

The University of Queensland

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AustLit and Australian periodical studies

Abstract:

AustLit is an important destination for those researching in the field of Australian literary studies. As a vehicle for periodical studies, AustLit provides invaluable resources in the form of indexes to the literary content of many magazines, newspapers and scholarly journals; the history, editorship and purpose of many small and large periodicals; and collections of records that demonstrate a particular aspect of the history of Australian periodical publishing and readership. As a virtual research environment, AustLit provides researchers with tools for creating, aggregating and annotating collections of relevant data and for publishing these datasets as scholarly outcomes of research projects. Amongst other AustLit supported research projects, Jill Julius Matthews, for example, used AustLit as a publication vehicle for her historical survey, 1895–1930, on the collection of magazines in the State Library of New South Wales’s Mitchell Library.

This paper will present some of the ways that AustLit has engaged with historical research into Australian magazine and newspaper culture, presenting the outcomes of projects that have, collectively, built our understanding of the important role periodicals have played. It will show how AustLit is embedded in the wider research environment and discuss how scholars and others can use AustLit as a site for their own research outcomes, foreshadowing some of the options becoming available as a result of a major restructure of the database and interface.

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

Creative writing – Magazines – Australian periodicals – Digital resources – Digital research practices

Introduction

AustLit is, among other things, an online database housing almost one million records relating to Australian literary and storytelling history. Part biographical dictionary, part national bibliography, part full text and research repository, one way of describing AustLit is as a resource that documents the ways Australians have told stories and thought about the art and industry of storytelling in all its forms. This article presents AustLit's role in periodical studies and demonstrates ways researchers can use it as a site to expand knowledge about the history and place of newspapers, magazines and other periodical publications.

Since the mid-1980s, and in various guises, data and other content have been made available through AustLit and its antecedent projects. AustLit, as it currently exists, was formed in 2000 with the merging of a number of independent databases on specialist and broad themes derived from research groups at eight universities.¹ That initial dataset of some 300,000 relatively simple biographical and bibliographical records, many of which related to periodical publications, has grown to become a highly complex database of almost one million records with multiple analysable elements and important research outcomes achieved. It is now the largest, most complex database of its kind in the world, covering all of the traditional forms of literature plus film, television and selected other performing arts and, through the BlackWords project, wider Indigenous storytelling activities. Criticism, reviews and online secondary material across these fields are also included.

A strong ethos of service to the literature and humanities research communities underpins AustLit's management and content development strategies. This is reflected in the two main strands of our activities: research-led projects, which support scholars to explore and document a specific area of cultural history; and our ongoing documentation of contemporary publications, events and criticism. This dual focus allows users to discover the latest information on Australian literary and storytelling culture and provides a strong base upon which deeper articulations can be made about the place of texts and their creators in time and space.

The digital turn

Print culture research and the emergent field of periodical studies are central to AustLit's engagement with contemporary research practice in the humanities, especially as more historical material is being digitised. Digitisation of the cultural record, such as the newspaper conversion project underway at the National Library of Australia (NLA), is creating new fields of study because material once hard to access is gradually becoming widely available in digital form. In literary history, old questions can be asked again and new answers discovered because we no longer need to rely upon what have been perceived as representative samples of print culture to understand the past but can consider and analyse huge swathes of cultural product.

As Franco Moretti argues in the case of literature, a

canon of two hundred novels [from] nineteenth century Britain ... is still less than one per cent of the novels that were actually published ... a field this large cannot be understood by stitching together separate bits of knowledge about individual cases: it's a collective system that should be grasped as such as a whole (2005: 4).

When Moretti's work on the novel is placed in the context of what may become possible in periodical studies through computationally-enabled research, revelations from work on the history of the novel pale somewhat!

The methodologies for analysing enormous digital repositories are really only beginning to emerge. Tools such as Google's Ngram viewer² and other text-mining software are showing enormous promise. The collection of digitised newspapers now available through the NLA is already transforming research into the place of Australian periodicals in literary and reading history. Access to such digitised collections of full text with robust search interfaces may well transform our understanding of the place of literature in society by enabling, for example, the discovery of a large volume of literary texts in the widely consumed format of the periodical publication. The inclusion of the 'citizen researcher' in digitisation projects is also beneficial to scholarly endeavours as, for example, crowd-sourced corrections on texts transcribed through Optical Character Recognition (OCR)³ software, as in the case of the NLA's newspapers project within Trove, provides more searchable and analysable content.

