

A possible literary canon in upper school English literature in various Australian states, 1945-2005

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Using information gathered from a specifically created database, ALIAS, this paper sets out to examine the variations and changes to the works that appeared on the English reading lists of the different Australian states in their literature course(s) between 1945 and 2005. All those states which offered a set of public examinations at the end of Year 12 have been considered in this study. Examining the process by which texts were selected and reading lists constructed is not the purpose of this work. Rather, by reviewing the changing titles, forms of work and writers appearing on these syllabi over time, an interesting comparison emerges as to what texts educational authorities identified as worthy of students' study.

Background

Across Australia there are eight state and territory jurisdictions, each responsible for its own English (and other subject) course. Currently, each determines its own curriculum, syllabus, subject reference and reading lists, as well as assessment and reporting procedures, including the administration of the public examinations held in the final year of schooling. English, or a variant of the subject, remains the only course most jurisdictions require students to study in order to "matriculate" or achieve a tertiary entrance score, now known as an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR).

Beyond providing literacy competencies that assist learners to navigate university or further training expectations, subject English, from its beginnings, has been "central to the curriculum as a principal means by which students explored their expressive, creative, imaginative and ethical selves, either through their own writing or through an encounter with literary texts" (Macintyre, 2001, p. 4). English in upper secondary schooling around Australia had been a literature-based course; a subject conceived as essentially being the "close study of literary works and the nurturing of students' responses to them" (Rosser, 2002, p.91). In the post-war world, however, the school curricula for English began to slowly engage more with the life and language of students, which in effect meant engaging with popular culture and its media. Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, to the joy of some and the alarm of others, the civilising mission of English began to give way to the encounters of personal experiences with the worlds of texts: the so called "new English". "In schools, the certainties of the literary and linguistic heritage now had to compete increasingly with the incursions of popular culture: radio, comics and television" (Beavis, 2002). Historically, therefore, English has not been as stable or as singular as sometimes assumed, particularly given that the aims and content of the subject are continually contested (Cormack, 2004, p. 1).

English has undergone a significant shift over the past four decades, from a “study of culture” to “cultural studies” (Patterson, 2008). English would change and split into two, three, or even four separate courses in coming decades as cultural studies re-shaped what and how texts would be studied. Thus, each state has offered a range of English subjects, each with a different title (see Appendix). Varying from state to state, literature-based courses became known as English or Literature or English Literature. It is these specialised literature courses that are the focus of this paper; that is, courses which emphasise literary texts, not those courses that are broader in nature and content, such as English Expression, English Communications, Alternative English or Senior English.

What this paper sets out to do is examine the variations and changes to the works that appeared on the reading lists of the different Australian states in their English literature-based course(s) between 1945 and 2005. In particular, the decade after 1945, and the 15 years prior to 2005 are the focus of this study. This chronology allows for the comparing and contrasting of texts identified by different educational authorities as worthy of students’ study, thereby hinting at a literary canon at the Year 12 level.

The states that offered a set of public examinations at the end of Year 12 designed to help identify and rank students suitable for university admissions have been considered in this study. As a result, data from Queensland, which abandoned public examinations in 1972, is not included. Nor is data from the Northern Territory (NT) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) tabulated, as each territory relied on the education system of a neighbouring state for their upper school courses and examinations (ACT and New South Wales until 1973 and NT and South Australia until 1984). Furthermore, discussing the determinants and processes of upper secondary school English curriculum and reading lists construction, as told by Paul Nay-Brock in 1987 for example, is not the purpose of this paper. This paper principally provides a chronological frequency count to inform the interested reader of what and who appears on reading lists around the country at different times, with an outline as to some of the reasons why.

To be able to undertake such an analysis, an extensive single database was created recording all the reading material listed in the syllabi of every publicly examined English subject for each year and every state from 1945–2005. Called ALIAS (Analysis of Literature in Australian Schools) this robust tool was created during 2010 and 2011 [1]. A specific platform was designed by a programmer for the purpose identified. Strings and codes were added as the research data was inputted and questions were asked of the information, building a sophisticated data mining tool. Significantly, ALIAS also has the potential to serve as a valuable template or tool for similar investigations in other subject areas. Currently, and for reasons beyond the author’s control, open access to the ALIAS site is unavailable. In due course, this limitation will change.

