

Not by Bread Alone: Authority, Value and Meaning-making in Australian Literary Studies

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As scholars, critics, reviewers and students of Australian literature, what are our values and our impact? Does what we research and write make any difference, make anything happen, anywhere? That is what the funders of our discipline are asking, but also what we need to ask of ourselves. This is not going to be a self-aggrandizing article, nor a nihilistic, hands-thrown-up kind of essay—Whence the Humanities? Whence Literary Studies? Whence literature?—although there may be something of that along the way. The most recent, 2018 round of Australian Research Council (ARC) grants is one arguably gloomy indicator that Literary Studies and its sister disciplines of Cultural Studies and Creative Writing are not doing well, and not being seen, in the national fields of research. Of course Literary Studies may have migrated into interdisciplinary locations, and is in now ‘in competition’ with other language disciplines, so is it becoming almost invisible on ARC platforms? This paper, generously given the mantle of the *2016 Dorothy Green Lecture* in its first iteration, explores authority and the making of meaning in Literary Studies as interlocking questions. However, for many within the discipline and beyond, even the notion of *meaning* is under fire. This paper will defend the categories of value and of meaning-making in the Humanities, and ask where Literary Studies might be going.

To do this I want first of all to set up a workable, if fluid definition of *meaning*, one which is appropriate for Literary Studies as well as for other current writing and critical practices, embracing the notion of “‘meaning’ as it moves between semantics and the effects of language, aesthetic and ideological. Meaning will be considered not as truth, but as interpretive, persuasive power and authority, in relation to Literary Studies. We might start with a basic, working definition:

...the meaning and interpretation of words, signs, and sentence structure [is how we] largely determine our reading comprehension, how we understand others, and even what decisions we make as a result of our interpretations. Semantics can also refer to the branch of study within linguistics that deals with language and how we understand meaning. This has been a particularly interesting field for philosophers as they debate meaning: how we build meaning, how we share meaning with others, and how meaning changes over time. (Gentry online).

The interdisciplinary focus of this kind of working definition of meaning and meaning-making has been important not just for Literary Studies, but across most Humanities disciplines. An added complication for the discipline of Literary Studies and a great deal of Cultural Studies and Creative Writing is that meaning is often what writers, perhaps especially experimental writers, as well as some critics, seek to *eschew*, challenging and subverting any peremptory claim to meaning, let alone truth. Critic Ed Wright’s 2015 review of Michael Farrell’s poetry volume *Cocky’s Joy* in the *Sydney Review of Books* is helpful, for instance, in outlining this subversive end of the meaning-making spectrum. He writes:

Michael Farrell enjoys a reputation as one of the foremost experimental poets in the contemporary Australian scene. In some of his previous work the cause of experimentation has tended to dominate. In *Cocky's Joy*, while experimentalism is strongly evident, he seems to have struck a superb and playful balance, a kind of lyrical abstractionism that blends key influences ... and generates pleasure and intellectual satisfaction at the same time as it continues to question and resist the urge to meaning. The consequence is a free-wheeling, idea-shifting, constantly suggestive, sometimes touching, politically acerbic and often very funny book of poetry. (Wright online)

Wright helpfully locates the pulse of contemporary Australian poetry and poetry criticism. He outlines the current tensions, delineating the differences between accessible meaning and literary experimentation, the latter offering access perhaps *only to the blessed, literate few*. Literature often dances, back and forth, along this line between communicative meanings and the pleasures of linguistic play, absurdist non-meaning, and experiment. So, for Wright, Farrell relishes 'nonsense...in his love for rhymes *unhinged from meaning*', and further, he argues:

The pleasure of the abstract from this point of view is that it brings us back to the potential of things, to the moments before perceptual decisions are made. It functions as a mode of cognitive refreshment by offering us new ways of seeing, new ways of going beyond the organising imprimaturs of our stacked preconceptions. Abstract images give us the opportunity to play in the interstices between the blank spaces of beginnings and the resolution of form. (Wright)

Arguably, 'the urge to meaning' must be questioned, as the specters of literalism, fundamentalism, essentialism and fascism lurk. But who does 'us' signify in Wright's view? Is it mostly the keenly and self-consciously literary who are being hailed? Wright's focus here is in part on the effects of modernist *visual* texts, but he leaves a question hanging in regard to the place of meaning in *literary representation*, concluding:

Farrell provides the reader (and there must always be a reader for these poems to have life in the world) with a fully disrupted expectation of a poem. The form remains but the meaning has been sucked out of it, unless of course there is a key to the substitution that can take us back to the original text, if indeed such a thing ever existed. (Wright)

The reviewer is drawing here on the tension between having 'life in the world' and the uses of language that are most literary—playfulness, and abstraction of language that is self-renewing (perhaps even self-sealed) and skeptical. While the critic is to a certain extent hedging his bets in relation to an 'original text', here is where the current essay can return directly to questions of meaning, including accessibility, and ultimately, authority, in literary studies. If Farrell's *Cocky's Joy* 'combines absurdity with political statement to create an edgy resonance that defies any glib interpretation or moral assumption' (Wright), it arguably does so in relation to earlier historical and poetic texts, and in a present political context—another text—with real world politics involved. The poetry is experimental, in Wright's words, in that it plays against glibness and moral assumption. Such uses of language—playful, intertextual, interpretive and beyond interpretation—are of course part of literary work, creative and critical, but such practices are surely not against meaning, nor are they necessarily a refusal of any ordinary texts. In fact, I would argue that such writing *depends on* other texts—not as bibles, but as

touchstones, ideological comparisons, even belief contexts—in order to emerge as experimental, playful, flouting of any glib meaning, in contrast.