As Latham and Scholes argue, the digitisation of historical periodicals provides an 'immediacy [that] reveals these objects to us anew, so that we have begun to see them, not as resources to be disaggregated into their individual components, but as texts requiring new methodologies and new types of collaborative investigation' (2006: 518). The increase in available newspaper and magazine content prefigures the transformation of the scholarly field of periodical studies and allows for 'scholars around the world ... to participate in its growth' (Latham & Scholes 2006: 518).

Engaging in new forms of periodical studies is not unproblematic, however. Citing the case of *Scribner's magazine*, Latham and Scholes (2006: 530) identify a number of issues facing researchers in the field, including 'holes in the print archive'. These holes can be made through the practice of selective preservation by librarians and archivists who, for example, disaggregated the advertising from the 'literary' pages of magazines, discarding the former because they were deemed unimportant, but thereby losing an enormous resource for cultural history research. A similar thing occurred in Australia when *The bulletin*, the periodical through which many historians read the past, was transferred to microfilm without the iconic and influential 'Red page', edited by AG Stephens, which appeared on the verso of each issue's title page and contained literary material and comment. The removal of the title page when binding the newspaper meant the loss of its verso as well; these bound copies were then transferred to microform. Thankfully the NLA's newspapers digitisation project will soon correct this format conversion error when *The bulletin* is digitised.

Latham and Scholes (2006) identify the role scholars can usefully play in the process of digitisation, especially in designing the parameters of projects, to facilitate future

researcher use. They identify the need to tag and describe aspects of the content, such as genre, at the point of conversion, and the need to return to the original texts rather than use facsimile or microform versions of periodicals for the digitisation process, a practice that can compound historical errors. Unfortunately, this form of consultation and involvement is not common, especially when conversion at scale occurs. Many factors influence the decisions made by organisations undertaking digitisation projects: resourcing, technology choices, the level and affordability of human intervention required to make a high-quality product, commercial considerations and the involvement of the public in the conversion process. The level of utility and value to researchers and research outcomes are frequently determined by these factors. As Rose Holley (2010) amply demonstrates, one of the most important decisions taken in the Australian newspapers digitisation project was to allow crowd-sourced corrections.

AustLit aims to be a part of the growth in periodical studies by supporting researchers' investigations of newspapers and magazines. Through a combination of expanded descriptive indexing and a 2014 project using text mining techniques over large corpora of digitised periodicals to identify matches in our database, AustLit will provide new opportunities for research and discovery in the coming years. Already, we have expanded our coverage of twentieth-century serialised fiction by finding and linking together instalments of stories published in newspapers to reveal previously unknown publications by significant Australian authors.

The accumulation within AustLit of sets of interlinked, authoritative records produced by researchers inevitably builds to become a significant national cultural and information asset in itself. It is also a foundation for future research and innovative methods of scholarly communication. While monographs, journal articles and book chapters are still perceived as premier outcomes of scholarly work, it is only a matter of time until greater recognition is given to other proceeds of digital research practice such as datasets and contextualised visualisations of data.

In 2009, Christine Borgman argued that while the sciences have long understood the value of accessing papers and data online, the humanities had been slow to adopt the potential of the digital due to a 'general reluctance to experiment with new technologies, even those well proven'. Borgman endorses Ken Hamma's (2009: 6) view that humanities scholars are 'professionally indisposed to change'. Key to Borgman's argument for the value of digital over print is that

[t]he distinction between print and digital publication is as much about epistemology as genre. Digital publishing is not simply repackaging a book or article as a computer file, although even a searchable pdf has advantages over paper. By incorporating dynamic multi-media or hypermedia, digital publishing offers different ways of expressing ideas and of presenting evidence for those ideas (Lynch, 2002; Presner, 2010, Presner & Johanson, 2009). When digital scholarship is published in print venues, much of its sophistication is lost (Borgman 2009).

Achieving a 'sophisticated' combination of datasets, visualisations and other forms of digital scholarship alongside traditional interpretive and analytical work is our aim across AustLit's research support agenda. While we have already made it possible for

scholars to work within AustLit to create and publish datasets with the accompanying analysis, the current restructure (2012–2014) will improve the delivery of multi-format scholarship so that readers, or end users, can move between project elements and gain a greater level of engagement than would otherwise be possible. As humanities scholars are increasingly disposed to engage with the affordances of digital environments, facilities such as AustLit will become more important to the dissemination of research outcomes.