ALIAS allows for the tracking and better understanding of the changes in upper secondary school English courses around the country. The form of work, author details, including nationality, the year of publication and year of inclusion on a reading list for publicly examined English subjects are the types of empirical data inputted into the ALIAS database. Thus, all the available syllabus manuals, handbooks and reading lists

from the five remaining Australian states for 1945 to 2005 were scrutinised for data to be recorded. Digital images of each source were taken and thousands of pages stored to be made available to researchers in the near future. This baseline database could potentially help researchers fill the historical gap that Annette Patterson believes exists in English pedagogy in Australia, and which Wayne Sawyer identified in a 2003 editorial for *English in Australia* (Issue 136) (Patterson, 2011, p. 6).

Questions under consideration in this paper include: What similarities and differences existed in reading lists around the country at the matriculation level for Literature, or subject English as it was called in some states, prior to the late 1950s and then at the start of the twenty first century? What forms of work have gained or lost in popularity over time? Which texts remained popular and which didn't? Was there any significant state variation in this regard? Was there any diversification in the nationalities of writers on reading lists? And finally, is there anything resembling a national literary canon discernible from the data collected?

The statistical popularity of a text, however, does not mean the work automatically belongs to a literary canon. Whether a work is popular because it is perceived to be part of a canon, or whether long-term popularity contributes to the work becoming part of the canon is not a question being addressed in this discussion [2]. Rather, this paper seeks to outline what the reading lists show and what trends appear in terms of text and author consistency over the years, and from state to state, so as to ascertain frequency patterns and the endurance of texts and authors. In turn, such data can help provide breadth and depth of information to help better inform the debate about a Year 12 literary canon and its composition. For teachers of English, beyond the general interest that the trends identified below may generate, the changes to reading lists signify more than just the varying of titles. Literary legitimacy, cultural capital, notions of nationhood, canon fluidity and even classroom practice are being affected.

Furthermore, at a time when English curriculums across the country, including the new national curriculum, are condemned for allegedly being dumbed-down in terms of content and in a context of falling standards, the ALIAS database can help test the validity of such criticisms. The data presented can help identify an historical curriculum overview across time and place, while making possible the identification of consistent writers and works. This, in turn, can inform the content and standards debate and assist in any curriculum review [3]. Given the current controversy about the National Curriculum, this research has added significance. In other courses where there is contestability about what is taught, such as history and biology, the implications of this work and model have relevance. Compared with the past, for instance, is there less reference to ANZAC in the new history curriculum? Are there courses overly laden with the "cross-curriculum priorities" of Indigenous awareness, engagement with Asia and sustainability when compared with the past? A similar database tool to ALIAS help could test such claims.

1945

The data analysis begins with the final year of the Second World War, where both differences and similarities in the reading lists for literature based English courses being studied at Year 12 level in the various Australian states (except for Queensland) were evident. The greatest choice available in what could be studied was for teachers and students from Western Australia (WA). In 1945, one Shakespearean play from *Coriolanus*, *King Lear*, *Henry IV* or *Much Ado about Nothing* had to be read; as well as one novel from a selection of nine, which included works by Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad and Robert Louis Stevenson. There was one Australian piece of prose in the collection, Ion Idriess' *Flynn of the Inland*. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* was compulsory reading in the West, as it was in Victoria. WA teachers had a choice of one from four essay collections and four poetry anthologies, which included *The Golden Book of Modern Poetry* and *English Verse: Old and New*, but there was only one short story collection to be studied. By contrast the similar level New South Wales course for the same year was much more prescribed and limited in choice. There was one play, William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, one collection of essays and one of short stories, plus the poetry anthology, *English Verse: Old and New*, and only one novel to be read, Dickens' *David Copperfield*.

The syllabus offerings in Tasmania were even fewer than New South Wales (NSW), while the choice available in Victoria and South Australia was somewhere between that of WA and NSW, with each of these states requiring students to study at least one Shakespearean play from a short list: *Macbeth* and *King Lear* being the most popular. Tasmania had no novel on its 1945 reading list while South Australia (SA) had a choice of seven, including works by Dickens, Hardy and Conrad, as well the American author, Edgar Allan Poe. Furthermore, one of the following biographies had to be studied in SA: (*The Life of) Madam Curie*, *South with Scott*, or *Everest, 1933*. Poetry anthologies and essay collections were popular across the country in 1945. All 33 writers and editors recorded for this year, with the exception of George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans), Gordon Daviot (Josephine Tey) and Eve Curie, were male, and just over 75 per cent of them English (of the authors listed only three were not from England or Scotland: Curie, Idriess and Poe.)