So how do we as practitioners negotiate issues of contemporary “meaning-making”, and the attendant questions of authority and value, in Literary Studies, and in the various cultures of creative writing in the academy and beyond? I want here to agree, in part, with a recent discussion by Simon During around questions of value in Literary Studies. During writes in ‘When Literary Criticism mattered’ (2016):

...from its beginning, a core strand of literary studies—which I will call “modern literary criticism”—sought to find standards without appealing either to value in the singular, to expressive values in the plural, or indeed to “worth,” or substantive qualities like right, good, or beauty. It turned rather to the literary heritage. It was committed to immanence: to finding what had worth in the heritage just as a result of comparative acts of attention to works in that heritage, as if to make judgments inductively on grounds supplied by the heritage. (121)

During’s essay resists short-term bureaucratic calls to measure the value of literary critical works in quantitative terms. He does so, however, in an arguably hermetic, literary way that is potentially self-defeating. His essay recommends a turning to the ‘literary heritage’, thus revealing a warm self-assurance in the formation of traditions, with a knowing sense of guardianship shared by the literary cognoscenti. During goes on to examine Leavisism in admiring terms, under the guise of historical description, in relation to poststructuralism and other pretenders to the throne, for it is:

...in Leavisism that the discipline came to reflect on itself most confidently and subtly as well as to articulate its institutional procedures, its technical and pedagogical methods, and its social and cultural purposes most carefully, and, in the process, to make the most ambitious claims for itself. As criticism’s most socially ambitious and (arguably) most conceptually sophisticated school of thought, Leavisism realizes criticism’s potential more fully than any of its rivals. (122)

In bravely detailing the values and the history of Leavisism, against the clear tastes and interests of the present moment, During also declares that Leavisism is dead today, and he is interested in why it died:

Leavisism’s blindness to the role that authority played in its organization is linked to its commitment to immanence. The Leavisites hoped to draw their criteria for critical judgment from the works being judged: the affirmation happening in an intuitive *seeing that* available to the properly trained. (During 129)

As During shows, today Literary Studies has moved far from the Leavisite *immanence of meaning* intuited in individual works and their place in (or not quite in) the canon, ideas which were strong planks of the movement. During is deeply aware of the reasons for this failure to maintain the assumption of immanence. His essay sets out both the strongly influential and the finite foundations of meaning-making and authority in Leavisism, but with just a hint of nostalgia for Leavisism’s authority when it comes ‘to finding what had worth in the heritage.’ His essay throws back to practitioners of Literary Studies today—post the historical contextualizing of the American new critics such as Empson and Bateson, post-poststructuralists across the seventies and eighties (Derrida and his far-flung tribes), post (?)

the vehement identity politics of the past two decades (ethnic, feminist, class-based)—the question for all Literary Studies practitioners: how is meaning and authority to be considered today?

‘Meaning-making’, and ‘authority’ are reduced, in the code of bureaucratic academia at present, to the discourses of ‘significance’, or in more recent terms, ‘impact’ and value, as the Australian Research Council, following the British model, asks scholars to describe (and give various kinds of evidence for) the *impact* of their research. So, in the world of Australian writing and in the discipline of Literary Studies, hovering questions continue to be: who gets to speak or write, to whom, about what, and is anyone listening? Citations, the H-index, A-journal acceptance, research points in workloads, and the ranked prestige of publishers are all hot topics. And these questions are complicated and amplified in relation to Australian Literary Studies, in the stress put upon *global* rankings, readerships and prizes. Scimago, the supposed ranking system *de rigueur* for many Australian institutions, is arguably *not* international as it is often hailed, but seriously American, with British fringes. Australian literary journals fare very badly there. But the point is that questions of worth, value and impact are increasingly being constructed predominantly in corporate, neo-liberal terms.

In the critical and creative practices of Literary Studies, who is granted authority, and how? The method for scoring and quantifying authority and impact in Literary Studies (and all Humanities) scholarship is, at least temporarily, settled. Look at the scores. But besides this mainly science-based quantifying, can and do we continue to ask if authority is connected to a larger realm of meaning-making, including the play of and with meaning? These questions pertain to the broad domain of academic scholars, reviewers, critics, and writers of literature, beyond academe. Literary journalist and occasional *bête noir* of literary critics and academics, Geordie Williamson, put these issues succinctly in a 2010 article, thinking mainly of literary journalism:

Critics may be uniquely equipped to elucidate those aspects of a national literature that enrich and sustain our sense of ourselves as different, as worthy inheritors of the stories we tell about ourselves...But there must be venues where they may be heard, and audiences willing to listen. (Williamson).