Australian periodical studies in AustLit

I will now outline some of the ways AustLit supports research into periodicals, and describe a number of projects in which magazines and newspapers and their contents are central. I will also briefly foreshadow two projects underway in 2013–2014: the literary record of World War I which manifested strongly in periodicals, and the Colonial Newspapers and Magazines Project.

As a site for periodical research, AustLit has strong bones on which to put flesh. There are 5,289 magazines and newspapers identified in AustLit, with more than 102,500 issues listed and over 406,500 individual items indexed from those issues. There is enormous scope for the expansion of these already healthy numbers.

As part of an ARC funded Discovery Project (2007–2010) entitled Resourceful Reading, a group of leading Australian literature academics (Gillian Whitlock, Robert Dixon, Leigh Dale and Katherine Bode) deployed AustLit resources and staff to research a range of areas using data-driven methods to, in part, explore the possibilities of what they called the ‘new empiricism’ in literary research. They were interested in considering ‘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’ (Bode & Dixon 2009: 15).

One of the Resourceful Reading projects, Australian Newspaper Reviews of 1930,

began from the premise that the academic study of literature – traditionally the focus of studies of individual writers’ reputations – is only one part of a broader and more complex ecology’ of literature, and that the circulation and reception of texts can productively be analysed in the light of this larger context (Thomson & Dale 2009).

Newspaper reviews can damn a literary work to oblivion, generate sales or spark a controversy. Thus, an analysis of the reception of works in a particular period or through a specific vehicle can tell us a great deal about the workings of literary culture in society.

Focusing on the representation of literature in Australian newspapers in December 1930 (a month selected because the period just before Christmas suggested a likelihood of greater coverage tied to promotion and Christmas sales), the project resulted in a subset of AustLit data of more than 300 records with statistical analyses of the ways that books and literature were represented in 32 metropolitan and country newspapers. Data collection, undertaken by AustLit staff member Robert Thomson,

included advertisements, mentions, columns, reviews and essays, plus literary content in the form of short stories, serials and poetry. The research identified approximately 5,400 instances where more than 1,700 book titles were mentioned.

Because ‘books themselves were news’ (Thomson & Dale 2009: 130) there was frequently a dedicated space within newspapers for literary topics and a widespread culture of reviewing with regional specificity in the presentation of books and book news. Country newspapers provided opportunities for local reviewers, and the researchers identified ‘a cadre of critics, reviewers and booksellers ... who operated in non-metropolitan Australia’ (130). Despite surveying the content of just one month in a single year, the data demonstrate that the ‘information about books is in general extremely high by today’s standards’, especially in country papers, while in many of the city papers there was ‘what now seem like a prodigious number of book reviews’ (131).

Another interesting finding was the identifiable support for Australian books in newspapers published in larger country towns. The researchers found that, in the period surveyed, the Rockhampton *Morning bulletin*, for example, only reviewed Australian works, while other country newspapers, proportionately, covered more Australian works than non-Australian along with ‘substantial discussions of literary topics’ (Thomson & Dale 2009: 135). They identified the importance of advertising by book stores and department stores to the publishing industry with the Christmas market for children’s annuals and specialist books, such as guides for playing Bridge, strongly represented.

In considering the future possibilities of data-intensive projects like this, Thomson and Dale (2009) identify the value of defining wide parameters of collection in order to facilitate discovery and allow the data to reveal patterns that would otherwise remain invisible. Well-structured data, such as that supported by AustLit, make it possible, through visualisation, to show trends, occurrences and relationships across time and space.