What is evident from an examination of the data for Literature courses across the country in 1945 is that while certain writers, notably Shakespeare, Conrad, Dickens and Hardy, were commonplace, others, for example, Daviot, Eliot and Rudyard Kipling, were not. With the days of Empire and colonialism coming to an end, works such as Kipling's may have been seen as anachronistic in some jurisdictions. Additionally, the works studied varied and there is breadth and difference in the range and form of work available for study from state to state. In WA and SA, non-British writers could be read and, beyond the essayists who were popular in every state, non-fiction works did appear, while in Tasmania no novel is even listed. An examination of the reading lists from a number of chosen subsequent decades will further highlight state differences and at the same time reveal a commonality of reading material.

Post World War Two

In the aftermath of the Second World War, state governments gradually introduced universal secondary schooling to at least third-year high school (either Year 9 or 10, depending on the state). Yet, teaching activities within secondary schools changed little until the late 1960s. Many of the English texts under consideration by students of that time would have been familiar to their parents, despite the changes Australia was undergoing.

While Chifley's Labor Party lost the 1949 federal election to Robert Menzies and his recently formed Liberal Party, the post-war migration scheme established in 1947 continued. This scheme brought to Australia a great influx of European migrants who would help transform the country economically, socially, politically and demographically. The last remnants of war rationing and austerity also ended with Chifley's defeat, heralding for most Australians a more affluent future. Australia experienced an industrial revolution in the 1950s, with high export prices assisting to improve living standards, as did a mining boom in the 1960s. For all the political opportunism and alleged inertia of the Menzies government (1949–1966), it helped deliver prosperity and stability to Australia. There was a great, if ad hoc, expansion in social services and increases in government spending on education.

The geo-political divide of the era had a gradual but deep impact on Australia. Though somewhat isolated and insular, the menace of the outside world was making itself felt. In particular, the fear of communism shaped decision-making climaxing in the 1954 Petrov Affair and, in the following decade, with Australia committing troops to halt the spread of communism and the "domino theory" by supporting the United States in the Vietnam conflict (Laidlaw, 1991, p. 263-264, 270).

Additionally, Australia began to feel the ever-increasing cultural impact of the United States. Film, music, fashion, cuisine, aspirations and lifestyle were being altered and those most heavily affected by these changes were the young. The influence of television in this regard cannot be underestimated. On the other hand, there was a desire for a return to "normalcy" after the war, as demonstrated by the enthusiasm associated with Queen Elizabeth's 1954 tour of Australia. The first visit to Australia by a reigning monarch triggered an outpouring of nostalgic affection for the past and the "mother country". Described by one social commentator as being "bigger than the Beatles" (Adams, 1987), it is estimated that one in three Australians saw the Queen at least once on her first visit.

However, many Australians sensed that the world and their country were changing and that there were new national and global tensions, primarily associated with the Cold War, calling for change and a re-assessment of Australia's place in the world (Rickard, 1988). Censorship, political and otherwise, was not relaxed during this decade, while the suspicion of intellectualism and a cultural cringe remained. Combined with growing student numbers and the need for more schools to be built, these developments would eventually impact on school curricula and English reading lists.

Yet, ten years after the conclusion of the Second World War, school systems remained, by and large, comfortable with their established English or Literature reading lists. This steadiness “was despite the dramatic increases in the demand for secondary education and escalating cultural change” (Beavis, 2002, p. 25). Some variations existed and a few changes had crept in to the reading material but, fundamentally, the syllabi of 1945 were still very much the foundation of what was operational in 1955. For instance, NSW had seen works by writers such as Conrad, Eliot, Hardy and Stevenson, come and go from the reading list, but the number of novels to be studied remained at one. The inclusion of works by female writers, Jane Austen’s *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, were noteworthy changes. So too was the inclusion in 1949 and 1954 of George Mackaness’ Australian anthology, *The Wide Brown Land*, and, in 1954, *Australia Felix* by Henry Handel Richardson. Shakespeare still dominated the drama category during the decade after the War, though different Shakespearean plays were on offer each year, for example, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*. The opportunity to study poets like John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Alfred Tennyson and William Wordsworth gave the syllabus further breadth, even though they were all Englishmen. Ultimately in 1955, as in 1945, teachers and students in New South Wales had a choice of one play, one novel, a poetry anthology and a collection of essays.

