

CONNECTIVITY, COMMUNITY AND THE QUESTION OF LITERARY UNIVERSALITY: READING KIM SCOTT'S CHRONOTOPE AND JOHN KINSELLA'S COMMEDIA

Philip Mead

The human world is busy social networking at the speed of blur: on Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, Second Life, email lists – via blogging, tweeting, avatars, ping-chatting, and text messaging. These digitised modes of communication and site-interaction include increasing millions around the globe. Facebook alone now has more than 900 million active users, more than 10.5 million of them ‘in Australia.’¹ Humanity’s professionals may connect to these globalised networks in various ways, if only for non-professional uses (checking out walls, chest-bumping, throwing a sheep). But social sites are also adapting specifically to the practices of academic work: conferences and symposia can be followed on official conference blogs or socially on Twitter; papers can be skyped in; sites like Academia.edu are netspaces that allow those who sign up to ‘share and follow research’ (academia.edu/). Even if, as literary studies educationalists, we are not involved in social sites as such, we are likely to have some professional investment in web-uses such as discussion groups, listservs, digitisation projects, born-digital e-journals, databases, archives and open source software that have been developed by writers, e-researchers, and readers interested in the ‘literary’ applications of IT and the net. Younger critics in the field, like Kate Fagan, have an ethnographic-user’s interest in the ways in which online environments and new media, in particular, are shaping literary production and literary community.² Other critics and historians of culture follow the social networking of reading collectives, including professional critical ones, from the point of view of the ecology of reading experience and the history of print culture, either as advocates of resourceful reading, as critics of the informing of literature and the death of the book, or, as in my case, as intermediaries in search of a multidimensional matrix of reading, history and locale.

Whatever our involvements in social sites and/or professional net-based resources, whatever our commitments to or ambivalence about the legacy of Gutenberg technologies,

1 Available at newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22; www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/australia [accessed 11 May 2012].

2 Kate Fagan, “‘Scan My Glowing Interior/and Write Down What You See There’: A Few Questions About Online Environments and Australian Poetry Communities,” unpublished paper, Association for the Study of Australian Literature conference, Common Readers and Cultural Critics, Australian National University, 8–12 July 2009.

we move between these technological and discursive spheres, as private individuals, as friends, as colleagues, as associates, as members of fluxual communities, and even perhaps as individuals with some adherence to a typified ideal called 'the public'. And these movements are all in real, virtual and historical time. Our social collectivity (or community), as a professionalised, discipline-based fraction, is multi-dimensional, multi-layered, and plurally connected to other professional institutions and groups. Our individual selves, in unstable and complex ontologies and performances, both constitute and are constituted by this social collectivity and its subgroupings (like the quiet little poetry and poetics neighbourhood) – from outside, on the margins, and from within, all at different times, and with a whole range of affective positions, public and private. There's no doubt that future disciplinary and institutional histories of literary education will have to find new ways of narrating this radical change in how communities of readers, teachers and researchers are constituted.

There are unavoidable questions and anxieties about the foundational elements of personhood, community and sociability that arise from this potentiality of movement between cyber and other social spaces. There is a lot of noise out there about the effects of web-based applications on the self and society. The social networking I just mentioned is a product of the digital revolution, which is not a simple rearrangement of the technological apparatus of the external world, but an evolution with fundamental effects, including constitutive ones, on practices and styles of the self, definitions of knowledge, interpersonal relationships and political structures, local, national and global. Because of its narrative generativeness and its index of interiority, literature represents a privileged understanding of media and technological change. We have learnt from the thematics of technology in Anglo-European modernism, for example – Benjamin on photography, Proust on the telephone, Thomas Mann in the x-ray surgery, Stein at the movies – to recognise how the technologically evolved environment of postmodernity is also hard-wired into literary works, either as part of their representation of individual subjects and social relations, or in re-mediated genres and linguistic modes.

One question, though, is what kind of critico-discursive resources do we currently have to think about literature in relation to the self and collectivities of selves? I mean from inside the (intermediated) critical traditions, rather than as differentiated cultural artefacts (high/serious, middlebrow, popular) that provide occasions for cultural analysis of expressive forms. Because of their more or less essential and historically marked structures of feeling, are novels and poems only readable in the context of legacy media, in relation to historical modes of historicism rather than a Web 2.0 world of 'posthuman' subjectivity?³ This question tends to arise most urgently when we're thinking about pedagogy and the role of literary texts in what is often a diversified and culturally de-exceptionalised setting. It's easy enough to say that a novel, play or poem is simply one in a range of cultural expressions that doesn't have to be read on a historicist screen of some kind, but this empties out the expressive forms of the past in favour of an amnesiac present, shifting the focus on historical markers to modes of technology: 'let's turn this poem into a tag cloud'. That's probably fun, but it

3 Alan Liu, *Local Transcendence: Essays on Postmodern Historicism and the Database* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2008), p. 5.

means we have to rethink how we understand the interoperability of reading (as teachers and critics) and the positionalities afforded by historicisms.

Two recent critiques of the cultural outworkings of the digital revolution that might be relevant here are Meaghan Morris' *Australian Humanities Review* article, 'Grizzling about Facebook' (November 2009), and Zadie Smith's *New York Review of Books* review of David Fincher's 2010 film *The Social Network* (and Jaron Lanier's *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*). Smith starts from the apparent accelerated precession of generations: she is only nine years older than Mark Zuckerberg and shared an institutional and educational background with him at Harvard. Coming out of *The Social Network*, though, she feels that her 'idea of personhood is nostalgic, irrational, inaccurate'. She feels like a 1.0 person in a Web 2.0 world. David Fincher's film represents the social and economic milieu out of which Facebook was invented as compellingly 'hyperreal' and at the same time under-representative of reality (like all information; even, especially, personal data), notwithstanding its core value of connectivity. Smith is struck by Zuckerberg's strangely affectless mantra about the Facebook application, that it allows people to 'connect'. Smith writes from the position of someone who went through an obsessive Facebook phase, but who ultimately kicked the habit. So her critique is not the kind of commentariat-led panic about the 'perils and inanities of Facebook' that Meaghan Morris begins by citing. Nevertheless, for Smith, Facebook creates

something like a Noosphere, an internet with one mind, a uniform environment in which it genuinely doesn't matter who you are, as long as you make 'choices' (which means, finally, purchases). If the aim is to be liked by more and more people, whatever is unusual about a person gets flattened out – one nation under a 'format'.