An even earlier project, undertaken in 2003 and 2004, was Australian Magazines of the Twentieth Century. This collection of bio-historical records traces the history of the establishment, range, frequency, size, price, editorial flavour, material published, people involved in and, in all but 22, the demise of 85 Australian literary and art magazines. This project gave us the chance to tell the stories of persistent stalwarts such as *Meanjin*, *Overland* and *Australian literary studies*, which have pursued agendas in publishing commentary, scholarship and/or creative writing, alongside more ephemeral, short-lived and experimental magazines. Examples of these include the exquisitely produced *Manuscripts* (1931–1935), which was established and edited by Harry Tatlock Miller when he was just 18 or 19 and ran for four years out of his Geelong bookshop, The Book Nook. Miller, like many of his generation, left Australia to pursue an arts career in Europe. He became Director of London’s Redfern Gallery, returning to Australia briefly in the 1970s to establish the Loudon Sainthill Award, named after the theatre set and costume designer and his lifelong partner. The Award allowed National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) students to travel overseas to study theatre and set design.

While it ran, *Manuscripts* made an important contribution to an emerging culture of arts and letters in Australia, attracting submissions by leading writers of the day, including Hugh McCrae, Nettie Palmer, Lionel Lindsay and Katharine Susannah Prichard. In Miller's editorial for issue 3, when the magazine moved from an occasional to a quarterly publication schedule, he asks:

If Australia is to develop national characteristics in literature and art why is it that in the new countries the life of so many journals of art and letters should be so short? With a blare of trumpet they come, unnoticed they go to a quiet death "bleeding with the wound of stars." Is it that our colonial feet are too heavy with the soil of the land to know "the stillness where our spirits walk," and our eyes so full of the yet unsettled dust of new-built cities, to notice "the thin blown shape of a rhyme"? (Miller 1931).

Illustrated with art nouveau woodcuts and linocuts, drypoint etchings, sketches and drawings by some of the leading artists of the period – Margaret Preston, Paul Nash, Hans Heysen – and printed on fine quality paper, *Manuscripts* (with the Norse God, Odin, as decorative cover or title-page talisman) published a diverse range of material, including essays on literature and the visual arts. In the third issue, an article by Norman B Tindale on Aboriginal art from Central Australia was published. Bookplates, poetry, short fiction, comment, *in memoria*, biographical studies of significant artists, and reviews and discussion on the state of literature, theatre and publishing in Australia and internationally all appeared in its short history. Despite their calibre there was no remuneration for contributors.

Sadly, *Manuscripts*' 'quiet death' arrived in 1935 with the final two issues produced by Margareta Webber from her Melbourne bookshop co-edited with AC Jackson. The final issue, in which Miller had no involvement, lost its elegant quarto size and most of its illustrations, and shrank to an ugly 5" x 7" format of 120 pages. It did include an extensive 'Foreign section' beginning with the revealing item 'Notes on German literature in exile' by Thomas Mann's son, Klaus.

Then there's the *Steele Rudd magazine*, which was revived and revived again for short periods between 1903 and 1929 with Arthur Hoey Davis's (the editor) guiding principle of *not* being

a purveyor of social personalia of the self-seeker, photographic and feminine idiosyncrasies, movie-star painted absurdities and claptrap. Pictures or personal paragraphs in its pages will be printed only of people who have distinguished themselves by achieving something worthwhile in one form or another, excepting, of course, in cases of entertaining and useful satire (Kilner & Carter 2004b).

The voluptuous *Vision* magazine (1923–1924) was a vehicle for Norman Lindsay's and his compatriots' art and internationalist philosophies in an era when, in their view, a narrow provincialism was manifesting in much of the mainstream media, particularly in *The bulletin*. The history of Australia's longest running feminist literary journal, *Hecate* (ongoing since 1975), is available, as is the brief story of *Pertinent* (1940–1947) established by Leon Batt, who had published in the fleetingly surviving, short story magazine *Yesterday and most of today* (1932–1933). *Pertinent* attempted to be a 'medium of expression for all who have something constructive, interesting, entertaining, and pertinent to say' yet it offended some with the frequent

publication of nude studies (Kilner & Carter 2004a). It appealed to radio buffs and film goers by advertising radio and cinema guides. Its grungy mix of poetry, short stories, political and art comment, sensationalist reportage and cartoonic illustration is reminiscent of popular magazines from the 1960s.

The *avant garde* and modernist movements, which David Carter (1993: 57) argues “‘arrived’ altogether and at once’ due to the post-colonial conditions of Australia in the early twentieth century, can be seen represented in the (again) short-lived *Stream*, which published only three issues in 1931. This lively publication, which Carter (1993: 57) calls ‘the most remarkable of a small number of magazines published in Australia in the first half of the 1930s’, wanted to provide space for internationally inflected and influenced poetry, short stories, theatre criticism and interviews with writers, including such luminaries as Aldous Huxley and Thomas Mann, alongside discussions of international literary and art movements. It was obviously an aesthetic stable mate of *Manuscripts*.