For a time in the late 1940s, South Australia witnessed a slight expansion in the choices available for study, but by 1955 the reading list had reverted to a number similar to 1945, even though many titles had changed. Dickens, Charlotte Brontë and H G Wells were on the reading list, along with dramatists Richard Brindsley Sheridan, Oliver Goldsmith and Shakespeare. The poetry anthology was Ernest Parker’s *A Pageant of English Verse*. Works by American writers Poe (*Tales of Mystery and Imagination*) and Herman Melville (*Moby Dick*), along with Rolf Boldrewood’s Australian tale, *Robbery under Arms*, which had all been regulars on the reading lists of the late 1940s, no longer appeared. The category of biography had also been removed from the syllabus by the early 1950s.

In Tasmania, the reading list for English, known from 1947 as English Literature, remained the smallest in the country. By 1955 it had contracted to one anthology of poems, *A Pageant of English Verse*, a collection of short stories, and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. No novels were to be studied, even though in 1954 a choice from four had been available (all English writers including Dickens and Thackeray).

It was in Victoria and Western Australia that the greatest expansion of reading options took place during the post-war decade. The Victorian reading list for English Literature expanded from just William Thackeray’s *Henry Esmond* to nine novels, including works by Dickens, Hardy, Homer, Richardson and Jane Austen. Along with Shakespeare, plays by George Bernard Shaw (*Saint Joan* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*), T S Eliot (*Murder in the Cathedral*) and Henrik Ibsen (*An Enemy of the People*) were on offer, plus, in poetry, Chaucer’s *Prologue*. In NSW, SA and Tasmania Chaucer’s work did not appear.

The already expansive Western Australian syllabus remained, though the emphasis changed. By the early 1950s novels were no longer as dominant a reading item as they had been in 1945. Drama and poetry in particular offered more alternatives for study. By 1955,

only three novels were on offer: Austen's *Persuasion*; Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* and, for the first time, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A clear choice between authors from different national backgrounds appeared on the reading list with an English, Australian and American writer. Shaw (*Arms and the Man* and *The Devil's Disciple*) and Shakespeare (*Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*) were the choices in drama, while four poetry anthologies and poems by the Victorian era poets Matthew Arnold, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Frost, as well as Chaucer, were available for study. The short story collection was Australian: Walter Murdoch and Henrietta Drake-Brockman's *Australian Short Stories*. In New South Wales, it would not be until several years after the tabling of the *Wyndham Report* into secondary education that the inclusion of Australian and American literature in English courses was recommended (van Straalen, 2000, p. 63) [4]. The cultural changes Australia was undergoing were finally being recognised in NSW. While a handful of Australian writers had sporadically appeared on NSW reading lists pre-1957, no American did so [5].

During the 1946–1955 period, the three most popular works listed on the relevant reading lists around the country were Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, and Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*; all appearing 15 times. The plays of Shakespeare were universal across Australian state curricula. His plays such as *Julius Caesar*, *Richard II* and *The Tempest* were common listings. Drama constituted approximately 25 per cent of all forms of work for study on relevant English Literature syllabi. The most popular novel was Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae* with 14 listings. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* were the most popular works by females: Austen's work appearing 12 times and Brontë's novel 11. Female writers contributed just over ten per cent of the works listed between 1946 and 1955.

The most popular writer in upper secondary school literature courses across Australia during this period was Shakespeare (103 entries), appearing three times more than the next most commonly listed writer (Chaucer, with 30). Of the twenty most prevalent writers recorded, all but one was from England, namely Stevenson from Scotland. The list also included two Australian anthologists, Alick Merson, who edited a collection of non-Australian essays called *Still Lighter Essays*, and poet and essayist Douglas Stewart. Norman Corwin, who contributed a play to the collection *Five Radio Plays*, which was listed on six occasions, was the most frequently included American writer, while Homer (six listings) was the most commonly included non-English writer. Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* was the most frequently listed novel by an Australian.

Sixty-two (48 per cent) of the 129 writers listed in the syllabi throughout Australia came from England. A little more than 16 per cent of the writers were Australian, with approximately 6 per cent from the United States and 5 per cent from Ireland respectively. Of the 226 works in the syllabuses a little more than 64 per cent were from England. What this suggests is that at Leaving or Year 12 level (or its equivalent) in the decade after World War Two, the literature that mattered still came from England and that a school literary canon did seem to exist; though works may have varied, the writers under consideration did not.