Connectivity is rapidly evolving in a posthuman world, replacing community as the structuring practice of societies and nations, turning simulacra of private selves into mediated social entities.

Morris' spirited defence of Facebook also begins with a recognition of the generational aspects of technological uptake with social sites: grizzling is done by grizzled types, or oldies, Net 1.0 types. Morris is well aware of the economy of the digital divide and of the

serious legal, ethical and political issues ... arising from or being intensified by the 'Facebook' phenomenon ... free speech and its limits, censorship, the right to privacy, the negotiation of social protocols for a transnational economy that thrives on difference as well as inequality, the foundations of community, the power of corporations in our personal lives, and the technological transformation of work.

By contrast with Smith, Morris is overwhelmingly in favour of, even utopian at moments about, the 'new era of global-popular participation on-line' represented by social sites. For Morris, Facebook

has increased my affective quality of life, and not only because it offers a break from academic service work. The collective stream of posts brings me word of

books, articles, music, films, video clips and news that I would otherwise never discover.

She also identifies the potential of social sites like Facebook for internet political activism; global disaster relief, for example, is a page on Facebook. What drives Morris' enthusiasm is the realisation that the social media exemplify the theoretical insight that 'everyday life [including work] is not a human universal' and so can evolve and be shaped.⁴ Smith also realises that the 'idea of personhood is certainly changing' but, by contrast with Morris, is worried about her agreement with Zuckerberg that 'selves evolve'.⁵

These two small windows on contemporary cultural phenomena are worth thinking about in relation to contexts of literature, community and reading. They point to aspects of everyday life in the present, including movies and academic work, by a writer and a critic, responding to changes in the forms of sociability. By analogy, what is the historical moment from which we understand the literary versions of human collectivity? Insofar as we can grasp the history of the present this seems like a remarkably complex and engaging moment to be thinking about the forms that literary sociability, or changing personhood, are or have taken. The Smith's and Morris' essays are not isolated instances; they exist within a broad set of debates, in popular and intellectual registers, about how personhood, community and collectivity are experienced and understood. And they are driven by a strong historical 'concern [going back at least a century] about the future of sociability' in consumption-driven societies, a future that seems finally to have arrived.⁶ Generational tensions and disjuncts, in particular, are at the core of these contentions, as are economic and cultural politics in the form of the film industry, finance and business, online purchasing, and media consumption. In relation to net-effects on everyday life and theoretical thinking, I am particularly interested in how critical reading works across space and time, and how it is shaped by contemporary discursive frames like world literature, the transnational imagination, distant reading, network interoperability, and critical regionalism, and what kinds of connections (to use Zuckerberg's word) these theoretically generated and institutional critical projects might have to web-based self and sociability, and to new medial ecologies. If literary studies is about how meanings are created, about the rhetorical and material textuality of those meanings, and what their connectivity to the spheres of social life might be, then the kind of individuals and collectivities (readers and critics) we are will depend on the nature of our intervening roles at every point of these multidimensional and complexly structured intersections.

Literary Connectivity

It might be useful to use an historical bookmark (as with a web-browser). Going back more than a decade to 1999, when Leigh Dale was taking over as the new editor of *Australian Literary Studies* she drew attention to a shift in the discipline of Australian literary studies and

4 Meaghan Morris, 'Grizzling about Facebook', *Australian Humanities Review* 47 (2009), available at www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-November-2009/morris.html.

5 Zadie Smith, 'Generation Why?', *New York Review of Books*, 25 November 2010, available at www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/25/generation-why/?pagination=false.

6 Morris.

presented two essays, one by Gillian Whitlock, one by David Carter, about new directions. Dale identified the lack of ‘a new narrative that ... is appropriate to the dramatically changed cultural, political and intellectual conditions in which writers, critics and teachers of Australian literature now work.’⁷ In her editorial the words ‘international’ and ‘overseas’ occur numerous times, as markers of a break with an older idea of ‘the nation apart’, but words like transnational, global, translation, cosmopolitan, planetary, world, universal, translocal, transcultural, subnational, distant reading, translingual, hemispherical, intercrossings, mobility studies, and diaspora, do not. As Dale recognises, there was a shift taking place and it could not be fully named or recounted at that point. In the intervening decade or so, though, the critical vocabulary and theoretical discourse of a newly ‘worlded’ literary studies has emerged from various quarters and spread across literary studies in Australia, as we now say.⁸ This chain of thinking outside the mononationalist descends to the present from postcolonial and diasporic paradigms – Azade Seyhan’s *Writing Outside the Nation* (2000), for example – and via David Damrosch’s numerous writings about world literature.⁹ It also includes studies of specific relevance to the development of an Australian-inflected globalised literary studies, like Christopher Prendergast’s *Debating World Literature* (2004) and John Pizer’s *The Idea of World Literature* (2006), as well as work by Robert Dixon (‘Boundary Work’, 2004; ‘An Agenda for Our Own Literature’, 2007; ‘Australian Literature – International Contexts’, 2007), Russell West-Pavlov (*Transcultural Graffiti*, 2005), Graham Huggan (*Australian Literature*, 2005; ‘Globaloney and the Australian Writer’, 2009), Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer (*A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900*, 2007), Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo (*Performance and Cosmopolitics*, 2007), Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (*Mapping World Literature*, 2008), Ken Gelder (‘English, Autonomy, and the Republic of Letters’, 2009), Simon During (*Exit Capitalism*, 2009), and Ann Vickery and Margaret Henderson (*ALS: Manifesting Literary Feminisms*, 2009).¹⁰ This loose constella-

7 Leigh Dale, ‘New Directions: Introduction to Australian Literary Culture and Australian Literary Criticism’, *Australian Literary Studies* 19.2 (1999): 131–35 (134).

8 See, for example, Ankhi Mukherjee, ‘What is a Classic? International Literary Criticism and the Classic Question’, *PMLA* 125.4 (2010): 1026–42 (1037); and Bill Ashcroft, ‘Australian Transnation’, *Southerly* 71.1 (2011 *Modern Mobilities: Australian-Transnational Writing*): 18–40.