So many stories are told (and hinted at) in this collection of AustLit records and each one invites further research. Unfortunately, not all of the contents of the periodicals researched under the auspices of this project have been internally indexed, especially in the case of the small or short-run magazines. For example, *Oz* (1963–1970), famous for its challenging content and the multiple charges of obscenity levelled against the editors of both the Australian and English editions, has only one work in each of the eight issues listed in AustLit, and they are all by Germaine Greer. At some point in AustLit’s history Greer’s publication record was fleshed out, but we didn’t have the resources available to index all of the contents of each issue. Such content development results in excellent coverage of a single author’s *oeuvre* but poor representation of the periodical overall. This patchy coverage is a reality of the gradual building of a database like AustLit as it pursues agendas defined by funding and the research interests of individual scholars. Despite this obvious shortcoming, this collection of records provides useful, foundational information that can be built on by others interested in a deeper analysis of Australian magazine and newspaper culture.

In 2005, as a Nancy Keesing Fellow at the State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW), Australian National University (ANU) historian Jill Julius Matthews conducted a survey of Sydney-based magazines published between 1895 and 1930 held in the SLNSW. Once again the focus in Hidden Treasures of the Mitchell Library was to establish the history and *raison d’être* for a range of magazines that provide a counterpoint to those frequently discussed and researched periodicals of the same period; those that might have had indexes created and significant levels of scholarly attention already applied to them. As Matthews says,

historians have often treated the *Bulletin*’s passionate championing of ‘Australia for the White Man’, as if it spoke for the racism of most Australians at the beginning of the twentieth century. But meanwhile *Australian Variety* heaped praise on Hebrew and coloured vaudeville performers, *Snowy Baker’s Magazine* recognised the true manliness and chivalry of black and Philippino boxers, *United Australia* published vehement articles opposed to White Australia, and *Yabba* declared its policy to be

‘Australia for the Australians, and not for the Englishman nor the Irishman nor the Scotchman alone but for all races of men without distinction of colour or religion’ (Matthews 2010b).

Recording details of these more fringe periodicals, which proliferated in Sydney during the period, gives us a richer view of Australian culture. Matthews undertook research that revealed that ‘The ten metropolitan weeklies of 1892 grew to eighty-eight by 1923; but the metropolitan monthlies and fortnightlies rose from ten to one hundred and twenty-nine’ (Matthews 2010b). Sydney’s quickly growing population required new reading matter and led to the publication of titles covering diverse topics – agriculture, friendly societies, motor and trade, theatrical, cinema, sporting and religious subjects. The sixty-two titles in Matthews’ dataset ‘give some indication of the range of formats and genres through which the processes of Sydney’s modernisation are revealed’ (Matthews 2010b). Each AustLit record provides a précis of the history of the magazine and its preoccupations. Sometimes amusing and always informative vignettes capture the style, coverage and aspirations of editors and publishers. For example, the illustrated monthly *Ha ha!: a merry newspaper magazine for Australians* (1889) is described thus:

Artist, journalist, and self-proclaimed Bohemian George A. Taylor explained his reasons for establishing *Ha Ha!*: ‘He thought if one could only own a prosperous newspaper, he would not only have a definite income but also a medium through which he could publish his pictures ... [It] was inflicted upon the public for three months, and seemed to sarcastically laugh itself out of existence. There must have been some bits worthwhile in it ... It was somewhat before its time.’ Its motto was ‘Advance Australia’. The first issue introduced ‘Ourselves’ and declared, ‘Our first big wrestle ... will be to bust up the depressing pessimism in Australian literature.’ (Matthews 2010a).

Taken collectively, this dataset provides rich insights into the ideas motivating writers, artists, intellectuals, polemicists and chancers, who put time, funds and effort into ventures that were so frequently unsuccessful. Magazines reflect intellectual and artistic trends in a given period, and ‘the set or range of successful magazines at any one time provides us with clues about the whole population of readers’ (Matthews 2010b). They can demonstrate the take-up of new technologies – whether that’s in printing presses or, more contemporaneously, the Internet – and while they might require relatively little effort to establish, this research shows they become hard to sustain. (A similar project relating to Internet-based magazines of the past twenty years is begging to be done.)