In the meantime, steady improvements in housing, transport, education, and health care accelerated. Living standards reached new levels in the 1960s, though some people were struggling to make ends meet. Consumerism took hold in Australia as elsewhere in the western world during this decade and as a sustained period of post-war economic prosperity (the “long boom”) spread, Australians, too, sought mass-produced, mass-marketed labour-saving devices and consumables. The austerity of the immediate post-war world was by now over and there were many more options available in the new and expanding supermarkets, department stores and car yards. Australian cities grew rapidly and sprawled in this decade as the nation’s population quickly expanded [6]. Disputation over dress, music, sexuality, politics, art, and relationships punctuated the decade. Through film, music and television, foreign policy, political and economic engagement, American influence in Australia grew further.

A new way for WA (and Australia)

As early as 1961 (WA Policy Committee of the Public Examinations Board) there was debate in WA about “the experiment of dividing English into two subjects” (Minutes of Public Examination Board for English, 7 July, 1961). Members of both the Public Examinations Board English Committee and the Policy Committee of the Public Examinations Board opposed any such division. They believed it to be subject self aggrandisement; a simplistic view that English was just about students being able to express themselves, and merely following trends emerging in universities where English was divided into language and literature.

It was during the 1960s that ‘New Criticism’ theories emerged, initially out of the United States, based on the evaluation of text in a manner analogous to scientific analysis (Grodén, Kreiswirth and Szeman (Eds), 2005, p. 528) [7]. Attention was to be given to the literature itself, with the text viewed as a self-sufficient “verbal artefact”. Close attention to the language and its unique meaning and value followed. This change resulted in much debate about the role of traditional literature in the formation of ethical, aesthetic and rhetorical competencies among English students. The civic function of English was being challenged. This is not to say that British ‘Leavism’ (See Docker, 1984 and Wiltshire, 1996) did not continue to have an influence on the study of literature in Australia during this decade.) Hence, by 1969, every Australian state had chosen to split the subject English in to a literature course, along the lines of the existing subject English, and another, loosely defined as English expression (see Appendix). Later, the emphasis in studying English shifted to an engagement with real world issues and a focus on social and cultural contexts, while Literature remained an “old school” literary subject.

In 1964, Dr J. H. Petch was invited by the University of Western Australia to report on the WA public examinations system. Petch was critical of the Year 10 Junior Certificate and recommended splitting both Year 10 and Year 12 English into Expression and Literature. Much debate followed the Petch Report release, notably about what form the two English offerings at Year 12 level would take. When debate settled on this occasion, though not to everyone’s satisfaction, English was to be a wide-ranging course of

predominantly contemporary fiction and non-fiction, with a choice of texts recommended rather than prescribed. Textual knowledge was not examined for its own sake; understanding and appreciation were (Corby, 2011). Literature was unchanged from the existing course except for having a wider reading list. The other states made similar decisions soon after WA authorities, but implemented them earlier than 1969. This was a momentous change to Australian curricula; the nearly synchronous nationwide partition of upper-school English into “English” (or “English Expression” or some similar name and/or level) and “English Literature” (or, as in NSW, it remained literature based “English” with differentiating levels or “Literature” or something akin) in the late 1960s [8]. Literary works were studied in English and such courses remained publicly examined. The non-examinable English courses were still several years away and are not part of this study.

Western Australia was the last state to divide English into more than one examinable secondary school course (Literature and English), in 1968 for Year 11 and 1969 for Year 12. In SA this division occurred in 1966; in NSW the new HSC courses were formulated in 1965, and examined in 1967; Victoria, initially in 1957 and then again in 1968, and in Tasmania in 1969. According to the 1969 WA Syllabus Manual for English:

The prescribed texts are to be studied as a means to an end, and not as an end in themselves. The aims of the reading course are to extend the interest of candidates; to interest candidates in techniques of writing; to promote an attitude of critical awareness in candidates when they read. The prescribed texts have not been chosen as models to be imitated, or as examples of literature to be studied in detail.

However, when a sample paper for the new subject (Leaving) Literature was forwarded to schools in 1968, the texts to be studied remained what they had been for many years and included Chaucer, Shakespeare, Austen, Dickens, John Milton and D. H. Lawrence—all members of the English literary studies establishment (van Straalen, 2000, p. 70). Poetry dominated the paper. Furthermore, the 1969 reading list for the subject revealed that most texts were by English writers.

The division of traditional English into distinct literature and expression subjects (though the nomenclature did vary from state to state) by the late 1960s resulted in a different emphasis being given to the forms of work being studied in each area of study. For Literature, 1970 saw poetry; drama and the novel (in that order) make up 91 per cent of the work listed on syllabi Australia-wide. For the same year, the novel, drama and non-fiction prose were the main forms of work listed on the reading lists of the English expression-type courses, making up approximately 69 per cent. Poetry constituted less than 11 per cent of the works identified for English, whereas for Literature it was the most popular form of work on offer at 42 per cent. Short stories still had a place in general English courses, as did the essay, but they had all but disappeared from the Literature courses.