9 It is relevant here to note that David Damrosch’s *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) consists of readings of works that, with the possible exception of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, are highly unlikely to appear on the shelves of a world literature section of any large bookshop: Sixteenth-century Spanish-Mexican missionary poetry; the Zairean/Congolese novelist Mbwil a M. Ngal’s novel *Giambatista Viko: ou, Le Viol du discours africain* (1975), still untranslated into English; marginalia verse on Egyptian papyri; Mechthild von Magdeburg’s mystical verse; Kafka; P.G. Wodehouse; Rigoberta Menchú’s life writing; Milorad Pavić’s *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1988). The only overlap with Casanova, although it is a substantial one, is Kafka: both critics chart in detail, in their different ways, the shift from a universal, denationalised modernist Kafka (of previous decades) to an ethnic, Yiddish, German-dialect speaking Czech, theorist of minor literature.

10 Full bibliographical details are as follows. Robert Dixon, ‘Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production’, *JASAL* 3 (2004): 27–43; ‘An Agenda for Our Own Literature’, *Australian*, 28 March, 2007, available at www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/an-agenda-for-our-own-literature/story-e6frgcjx-1111113234442; ‘Australian Literature – International Contexts’, *Southerly* 67.1–2 (2007): 15–27. Russell West-Pavlov, *Transcultural Graffiti: Diasporic Writing and the Teaching of Literary Studies* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005). Graham Huggan,

tion of readings and arguments in theory about variously globalised literary systems has enabled transnationally and transhistorically framed accounts of authorship, expatriation, reputation, mobility, text reception, institutions, pedagogy, the dynamics of transhistorical canonisation, the politics of metropole and periphery, and the role of fractions of literary sociability (like communities, small groups and coteries).

Part of the reason for going back to 1999 is that that was also the year that Pascale Casanova's *La République Mondiale des Lettres* was published, although it did not appear in English until 2004. For a country like white Australia, with foundationally nineteenth-century and repeatedly assertive institutions of national literature, Casanova's critique is particularly relevant, even while it ignores the southern hemisphere. Casanova's study begins with the observation that literatures and literary histories were appropriated by political nations in the nineteenth century.¹¹ 'We do not always realize it, [but] our literary unconscious is largely national' (xii), Casanova asserts, and the predominant organisation of literary studies 'along national lines' makes us blind to transnational phenomena like world literary space, or what she calls the world republic of letters as a distinctive and separate cultural sphere (xi). The nationalisation of literature, or the assertion of self-invested, soil-based national languages and literatures, is one of Casanova's primary targets, hence her critique of the Herder effect, and the exceptional role of Goethe in the inception of a cosmopolitan recognition of how writers 'detach themselves from historical and literary forces' (xiii). For this reason she sees the post-Second World War period of global decolonisation as homologous to the 'national and literary upheavals of nineteenth-century Europe', in their claims to autonomy and legitimacy in the nation and national language and literature (79–80).

Casanova wants readers and critics to live in the literature world, a virtual republic or ideal community of writing and reading, that is 'relatively independent of the everyday world and its political divisions' (xii). At the same time she is well aware that literary capital is inherently national, often and mainly because of language (34). Thus she postulates a kind of paradoxical structuring of the cultural field:

On the one hand, there is a progressive enlargement of literary space that accompanies the spread of national independence in the various parts of the

Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); 'Globaloney and the Australian Writer', *JASAL* (2009 *Special Issue: Australian Literature in a Global World*): 1–17. Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer, eds, *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900* (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, UK: Camden House, 2007). Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008). Ken Gelder, 'English, Autonomy, and the Republic of Letters', *Australian Humanities Review* 47 (2009), available at www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-November-2009/gelder.html. Simon During, *Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory, and Post-Secular Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). Ann Vickery and Margaret Henderson, eds, *Australian Literary Studies: Manifesting Australian Literary Feminisms*, 24.3–4 (2009).

11 Pascale Casanova, trans. M.B. DeBevoise, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2004 [1999]), p. xi. All subsequent references are given in-text.

world. And, on the other, there is a tendency toward autonomy, which is to say literary emancipation in the face of political (and national) claims to authority

– although this autonomy remains abstract (39). As Goethe intuited in the late 1820s, world literary space is both international and competitively generated; it is enabled more than anything by historical depth of literary heritage, which allows ‘cultures to escape the hold of national politics’ (39).

Casanova’s book has been influential but critique has quickly identified its blind spots: it is seriously Eurocentric, even Paris-centric – at least until its final pages – and the abstracted literary state she describes, even at its most extensive, is geographically limited to the northern hemisphere. The world republic of letters has no antipodes, or at least only an implied one.¹² Casanova makes two brief mentions of Australia, and not in relation to any body of literature, small, minor or otherwise, but in relation to the imperium of the English language centred on London. She makes no mention of any Australian writer. Casanova’s account, also problematically, is unapologetically social-Darwinist in its assumptions about the evolution of world literary space: ‘the literary world needs to be seen’, she argues, ‘as the product of antagonistic forces rather than as the result of a linear and gradually increasing tendency to autonomy’ (109). This reminds us of Andrew Ross’ *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, a critique of the way science makes its way into the broader culture, usually badly or inaccurately. Ross’ title refers to Richard Dawkins’ metaphor to describe the ‘selfish gene’, an instance of the way in which ideas about nature invariably have their origin in ideas about society.¹³ For Casanova, ideas about literature clearly have their origin in ideas about European political history, a history characterised by national conflicts and evolutionary historicism. As Simon During points out, it is also a dichotomised world: ‘literature is either linked to autonomy or not; it is either modern or anachronistic, either consecrated or unconsecrated, either national or international, even if over time the status of particular works may change’.¹⁴ Notably, also, Casanova’s argument for a determinate and ubiquitous world system of literature nowhere acknowledges the digital revolution; in fact her republic of letters emerges alongside a world system of social connectivity that it never recognises.

Perhaps one of the most useful aspects of Casanova’s study is its insistence on and analysis of the importance of translation (although this also comes with an under-recognition of the centrality of ‘Übersetzungen’ to Goethe’s idea of Weltliteratur).¹⁵ The powerfully value-adding process of translation – and that means much more than simply converting a literary work from one language to another – is usually one in which the ‘consecrating’ nation reduces foreign works of literature to its own categories of value and

12 David Damrosch remarks that her book might be more accurately titled *The Parisian Republic of Letters*; ‘an unsatisfactory account of world literature in general’, he says, ‘it is actually a good account of the operation of world literature within the modern French context’ (p. 27).