The projects outlined above also serve to identify further research opportunities for expanding the record on the contribution to Australian culture made by magazines. How much more useful these datasets would be if the contents of individual issues were indexed. The larger quantity of structured data would move the analysis from the impressionistic – inevitable because of the research method – to the verifiable based on the hard data about form, type, style, subject, gender, etc.

Current projects

With the centenary of World War I approaching we identified a need to ensure that AustLit's coverage of the literature, film and other relevant material relating to WWI was as comprehensive as possible. The University of Queensland funded an initial research and indexing project in 2012, followed by the Australian Research Council (ARC) providing funds in 2013 for the further expansion of content.

World War I: The Australian Literary Record is a survey of the creative literary responses to World War I published since 1914 and has resulted in the indexing and enhancing of records relating to poetry, short stories, novels, drama, film, biography and other material published in newspapers, and popular and soldiers' magazines. Many thousands of records have been either entered into AustLit or enhanced during the course of the project. Because we have also focused on biography, we have been able to extend our knowledge of soldiers and other participants in the war 'effort'. Thus, the writing and information we have from and about nurses and soldiers, Indigenous soldiers and other participants is extensive.

From the digger-produced magazines to official organs of the Australian Defence Forces, periodicals were an important mechanism for sharing the experience of the war at home and at the front. We have been tracing the differences between material published for home-front consumption and that written by and for those in the various theatres of war, taking into account the role of censorship and propaganda. When launched in mid-2014, the combination of biographical and bibliographical data, full text, images, data visualisations, curated information trails and stories will provide useful knowledge for teachers, researchers and the general enquirer. There will be opportunities for users to participate in expanding information about family members, to upload images and literary works they may have or to comment on the project. World War I: The Australian Literary Record will expose the many ways in which the war has influenced the arts in Australia over the past 100 years.

Book historian and editor Paul Eggert's current project, *Colonial Newspapers and Magazines*, underway at University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra, aims to create a map of the reading habits of Australians in the nineteenth century by undertaking an indexing project which is 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical' in nature. The traditional vertical indexing, which is to record the Australian literary content in an identified periodical across its entire run, does not provide insights into what a population was reading or, rather, what was available to the public to read. By taking a horizontal approach to indexing, this project will identify and create records for *all* literary content in a range or representative colonial periodicals in a given period:

The map depends crucially on AustLit's indexing of colonial newspapers and magazines. They were the principal patrons of literary endeavour in the colonial period until and even after royalty-paying publishing was put onto a proper footing in the mid-1890s (Eggert 2013).

The years 1838, 1868, 1888 and 1900 have been selected and all literary content in all newspapers and magazines in that period will eventually be indexed. The NLA's newspapers database and microfilm copies of periodicals not yet included in the NLA database are being used to identify and record the material:

One highly valuable new aspect of this approach will be the inclusion in AustLit of data revealing the broader literary reading habits of colonial audiences by indexing the presence of overseas writers and literature published or advertised within 19th century Australian newspapers and magazines. This question reflects emerging research directions in print culture. New methods of displaying and analysing such data within AustLit – that will simultaneously ensure the reliability of returns for purely Australian literature – will be devised and tested during 2013 in readiness for the 2014 work (Eggert 2013: AustLit project page).

Importantly, this project shifts the more common AustLit focus on Australian-written or produced works to an analysis of literary culture *in* Australia as represented in newspapers and magazines of the period. This wider research focus is also demonstrated in the *Banned in Australia* subset of records compiled by Nicole Moore as a supplementary work to her monograph *The censor's library* (2012), which records details of all literary works banned or restricted by the federal censor between 1901 and 1973, whether or not they were by Australian authors. These projects present knowledge about how Australian culture and society have been shaped by the place of literature (or lack thereof) in the public realm. Because the networks of publishing, reading, social policy and political change are global in nature, it is important that AustLit operates in that wider context.