With the growth in the number of English courses on offer during the 1970s, and a shift from prescribed to recommended texts, the choices available to teachers grew

dramatically. There was a fear in some quarters that the limited reading list of the past could be perceived as a literary canon in its own right. This concern helped to prompt an expansion in the works offered on reading lists, notably in general English courses, across the country in subsequent decades [9].

The emphasis on Australian cultural nationalism during the prime ministerial terms of John Gorton and Gough Whitlam would see further changes in the works on offer. The impact of multiculturalism, women's liberation and Indigenous rights filtered through to educational authorities and practitioners, influencing decision-makers in what would be included on reading lists. Technological change also altered offerings and the delivery of subject matter with the advent of video and DVD.

Another consideration in the expansion of school reading lists was the extent to which reduced university influence on syllabi liberated courses. For decades, education in Australian high schools had been heavily influenced by tertiary selection requirements. In Western Australia, for example, complaints about the nature and extent of that influence led to a variety of investigations and reforms, such as the Dettman (1972), Beazley (1984), McGaw (1984) and Andrich (2006) Reports. Course and assessment structures were altered, as was the composition of syllabus and examination committees. Educational objectives also became broader to cope with the ever-increasing number of non university-bound Year 12 students.

The 1988 Western Australian *Examiners' Report* for Literature also throws light on the changes and continuities of "traditional" works. Wilfred Owen and the Australian Bruce Dawe were the most popular poets studied: much more than Keats and the metaphysical poets. Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie* elicited the greatest number of student responses (resultant from texts studied) at 26.7 per cent, followed by *Hamlet* (22.7 per cent). However, in total, the four Shakespearean plays listed on the reading list (*also Henry IV, Antony and Cleopatra* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*) totalled 31.5 per cent of answers. Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was the next most popular play. The most popular novel was John Fowles' *The Collector*, generating 16.7 per cent of student replies and thereafter, predictably, novels by Dickens, Brontë, Austen, Hardy, Lawrence and Twain influenced student answers. Despite the many more literary works listed on the syllabus, *Great Expectations*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Heart of Darkness* continued to dominate what was being taught. Two Australians who drew significant numbers of student answers were Randolph Stow (8.8 per cent) and Patrick White (5.7 per cent).

What is clear from examining reading lists since 1945 is that even though some authors such as Shakespeare regularly appear on reading lists (prescribed or recommended), titles constantly changed over time. Additionally, there was a shift away from works by English writers from the mid-1970s towards writers with more diverse backgrounds, and an emerging dominance of Australian writers, became evident. Yet, a core literary canon comprised of Austen, Conrad, Eliot, Hardy, Shakespeare and the American Arthur Miller seemed to exist. The works of other writers appeared to revolve around this central pantheon.

More recent trends

Between 1991 and 2005, the most popular work at Year 12 level around the country was Miller's *The Crucible*, appearing on both English and Literature reading lists. The next most popular work was also a play, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The most regularly listed novel was Hardy's *Tess of D'Urbervilles* just ahead of the Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, the highest ranking Australian work. *Cloudstreet* appeared on both general English and Literature reading lists too, but, like *The Crucible*, was more recurrent on English rather than Literature syllabi.

For Literature, the most frequently listed work was poetry by an Australian; that is, Gwen Harwood's *Selected Poems*, appearing 37 times. Helen Gardner's collection *The Metaphysical Poets* then followed, with 31 listings. Chaucer appeared 20 times, but only on the New South Wales and Victorian syllabi (where *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* was the work most commonly listed). Euripides' *The Bacchae* was also regularly programmed in Victoria, but nowhere else in Australia. Years earlier, the 1950 *English Examiners' Report for WA* noted that students better tackled *The Prologue* than they did *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. *Hamlet* was the most popular play tackled that year and the Examiners wondered why *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had been "so neglected". Approximately sixty years after the War, the popularity of some selections, such as *Hamlet*, had not changed.

The most popular novel in Literature, Australia-wide, for 1991–2005 was *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, then *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Emma*. Two Shakespearean plays dominated reading lists, namely *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. *The Tempest* and *Othello* were other popular Shakespearean plays. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was a frequently listed novel. Newer novels such as Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, joined *Huckleberry Finn* and *Great Expectations* as common works. Australian writers finally joined the pantheon in this period. *No Sugar* by Jack Davies appeared 23 times on the Literature reading lists, as did Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. Davies' play and White's novel were particularly popular in WA and Victoria.