13 Andrew Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature’s Debt to Society* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 15.

14 During, *Exit Capitalism*, p. 62.

15 John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p. 8.

perception, which it mistakes for universal norms (154). Universality is not something that small literatures or hinterlands and margins can bestow: only the cultural capitals can do that. And only the capitals think – blindly, as Casanova recognises – that they know what universality is. Political power structures tend to correlate with literary and cultural ones (81). Hence the virtual absence of the southern hemisphere in the world republic of letters. As noted, Casanova is also surprisingly unaware of new media, the web, and their obvious and significant structuring effects on the contemporary net-based republic of letters – very different from the republic she imagines – although she is aware that the old struggle between imperial centres like Paris, London and New York has morphed into a de-metropolitanised rivalry between the ‘commercial pole’ of literary publishing and distribution, and the autonomous pole of literary universalism (169). This is why internationalisation is a positive term in Casanova’s thinking, as opposed to globalisation, a negative term. More seriously, I think, as critics interested in transnational literary criticism (like Ankhi Mukherjee) have noticed, there is a problem with the exclusion of literary criticism in Casanova’s republic, or rather her repeated derogation of the metropolitan critic in favour of a transcendent, innocent and abstract reader. There is no sense in Casanova that a peripheral or localised critical position is possible, within the field, or on the globe.

Distant Readings

At almost the same moment as the interventions of Casanova and Dale I’m pointing to, Franco Moretti’s influential article ‘Conjectures on World Literature’ (2000) was published in the *New Left Review*,¹⁶ and it remains in some ways the most interesting and powerful version of his position. It is not relevant to take up space here with a genealogical sketch of the spread of Moretti’s developing theory and methodology. But given the range of quasi-sociological research in literary studies that distant reading has fostered, it is worth recalling the original provocation (and the good humour, I guess) of his method. From the beginning, as Daniel Shore argues, Moretti emphasised the sociological provenance of what was an oppositional project, the understanding of literary meanings from outside the varieties of literary humanism, and in terms of a world system:

In order to understand literature as a world system we must abandon traditional close reading as a ‘theological exercise; concerned only with the very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously.’ [Moretti] proposes instead that we practice ‘distant reading,’ which would allow us ‘to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems.’ Systematic study of world literature must proceed ‘*without a single direct textual reading*,’ jettisoning the rich experience of individual poems and novels to rely instead on ‘poor’ and ‘abstract’ concepts ... The limiting factor for such a study is not distance (in which ‘the text disappears’) but quantity (in which texts are multiplied).¹⁷

16 Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, *New Left Review* 1 (January–February 2000): 54–68.

17 Daniel Shore, ‘WWJD? The Genealogy of a Syntactic Form’, *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2010): 1–25 (23–24).

Moretti was always a formalist and a comparatist:

From the moment I started using external models for literary study – evolutionary theory, over twenty years ago – I realised that their great advantage lies precisely in the fact that they renew and galvanise formal analysis. At times the external model makes literary structures more perspicuous: it's the case of maps. At other times, it provides a conceptual architecture for the history of forms: evolutionary theory. And quantitative series, for their part, allow us to see new problems, whose solution is usually found at the level of formal choices (linguistic, rhetorical, or a mix thereof).¹⁸

The Resourceful Reading project and the papers from the conference focused on that project (2010) have filiations to Moretti's approach and are an important compilation of work in the application of information technologies, theories of reading from the 'outside', to broadly formalist literary analysis, book history, and archival research (in the Australian setting).¹⁹ And like current thinking about the 'world system' of literature, the set of practices under the 'new empiricist' heading should interest us for any understanding of the granular social settings of reading, and also, perhaps, as a further instance of the 'nationalist cosmopolitan longings' of 'Auslit'.²⁰ This set of practices constellated around 'Moretti' is shadowed by a less marketable but nevertheless influential extension of literary deconstruction that reasserts the singularity of literary texts and their resistance to all programmatic projects of reading.²¹

*'his province, his town, his countryside'*²²

So these complexly inter-related shifts in literary studies and cultural theory, with influential methodological outworkings – whatever else they might enable – carry implications for any reading practice that privileges the singular, the internal, the local, the iterative, the contingent, the contextual, the up-close. This essay is moving towards articulating a problematic about how these regimes of reading do or do not reciprocate with each other

18 Franco Moretti, 'Critical Response II: "Relatively Blunt"', *Critical Inquiry* 36.1 (2009): 172–74 (173–74).

19 Katherine Bode and Robert Dixon, eds, *Resourceful Reading: The New Empiricism, eResearch and Australian Literary Culture* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010). A parallel development of 'distant reading' was Tony Bennett's 1990 study *Outside Literature*, which has its provenance in Macherey and Barthes, and whose version of revisioning the history of the institutions of literature, rather than works and authors, was entirely swamped by Moretti's version of the sociology of literary forms in *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1983).

20 During, p. 84.

21 The MLA convention, held annually as a global, national and local event: the study of all literatures is becoming more transnational, while at another level the institutional categories remain firmly in place. 'Australian' is a small category under 'Other Literature in English', following British Literature, along with General, Canadian, Irish and Scottish. See Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

22 From Czeslaw Milosz, *Road-Side Dog* (1998), used by Pizer as an epigraph to the Introduction to his *The Idea of World Literature* (p. 1): 'A poet, thrown into the international bouillabaisse where, if anything can be distinguished at all, it is only lumps of overboiled fish and shrimp, suddenly discovers that he sits firmly in his province, his town, his countryside, and begins to bless it'.

and circulate together, and what kind of relations this calculus might have to localised critical reading and specific fictional and poetic texts. At one level, the problematic I offer is actually about methodology: that close reading is multidimensional and not necessarily delimited by exceptionalist assumptions about individual literary texts but comprises, rather, ‘an assemblage of practices, themselves often positioned against one another in debates about method’ and extendable, I think, into site-specific but globally informed readings and other developments in new contextualist and geopsychoanalytic methods.²³ In the back of my mind, though, is the sense that a problematic is not necessarily something with any single or sufficient answer. I’ll come back to this after looking briefly at Kim Scott’s *That Deadman Dance* (2011) and John Kinsella’s *Divine Comedy* (2008). But I should say, since I have mentioned methodology, that not being able to offer fully extended readings of Scott’s novel and Kinsella’s poem is fortuitous in the Levinasian terms of how I understand reading (or re-reading) and criticism: as having ‘no interest in distilling the content of a text into a “said”’.²⁴

