1997, p. 70). Far from being a one-sided exchange, these academics mentioned were powerfully influenced by connecting with, and contributing to, the secondary teaching profession (Doecke, 2007, p. 40). The recently launched Teaching Australian Literature website and related surveys (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2008), created by academics at the Universities of Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland, can be understood as a move towards building bridges, based on mutual respect, between tertiary and secondary teachers of literature, and a way of rekindling the beneficial links between the sectors that Doecke recalls. In addition to this, there is valuable work to be done in exploring frameworks for teaching Australian texts which link scholarship with classroom experience: this paper can be understood as a first step towards making these connections.

ⁱ While Roundtable participants Kevin Donnelly and Imre Salusinsky both released Anglo-centric lists of classic/canonical texts “suitable” for study, these lists were not included in the Communiqué, and were published after the August 2007 meeting.

ⁱⁱ See Love (1999) for an earlier discussion of the importance of metalanguage in subject English.

ⁱⁱⁱ Although the term heterotopia is most often associated with Foucault, others have also used this term, most notably, Gianni Vattimo and Henri Lefebvre. For a discussion of heterotopias within the context of post 1960s art, see Vattimo (1992, pp. 62-75). For a contrasting discussion of heterotopias as “analogous” or “contrasting” places, and as “mutually repellent spaces”, see Lefebvre (1997, pp. 163-164 and 366).

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