The other change identified earlier that continued during the 1991–2005 period was the decline in the popularity of poetry. Essays had all but disappeared from Literature syllabi, while short stories as a common form of work plateaued at approximately 3 per cent of the type of readings recorded. Novels accounted for 37.5 per cent of the works listed for Literature, while poetry remained at 27.3 per cent. Drama was constant as a form of work available for study in Literature at approximately 27 per cent of the total number of reading options available.

Writer nationality also reflected the further acceptance of Australian literary work as being worthy of study and of the internationalisation of Australia. Australian authors were more frequently listed, at 29 per cent, but the continued dominance of writers and work from England in Literature remained evident with 136 works, or 31.2 per cent, being from England, compared with 125 or 28.7 per cent being Australian. Works by American and

Irish writers were also prevalent. The diversity of nationalities appearing thereafter is striking. Compared with 1945, a major change had happened. Multiculturalism was reflected in Literature reading lists. Writers with national origins as diverse as India (Rasipuram Narayan) and Italy (Giuseppe Di Lampedusa) had work included on reading lists, something that would have been inconceivable just three decades earlier.

By the close of the period under review, the most frequently listed work for Literature was a collection of poems by the American woman Adrienne Rich. Harwood's poetry collection was the second most popular work. Two other Australian works appear near the top of the list for the year: Davies' *No Sugar*, and a poetry collection by Judith Wright. However, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* remained the most commonly listed novel. Works by Malouf, Hardy, Austen, Heaney, Chekhov, Wilde and White were still listed, as were Ibsen and Stoppard, but gone, amongst others, were Brontë, Dickens, Eliot, Twain, and Lawler. Some of the works that were common on past reading lists had to make way for newer entries: contemporary and Australian. The work of many more female writers was also available for study in 2005. For Literature, the percentage was 31 per cent, compared with 1945 when only three females (5.6 per cent) had work listed for possible study.

The 2005 *WA English Literature Examiners' Report* noted that the poetry of Gwen Harwood and Seamus Heaney dominated student answers, as did the novels *Heart of Darkness* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. *No Sugar* was the most popular play in WA. *Cloudstreet* and *Remembering Babylon* were other novels regularly referred to by students in their answers. Plays such as *Medea*, *Othello*, *The Tempest* and *Caucasian Chalk Circle* were also popular with students. These listings demonstrate that after 60 years, some works or at least writers remained popular. Australia-wide, Shakespeare was still the most frequently listed writer in 2005. Chaucer, Chekov, Conrad and Euripides followed. The inclusion and reading of Australian works is the biggest change to have taken place since 1945.

Certainly there were many more forms of work and choices available in 2005 than at any earlier time. While the novel dominated reading lists around the country, the nationality of writers was much more diverse than ever before, even though there remained a dominance of writers from England. Shakespeare, Hardy, Chaucer and Conrad appeared on the 1945 listings and these writers were still present in 2005, though some of their works available for study had changed. Stevenson, Poe, Daviot, Golding, Shaw and Hemingway, amongst others, were some of those writers who disappeared from reading lists altogether. Only two works remained constant throughout the period of study so as to still be listed in 2005: *King Lear* and the *General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. Anthologies of poems, essays and short stories also lost their popularity, but do appear occasionally on modern reading lists. Biographies, such as that by Curie, once common on syllabi, had no currency in Literature courses in 2005.

Conclusion

From the various States' reading lists and syllabus documents examined with ALIAS, there is a discernible commonality in what has been regularly itemised over the years [10]. The changes to syllabi, examinations and course structures, along with Australia's political and

cultural evolution since 1945 altered much about the English Literature courses offered at Year 12 level around the country. So too, did changes in curriculum theory and pedagogical practices. Yet, despite the shifts and the State variations, it is clear that notwithstanding the changes in methodology and theory influencing selection processes and the instruction of the subject, a core group of writers remained popular across the six decades since the end of World War Two.

Baseline data information such as that collated and discussed above helps practitioners, curriculum writers, analysts and critics to recognise significant trends and patterns over time and across locations, showcasing commonalities and anomalies. The statistical evidence collated for ALIAS suggests that there were, and are, common works found in Year 12 English Literature courses around Australia, with many by Shakespeare still the central and dominant texts throughout the period studied.