Kim Scott’s Chronotope

Kim Scott’s novel *That Deadman Dance*, published towards the end of 2010 (Miles Franklin Literary Award 2011), ‘is inspired by the history of early contact between Aboriginal people – the Noongar – and Europeans in the area of [Scott’s] hometown of Albany, Western Australia, a region known by some historians as the “friendly frontier”’.²⁵ Like his previous novel *Benang* (and the co-written family/community history, *Kayang & Me*), the novel draws deeply on published histories as well as archival documents of the region. Its four sections cover the period 1826 to 1844, although it also refers to the earlier European maritime presence of ‘horizon people’: Vancouver (1791) and d’Entrecasteaux (1792). The title of the novel refers to an incident from Matthew Flinders’ time at Princess Royal Harbour at the very end of 1801, where he had anchored before exploring the ‘Unknown Coast’ to the east. The day before Flinders left the harbour and King George Sound (30 December), he ordered the marines ashore from the *Investigator*, for the entertainment of ‘Our friends the natives’:

The red coats and white-crossed belts were greatly admired, having some resemblance to their own manner of ornamenting themselves: and the drum, but particularly the fife, excited their astonishment, but when they saw these beautiful red-and-white men, with their bright muskets, drawn up in a line, they absolutely screamed with delight; nor were their wild gestures and vociferation to be silenced, but by commencing the exercise, to which they paid the most earnest and silent attention. Several of them moved their hands, involuntarily, according to the motions; and the old man placed himself at the end of the rank, with a short staff in his hand, which he shouldered, presented, grounded, as did the marines their muskets, without, I believe, knowing what he did.²⁶

23 During, p. 85.

24 Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, cited in Attridge, p. 141.

25 Kim Scott, ‘Author’s Note’, *That Deadman Dance* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Picador, 2010), p. 397.

26 Flinders’ journal, 1803–1814, pp. 60–61, cited in Tim Flannery, ed., *Terra Australis: Matthew*

This moment, available in the textual trace of Flinders' journal, and later in Daisy Bates' writing, but also rereadable through the oral and performative traditions of Noongar artistic practices, provides the meditative germ of Scott's novel.²⁷ These historical traces, variously intertwined, allow Scott to imagine a past and a 'fictional geography', as a way of understanding the self and its genealogies (including collective ones).²⁸ *That Deadman Dance* has the generic appearance of a historical novel of frontier contact but it seriously resists appropriation to that nationalist form: primarily via its poetic narrative mode – intensely imagined moments rather than linear diegesis – and its thematics of a 'global' shore-based whaling industry. It belongs to a different cultural project, one that Spivak would recognise as the work of the singular imagination, building a chronotope of sub-national regionalism, unmooring the cultural nationalism that controls the 'historical novel' and that disguises the workings of the state.²⁹ It is a meditation on the past but not as an archaeological layer of a national present.

The novel is also a project that can only be fully grasped with some knowledge of Scott's work as a whole, including its authorial threads. In this connection, the 'struggle to articulate the significance and energy of a specific Indigenous heritage' has a relation to Scott's awareness of his own father's impoverished linguistic and narrative sense of his Aboriginality.³⁰ It is about retrieving and reviving language. As he writes in the 'Author's Note' to *That Deadman Dance*:

rather than write an account of historical events or Noongar individuals with whom I was particularly intrigued, I wanted to build a story from their confidence, their inclusiveness and sense of play, and their readiness to appropriate new cultural forms – language and songs, guns and boats – as soon as they became available. Believing themselves manifestations of a spirit of place impossible to conquer, they appreciated reciprocity and the nuances of cross-cultural exchange.³¹

Not 'oppression culture', as he describes it in *Kayang & Me*, but 'high culture, creation stories, language and songs'.³² In this sense, *That Deadman Dance* explores an idea of Aboriginal cosmopolitanism, openness to strangers, to the non-local and the value of mobility.³³

Flinders' Great Adventures in the Circumnavigation of Australia (Melbourne: Text, 2000), p. 54. See also Anthony J. Brown, *Ill-Starred Captains: Flinders and Baudin* (Adelaide: Crawford House, 2000), p. 157.

27 As recounted by Kim Scott, at the end of nineteenth century Daisy Bates recorded a Noongar man doing the Flinders dance. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqY8v1l9Pls.

28 Scott, 'Author's Note', p. 399.

29 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* (London, New York and Calcutta: Seagull, 2010), p. 50.

30 Kim Scott and Hazel Brown, *Kayang & Me* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2005), p. 13.

31 Scott, 'Author's Note', p. 398.

32 Scott and Brown, *Kayang & Me*, p. 17. In that work Scott recounts, from a settler diary, a similarly fascinating moment of Indigenous cosmopolitanism in a visit by south-coast Noongars to the Swan River Colony and their attendance at a piano recital. See Scott and Brown, *Kayang & Me*, p. 35.

33 Zlatko Skrbis and Ian Woodward, 'The Ambivalence of Ordinary Cosmopolitanism: Investigating the Limits of Cosmopolitan Openness', *The Sociological Review* 55.4 (2007): 730–47 (730).

Significantly, then, the novel's 'Prologue' begins with a scene that dramatises Bobby Wabalanginy's playful adaptation of the European and American technology of writing:

Kaya.

Writing such a word, Bobby Wabalanginy couldn't help but smile. Nobody ever done write that before, he thought. Nobody ever write *hello* or *yes* that way!

Roze a wail ...