AustLit research projects

As has been demonstrated, AustLit research projects support an extended engagement with a specific aspect of cultural activity and the development of enhanced datasets embedded within the larger database. Research projects can have ambitions to map an entire field, genre or period, or they can aim to produce a neat collection of data, to analyse that data in the context of a particular scholarly project and publish the analysis within AustLit's contextualising web-space.⁴ They can be iterative in nature. A beginning can be made in a particular field with further research undertaken as resources allow. Many of the research projects supported by AustLit have been funded through the ARC's various schemes or through early career and internal university funding opportunities. The design of the database and editing interfaces means that when a biographical or bibliographical dataset is required to support research, teaching or knowledge sharing, AustLit facilitates the collection, tagging and publication of records as belonging to a particular field of investigation.⁵ Each project is presented as a cohesive, published outcome of research and includes scholarly introductions, peer-reviewed articles, data access points, information trails and data visualisations. They can be published with an ISBN and recognised as a formal publication for research assessment exercises.

Collections of data can underpin the comprehension of fields of activity; publication records demonstrate influence, impact and affect. Identifying and recording details about communities of practice, networks of writers and other actors in the public sphere can be done within AustLit to provide the evidence base for an understanding or interpretation of the way cultures work. Thus, AustLit operates as a research infrastructure, a repository and a publisher and distributor of contemporary data- and

information-driven scholarship. The central place it holds in contemporary scholarly activity in Australian literary studies demonstrates a shift in the positioning of the sort of research activity that produces empirical evidence for interpreting the way culture operates and the way literature works upon and within society.

Conclusion

[T]he new forms of scholarship characterized by eResearch are information- and data-intensive, distributed, collaborative, and multi-disciplinary. Collaborations, when effective, produce new knowledge that is greater than the sum of what the participating individuals could accomplish alone (Borgman 2009: 14).

This paper has demonstrated the ways in which AustLit, as a part of its larger agenda of mapping Australian literary history, is also a significant resource for periodical studies in Australia. The rise of the 'data-driven paradigm' (Borgman 2009: 11) of contemporary research methods in both the sciences and humanities is facilitated by the exponential increase in digitised print and material culture artefacts. The global trend to convert historic newspapers and magazines to digital formats opens up the field to exploration and analysis in ways not previously possible. Improvements in data-mining techniques and international linkages across historic corpora of newspapers and magazines will also enhance opportunities for learning more about global networks and patterns of publication and influence.

AustLit will continue to support new research and, taking advantage of the recent technical restructure, focus on improving pathways to, and through, our vast content. We aim to increase participation in the development of content and facilitate the establishment of autonomously run research projects through a participation platform currently under development. Researchers will be able to become members of the AustLit community, create individual and group profiles, establish independent research groups and pursue a data collection and publication strategy to underpin data-intensive projects. A peer assessment platform is being developed to facilitate traditional scholarly oversight of these new forms of scholarly communication.

Over the coming years, we will increase our involvement in teaching activities by providing opportunities for undergraduate and postgraduate project work in the development of curated collections of data. Internships at University of Queensland are beginning to yield valuable outcomes for students and AustLit. Such projects will be of particular use in print culture and periodical studies as students (and others) will be able to select, annotate and organise collections of AustLit records and other material on a particular field of study. These datasets can then be presented as an online exhibition for assessment, for publication and as supplementary datasets for theses and monographs. We welcome approaches from scholars to take advantage of the opportunities provided by AustLit.

The AustLit consortium took advantage of the affordances of digital technologies and emerging scholarly communication practices in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As early adopters of the opportunities presented by the rise of the Internet, we have

worked hard to present AustLit as not only a destination for information to support research but also as a platform for the dissemination of the results of research.

Moving from paper based (or paper emulated) methods of scholarly communication to digital methods has revolutionised the way the results of research can be shared. In fact, the results of humanities research projects are no longer simply articles, conference papers and monographs but, as has been demonstrated here, can include curated datasets, websites and interactive spaces for collaboration. The benefits are obvious and legion: participation is increased; repetition of data gathering can be dispensed with; more people can share in the benefits of academic research; and more stories can be told.

Endnotes

1. See AustLit's 'About' pages for more information on its establishment and development: <http://www.austlit.edu.au/about>
2. Google Books Ngram Viewer, <http://books.google.com/ngrams>
3. OCR is used to convert analogue text to digital format.
4. See the AustLit 'Research projects' page for information on a variety of research projects supported: <http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets>
5. The redevelopment of the AustLit infrastructure currently underway includes enhanced data visualisation options. These services will become available in 2014, enabling new data analytics.

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