Endnotes

- [1] ALIAS is the product of Tim Dolin and John Yiannakis, with technical assistance from Joko Wong. It is based on all available syllabi, reading lists, examination papers and subject manuals and/or handbooks from 1945-2005 for Western Australia, New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. The website is currently and temporarily housed as part of the Australian Common Reader at Curtin University. In the near future it will be hosted by the Australian National University, Canberra.
- [2] Nevertheless, this particular aspect of the senior school literary canon debate remains important in the discourse of scholars and classroom practitioners, particularly the Australian literature component of any such canon, including the work of writers such as Larissa McLean Davies and Philip Mead. The issues regarding canon formation and the socio-political implications of what is studied in literature are outside of the scope of this paper. Professor Tim Dolin has commenced writing a paper dealing with such debates in light of the statistical findings from the ALIAS database. Discussion about the strengthening or diluting of any literary canon over the years is also beyond the purpose of this paper.
- [3] The announcement in January 2014 by Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne of a review of Australia's national curriculum, particularly the English and History courses, has triggered much debate about the curriculum's standards, content and political intent. The two reviewers appointed have also prompted much media and academic argument. For example, see Cater, N. (2014). Australian Curriculum beyond saving. *The Australian*, 14 January. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/australian-curriculum-beyond-saving/story-fnhulhjj-1226800948151>
- [4] The Wyndham Report was concluded in 1957. The suggested reforms were approved by Parliament in 1961 and the changes initially appeared on reading lists by 1965.
- [5] According to Paul K. Nay-Brock (1984, p. 55), it is not until 1962 that there is a "notable ... American influence in a NSW English Syllabus in the section on reading."
- [6] Western Australia's population, for example, doubled in 25 years, passing one million in 1969, eight per cent of the national total.
- [7] "New Criticism is a name applied to a varied and extremely energetic effort among Anglo-American writers to focus critical attention on literature itself."
- [8] This division complicated the data analysis. More recently in NSW the following distinction between types of English has been made: While English (Advanced and Standard) is designed for students to improve their English "in order to enhance their personal, social and

vocational lives”, the non-examinable Fundamentals of English “addresses the literacy needs of students undertaking the course and assists students to use the English language effectively in their study and for vocational and other purposes.”

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english-syllabus-from2010.pdf

In Western Australia the division of both examinable subjects is thus: “Through the study of Literature, students create readings of literary texts and develop the skills necessary to better understand their world.” In English, “through the use of oral, written and visual communication texts, students examine the relationship between language and power, and learn how to become competent, reflective, adaptable and critical users of language.”

http://www.scsa.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior_Secondary/Courses

- [9] The ALIAS database is able to generate reports showing an array of information regarding syllabus listings including writers and works for any given year or set of years. By the 1970s, works such as *The Great Gatsby*, 1984 and *The Caretaker* were regulars on reading lists across the country, as were works by writers like Thomas Kenneally, Samuel Beckett, John Keats, Alec Hope and Joseph Heller.
- [10] The list of works recorded across Australia in syllabus manuals and handbooks from 1945 until 2005 does not tell us how many of these texts an individual student may have read. Examiners’ Reports from recent years help in this regard, but a more valid way to determine the existence and nature of any literary canon beyond texts appearing on syllabi is to compile lists of what individual Year 12 students are reading in schools Australia-wide. Such a task would be difficult to perform for today’s Year 12 students, and impossible to recreate for those students of 20, 40 or 60 years ago.

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Appendix: Various publicly examined Year 12 English courses offered in five different Australian states, 1945-2005

NSW		SA		TAS		VIC		WA	
1945-1966	English	1945-1965	English Literature	1945-1946	English	1945-1992	English Literature	1945-1968	English
1967-1975	English (Levels 1, 2 and 3)	1966-1974	English English Leaving	1947-1968	English Literature	1957-1971	English Expression		
1976-1989	English 2 Unit Course 2A General Course 3 Unit Course	1975-1985	English	1969-1990	English Lit Levels II and III	1972-2005	English	1969-2005	English
		1986-1990	English (P)	1971-1991	English Studies Level III	1993-2003	Literature Part B		
				1980-1982	English Lit. Level III (Alt Syllabus)			1969-2005	English Literature
1990-2000	English 2 Unit Course 2A General Course 3 Unit Course Contemporary 2 Unit Course	1991-2005	English Studies	1983-1987	English Studies Alternative				
				1991-2003	English Literature	2004-2005	Literature		
2001-2005	English Stage 6 (Advanced)(Standard)			1992-2003	English				
				1993-2003	World Literature				
				2004-2005	English Studies English-Communication				

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