Bobby Wabalanginy wrote with damp chalk, brittle as weak bone. Bobby wrote on a thin piece of slate. Moving between languages, Bobby wrote on stone.³⁴



Figure 1. Map on the inside front cover of *Kayang & Me*. Reproduced courtesy of Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

Bobby is trying out the potential of writing to represent Aboriginal language, '*Kaya*' (hello), and consciously or not it is a word of welcome that he uses, translated into the encountered cultural technology of writing. But he is also aware of the cultural limitations of that technology of writing which has never been used to script a Noongar word or name. Bobby moves between languages, thinking about their material forms and the relations to meaning, a cosmopolitan skill not shared by the young white settler, Kongk Chaine, who joins him in the hut. This is a complexly figured scene in the diegesis of imagined frontier settlement, dramatising as it does an ephemeral moment in the meeting of an oral and a literate culture. This is the moment Scott chooses as the first in his series of meditations on moments of history, one in which the story is difficult to retrieve, or to recall, but that is nevertheless centred on the totemic and economic figure of the whale. While he can

³⁴ Scott, *That Deadman Dance*, p. 1. All subsequent references are given in-text.

move between languages, Bobby cannot recall the full story he wants to write down. Following his opening sentence ‘*Boby Wablgn ... roze a wail*’ (1), he ‘couldn’t even remember the proper song’ (3), and so he erases the writing on the slate. Writing cannot help him retrieve the song of the whale in the Noongar oral tradition. Later, though, he uses writing to embody the story of the ‘wail’ (5). This ‘Prologue’ then functions as a *mise-en-abyme* of the novel as a whole, drawing a moment from the temporal margins of (imagined) history into the centre and opening of the diegesis, narrating the centrality of language and writing technologies, as well as the social realities that frustrate the cosmopolitan impulse. Scott imagines the difficulties Bobby has in being able to tell his own stories, despite his cosmopolitan mentality. Their traces, though, survive to be retrieved and written by Kim Scott.

Scott’s imagination also works with a kind of alternating documentary current, cross-checking ‘oral [settler and Indigenous] history against the [often] scanty written records’ (59), always resisting and probing the imperialisms embedded in the technologies and genres of writing – maritime and land explorers’ journals, settler diaries and letters, ‘anthropological’ records, government reports and documents – for their bias and prejudice. While he generously acknowledges the archive of colonisation and its curators in the extra-diegetic (or is it?) ‘Author’s Note’ to *That Deadman Dance*, Scott is not about to trust the archive, not even in its powerfully originary form of Flinders’ journal. The novel is an explicit correction to Flinders’ observation that the old man at the end of the column of marines in 1801 did not know what he was doing. *Benang*, also in its imaginative renegotiations and rememorisations of the record of government administration and pseudo-science of racism, is initiated by a kind of diagnostic response to what Scott identified as the symptomatic markers of white settler history: the ‘FWMB’ and the ‘LFBA’, the first white man born in such and such a place (the legitimacy of noble pioneering), and the last full blood Aboriginal (the sublimated memory of dispossession).³⁵ *Benang* is a fictional critique of such racist language and history (native welfare and Aboriginal protection were the euphemisms of governmentality) by way of exploring personal and collective identity. Relevant here is the scorching treatment of A.O. Neville’s eugenics in Scott’s 2001 Alfred Deakin Lecture. Neville’s 1948 publication, *Australia’s Coloured Minority*, was subtitled *Its Place in the Community*. Scott asks: ‘What place is that, do you think?’³⁶ Neville’s community is produced by eugenics, and Aboriginal people have only a disappearing place within it.

But Scott’s project is not only one of critique: it is part of a broader commitment to Aboriginal land rights (with the South-West Land Council), to language and literacy education (with the Western Australian Education Department), to the mental health of Aboriginal people (his current professional context), and to cultural retrieval. In relation to this last point, he notes the importance to *That Deadman Dance* of the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Story Regeneration Project.³⁷ And for Scott, ‘research’ is not an invisible or unproblematic practice: it is political, community based and self-reflexive. Research into Noongar language and stories and their ‘daily “narrative construction”’ of history

35 Scott and Brown, pp. 27–28.

36 Scott, ‘Australia’s Continuing Neurosis: Identity, Race and History’, ABC Alfred Deakin Lecture, broadcast 15 May, 2001, available at www.abc.net.au/rn/deakin/stories/s291485.htm.

37 Scott, ‘Author’s Note’, p. 398.

and culture 'would be of limited value unless it can also contribute in some way to the wellbeing of the community descended from its first speakers, and – best of all – to keeping the language alive'.³⁸ All Scott's work – its literary imaginative core, as well as its other professional and cultural aspects – is an ongoing, fragmentary, individual, geographically specific and inter-personal project in articulating a self in relation to place and community, a project that deploys (just as it resists) the formal, narrative possibilities of the novel to articulate that project to history, but not to any incipient or hegemonic narrative of nation.

That is why Scott's novel does not begin with the great navigator Flinders and his prejudice about what the 'natives' may or may not have understood about the marines' performance. The cultural memory of the deadman dance, rather, belongs to Noongar oral and performative heritage and Bobby's creative curatorship of that heritage, rather than to the published annals of European maritime exploration or Daisy Bates' anthropological recording. It is also part of the reason the conclusion to the novel, which also feels like a beginning, has a carefully muted, tragic resonance. The moment of friendly and performative interaction between Flinders' crew and the Noongar people on the south coast of Western Australia in December 1801 bore within it the isotopes of different cultural possibilities: the mutually significant recognition of the role of performance, adornment and (male) warrior culture; an environmentally sustainable exchange of natural resources (*Investigator's* wooding, watering and refitting); and the cosmopolitan practices of cross-cultural exchange. Even up until 1830, the military garrisons at Albany and at Cape Riche 'hadn't competed for resources; nor had [they] excluded Noongars from their own land, or insist[ed] they be enslaved'.³⁹ But the destructive potential is there as well; it is an armed military force that Flinders deploys. The marines appear only mechanically alive in their ritualised movements and identical markings. They are the dead men in the dance: drilled, uniformed, performing to orders.

By the time the *mulga*, Bobby Wabalanginy, re-enacts the dance of his Noongar ancestor in the final scene of the novel, the context has become a violent and menacing one. Bobby will only avoid prison by signing a document that falsifies the history of his disastrous and murderous return expedition from the east with the white settler Chaine, the ex-soldier Killam, and the two east-coast Aborigines James and Jeffrey. Bobby, though, as a cosmopolitan, still believes in the importance of cultural performance, like dance, and that the land is his as a Noongar, inherited from his ancestors, and that it can be shared with the white settlers, that written documents are only one form of cultural power. 'Bobby Wabalanginy believed he'd won them over with his dance, his speech, and of course his usual trick of performance-and-costume stuff' (394–95). But it is now (in 1844) another world, full of anxiety and violence. His dance has no meaning for his white audience whatsoever. Outside he hears gunshots (395).

In Scott's chronotope of West Australian frontier contact – the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' – he imagines the (ultimately unknowable) moments of history, not as constituting some kind of facsimile of the historical past, when Aboriginality was presumed to be authentic, but as a question: How are the potentialities

38 Scott, 'A Noongar Voice, an Anomalous History', *Westerly* 53 (2008): 93–106 (103–04).

39 Scott and Brown, p. 36.

of history present in that first contact?⁴⁰ Has the history of these moments actually been fulfilled or concluded? Can moments in history that appear to be concluded, past, in fact start up again? What possibilities for Noongar individuals and communities exist today in these narratives is a serious question for Scott. In thinking about such questions, Scott uses what Spivak calls the de-transcendentalising imagination, to narrate a sub-national history and place. The narrative that emerges from complex, situated community engagements also, whatever else it might do, provides a community resource.

John Kinsella's Commedia

John Kinsella's *Divine Comedy: Journeys Through a Regional Geography*, published in 2008 simultaneously in Australia by UQP and in New York and London by W.W. Norton, is a 400-page poetic sequence. I can only offer a very preliminary reading here. The results of a decades-long interest in Dante, and a desire to 'write a work over a period of time about one small section of land', Kinsella's *Comedy* reterritorialises Dante's medieval Christian epic onto a five-and-a-half acre block of land on the outskirts of York, the oldest inland settlement in the West Australian wheatbelt.⁴¹ It is a serial poem, with filiations to modernist works like Williams' *Paterson* and James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, and to longer postmodern works like Armand Schwerner's *The Tablets*, and Susan Howe's *The Europe of Trusts*, with their thematics of cyclical human culture, angelology, ruin, and procedural composition. It is a powerful contribution to the wheatbelt imaginary. Kinsella's reterritorialisation of Dante's three canticles distracts, collapses and reformats the original schema in multiple ways: for example, it begins with Purgatory (Up Close), followed by Paradiso (Rupture), and ends with Inferno (Leisure Centre). The journeys through these imaginatively terraformed landscapes are through multiple entries and exits, and are repetitive, not unidirectional across souls always moving in circles, like Dante's. It is a regional geography, with doors into actual places but, like Dante's imaginary worlds, it is travelled through via language and mentalities. Kinsella frequently evokes the Möbius strip in relation to the inseparability of his three realms/canticles/states of mind.

The Preface to Purgatory is one of multiple examples where Kinsella reimagines Dante's schema in an antipodean locale:

York is a place of fault lines and earthquakes. The tremor/earthquake in Canto 20 of *Purgatorio* takes on a particular significance in my local version. As I wrote my version [over a period of three years], probably hundreds of tremors occurred, most undetectable by anything but machines, but still, the house we live in has been 'earthquake-proofed'. Earthquakes are taken seriously. Phenomena and phenomenology are major variables around 'our' place. The stars are bright, and astronomy and astrological matters are at the core of Dante's work. As they are of mine. The five acres and its extensions are a cosmology. Wind, rain, lightning (especially), tremors, and all other natural events fuse with the imagined, the constructed. The smaller the space examined – the bark of a tree, for example

40 Pizer, p. 36; Scott, 'Australia's Continuing Neurosis'.

41 John Kinsella, *Divine Comedy: Journeys Through a Regional Geography* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2008; New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), p. 3. All subsequent references are given in-text.

[a wasp's nest] – the more intense these associations and juxtapositions become.
Dante's work is allegorical, and so is this version. (5)

Dante's *Purgatorio* begins on the antipodean beach that surrounds the mount of Purgatory, as he and Virgil emerge out of the back door of Hell. This is the first poem of Kinsella's Purgatory, titled 'Dream Canto: Egotistical Sublime':

They dream ocean currents here: landlocked,
low-rise valley, foot of purgatory
tidal and exposed to the drag of planets.

Farmers travel to Albany for holidays,
and the Southern Ocean pounds and grinds
continental granite, contorted vegetation

low to fronts always crossing, brushing ...
a five-hour drive a stone's throw away,
the white-sand beaches of Frenchman's Bay,

white-pointers cruising deep waters
malodorous with sea shanties. Sometimes,
after retirement, it's the Greek Islands,

or the Peloponnese or Sicily ... and these coastlines
also gnaw as pain and salvation, a nervous tic,
yes, yes ... our paddocks were salt-water and krill. (7)

Where Kinsella's Purgatory is a distraction on Dante's cosmology, his Paradiso is ruptured, 'charged with light and glued together by darkness' (161). This is a space travelled across sideways rather than upwards (163) as 'ultra real', full of birds and car accidents (162). This is also the part of the journey where he acknowledges that Paradise is land stolen from others, the Ballardong Noongar people. This Paradise is 'colonisation, it is theft, it is subjugation' (162) – perhaps like Dante's *Paradiso* it is undergirded by dogma (a concept Kinsella is unafraid of); it is also a canticle of 'environment and family' (163).

Inferno, the third of the geo-states, is spatially rearranged, with 'Other circles and layers and strips and echoes ... in place of Dante's 'circles/pits/ditches/pouches' (265). 'Hell is an easy place to populate – mainly with oneself' (271). The York district's Mount Bakewell (Walwalinj), re-named by English surveyor Ensign Dale in 1830, is both a threatened earthly paradise and a kind of portal into another world. But Kinsella's Inferno is 'not the place of nuclear abomination, pesticides, land degradation and political horror in the same way that ... *Purgatorio* is. It does have elements of them, of course, but the prime drift is psychological' (267). Inferno

is the place where we are all complicit, where the cliché is paramount, rather than twists of words. They too have their place, as exclusion and rejection – 'othering' – and the sub-alternising – make for a concept of Babel in which none of us understands those outside our immediate circles. Inferno is internationally

regional: we're all there with the same possibility of trauma and wrongdoing.
(267)

This is hardly bioregional communitarianism. Like Dante, Kinsella seems furiously to pursue his critique of government, settlement history and global mythography 'while travelling through heaven, hell, and purgatory'.⁴² There are lots of other levels: astronomy, microscopically fine calibrations of place and flora names, animal life, local politics, national politics, regional environmental history, geology, bad land management, allegorisation of children's toys, etc. The 'journey' through this regional geography, deeply layered in Noongar, settlement and geological times, is at least as allegorical and fractally imagined as Dante's through his tri-world *Commedia*.

Kinsella describes his divine comedy as a provincial cosmology, stretching the spatial referents to the extreme (272). This is the rhetoric of the paradoxical and fissionable core of literary particularity and universality. It also clearly applies to Kinsella's understanding of Dante, not as the universal poet of historical transition between classical and Renaissance paradigms, but as a writer who imagined the eternal in the local, the cosmological in the provincial. In a chapter of *The World Republic of Letters* entitled 'The Revolutionaries', Casanova argues that great modernist writers like Joyce, Faulkner, Beckett, Reuben Dario, and Cortazar 'break away from the national and nationalist model of literature and, in inventing the conditions of their autonomy, achieve freedom. In other words, whereas the first national intellectuals refer to a political idea of literature in order to create a particular national identity, the newcomers refer to autonomous international literary laws in order to bring into existence, still on a national level, another type of literature and literary capital' (324–25). I am representing Casanova's argument somewhat sketchily – it is more nuanced in fact – but the point I want to draw alongside my own reading of Kinsella is that Casanova sees the 'paradigm surely of all these [modernist and postmodernist] reworkings as the use that the Irish (first Joyce, then Beckett and Heaney) made of Dante' (Joyce was '[n]icknamed "the Dante of Dublin"'). Each of these writers, she argues,

Reappropriated the work of the Tuscan poet – noble before all others – as an instrument of struggle on behalf of cosmopolitan and antinationalist Irish poets. Through a sort of reactualization of the linguistic and literary project laid out in *De vulgari eloquentia* (On Vernacular Eloquence) – a project that only writers concretely and directly concerned with the status of a national language in relation to the literary language of their space could understand – Joyce and Beckett in turn recreated, recovered, and invoked Dante's subversive power ... Dante became at once a resource and a weapon in the struggle of the most international writers in the Irish space. (328–29)

Casanova goes on to detail the case of Beckett's defence of Joyce, using *On Vernacular Eloquence* in his 1929 essay (in fact his first publication), 'Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce', 'a defense of the linguistic – which is to say political – dimension to Joyce's enterprise' and his allegiance to Dante throughout his career (329). Of course *De vulgaria eloquentia* is not the

42 David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 140.

Commedia, but my context here is the use that Casanova is putting Dante to in her reading of Joyce and Beckett, modernist heroes who resisted ‘the narrow limits of national realism’, thereby expanding world literary space (330). Casanova herself argues, and this is hardly acknowledged by her critics, that the

international and historical model that has been proposed [in *The World Republic of Letters*], and quite particularly an appreciation of the historical link established since the 16th century between literature and the nation, can give the literary projects of writers on the periphery their justification and their aesthetic and political coherence. By drawing up a map of the literary world and highlighting the gap between great and small literary nations, one may hope to be delivered at last from the prejudices inculcated by literary critics in the center (354).

At the outset, I suggested that the pathologies of net-based sociability are part of our lifeworlds and impinge also on our professional practices. These ecstasies and anxieties are about the depth and connectivity of selves, which is to say, about what it is to be human in a posthuman world (that is, one where selves might evolve), connected to the political and historical specificities of time and place. Communities are dimensional in the way space is; they exist in time, in historical incarnations, but also in the existential constellations of individual consciousness. Multiple and virtual, they are always expanding and shifting. They can only be modelled rather than defined or definitively described; their embodiment in practices is interspersed with the social imaginary at every point. Neither Kim Scott nor John Kinsella is writing with the intention of revivifying some transhistorical humanism, neither withdraws into subjectivity in the face of a powerfully standardising globalism, both write out of a processual knowledge of a geography and its history, both are deeply committed to local-molecular inflections of language, neither has any discernible allegiance to any kind of overarching national question or narrative; their drive is into the detranscendent, the locally temporal.⁴³ They up-end mythic schema, antipodise them, they Indigenise narrative modes and styles, they reterritorialise literary forms, they are extreme in their particularism (but not regionalist), they bypass the question of identity, they defamiliarise the subtle politics of oppression.⁴⁴ Multiple temporalities course through their writings.⁴⁵ As a critic, like many I suspect, with little interest in the rhetoric and practice of pure, disinterested or historically privileged positionality within the field of reading, one of the attractions of these examples of fiction and poetry is the challenge their ‘extreme particularism’ offers to theory and modes of literary knowledge (354). As my merely introductory readings here seek to demonstrate, Scott’s novel and Kinsella’s poem are complex, contradictory representations of connectivity and cosmopolitanism that also happen to be West Australian, four-dimensional LandPrint models.

But it is worth noting the careful dissonance of Casanova’s vocabulary. Her reading, in the end, is motivated by an inquiry into what she describes as ‘the question of how

43 During, p. 59.

44 ‘Advance Australia Fair – that’s that eugenics stuff all over again, isn’t it?’ See Scott, ‘Australia’s Continuing Neurosis’.

45 Wallace, p. 11.

literary universality is manufactured' (354). 'Universality' and 'manufactured': two terms with incommensurate denotations. With 'universality' she is thinking both of the evident escape of some (modern European) writers from the bonds of nation and language, and also of its circulation within non-professional, public discourses about literature, where, by various misprisions, 'universality' expresses an ultimate value. And that is a real-world effect. 'Manufactured', though, empties 'universality' of any trace of the transcendent and the transhistorical. What is left, then? Scott and Kinsella would no doubt qualify, in Casanova's terms, as peripheral literary figures, a long way from the Greenwich Meridian of the world republic of letters, perhaps even from the Eastern Standard Time (and Space) of a national literature. As such, communications about their works will be subject to uneven and unreliable connectivity, always threatening to drop out of the cellular networks of critical reading. But that is not the only point. Reformulating the world literary system as less orientalist or First-World-northern, moving to where there is more signal, is not the only use of disciplinary time and effort. To refine the problematic I outlined earlier: it is about how to represent the ways in which the individual reader – who is also multiple, in so far as she/he participates in plural real and virtual communities of reading – contributes to the hierarchies of literary value. Are we going to include specific fictions and poems like *That Deadman Dance* and *Divine Comedy: A Journey Through a Regional Geography* in 'our' inquiries about particularity and universality – which is also the question of singular literariness itself – or zoom out, as in Google maps, to the satellite view of place and history, of form and language? Where does our reading begin?