Williamson’s understanding of what and how the meaning-making enterprise of critics should be conducted, who it should speak to, is working with a capacious (some would say over-inclusive) category of ‘critic’, a category which blurs together the work of literary journalists, reviewers, bloggers, literary critics, literary scholars, literary historians, and literary authors cum reviewers. Is the work of reviewers and bloggers on the same spectrum, or in some instances counter to, even obfuscating of what literary criticism’s practices and values might be? Selling books seems to be placed by Williamson on the same spectrum as critiquing (a common denominator being books? markets?), but there are arguably certain caveats and procedures along the way that might give us pause. Asking, as it can do, uncomfortable, unsettling, often complex or unpopular, unentertaining questions, what authority *and* use value does the disciplinary end of Literary Studies possess or generate? In the shadow of neo-liberal mechanisms that equate book events, marketing and sales, and the wider celebrity-based aspects of writing (festivals, festivals, festivals) with ‘the literary’, we might ask if we are facing the twilight of the Humanities and, particularly, Literary Studies, as our use value is arguably more and more eroded in the context of Australian and international economic rationalist terms.

Literary journalist James Ley adds to this scenario of uncertain value and authority with his very funny and painfully recognizable account of lunching at the home of his aunt and uncle, where he was interrogated about his PhD thesis on the topic of James Joyce:

...it was at this point that my uncle's rather well-lubricated guest leaned slowly into the sunlight, granting everyone a distinct view of the minor Pollock of exploded capillaries that bloomed across his empurpled proboscis, scanned the table with a single bleary bloodshot eye, and said in a loud and scornful voice:

What's ... the *use* ... of *that* ...?

Suffice to say, the afternoon began to go downhill. A frank exchange of views ensued, during which it transpired that our dining companion held eminently practical opinions on all manner of topics. These included a general disdain for the various academic disciplines that fall under the rubric 'humanities', an unshakeable belief in the virtues of trickle-down economics, and a strong disinclination to educate poor people. (Ley)

For Ley, even given his spirited defense of his literary critical enterprise that afternoon, 'it must be conceded that the problem of "use" is one that critics have long struggled to address.' Ley's position echoes that of American-based critic Rita Felski in her 2015 volume *The Limits of Critique*, where she points to what she calls the 'legitimation crisis' (Felski, *Limits*, 5), from which Literary Studies suffers, but which, she argues, has been part of the discipline from the beginning. For both critics, there is a problem with authority and meaning-making in Literary Studies if it holds itself aloof, too narrowly imagining its task as different in kind to other forms of reading and writing about literature, as against the elitism of Leavisism and the theory tribes across the last three decades. Ley argues, in regard to the spectrum of literary activities:

...in practice there has always been a significant overlap between academic and public criticism; literary theorists within the academy are frequently at pains to differentiate their work, intellectually and formally, from the supposedly impressionistic and belletristic writing that is associated with criticism in the public sphere. (Ley)

In sardonic mode, Felski goes further still in outlining the excesses of contemporary Literary Studies. Felski seeks to usher in what she calls a postcritical era:

These are some of the things postcritical reading will decline to do: subject a text to interrogation; diagnose hidden anxieties; demote recognition to yet another form of misrecognition; lament our incarceration in the prison-house of language; demonstrate that resistance is just another form of containment; read a text as a metacommentary on the undecidability of meaning; score points by showing that its categories are socially constructed; brood over the gap that separates word from world. (Felski, *Limits* 173)

Felski is worried here particularly by the proliferation of *suspicious* readings, whether they are poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, contextual. Perhaps Leavis' more positive, admiration-laced criticism hovers, hoping for a come-back. Literary critics may well be wincing, or protesting, or even agreeing with Felski's list of no-nos, with some level of recognition going on. In her

earlier, 2008 volume *Uses of Literature*, Felski was already honing her argument, writing what she calls her manifesto for a positive aesthetics:

I offer... a thought experiment, an attempt to see things from another angle, to rough out, if you will, the shape of a *positive aesthetics*. When skepticism has become routinized, self-protective, even reassuring, it is time to become suspicious of our entrenched suspicions, to question the confidence of our own diagnostic authority, and to face up, once and for all, to the force of our attachments. The point is not to abandon the tools we have honed, the insights we have gained; we cannot, in any event, return to a state of innocence, or ignorance. In the long run, we should all heed Ricoeur's advice to combine a willingness to suspect with an eagerness to listen; there is no reason why our readings cannot blend analysis and attachment, criticism and love. (Felski, *Uses* 22)

Most students and professionals in literary criticism and literary history would be able, and even eager, to address the question of what Literary Studies thinks it is doing, what its value is. I personally concur with Felski's attempted balance of suspicion with attachment and love; but there are, of course, multiple other responses possible, regarding what the discipline should be doing. If Literary Studies is to continue challenging power and authority, imagining alternative visions of society, not merely providing entertainment, it needs to continue to produce ideologically suspicious readings, surely. But how does Felski's sense of 'the co-dependence of mimesis and magic, of enlightenment and enchantment' relate to such challenging activities (Felski, *Uses* 133)? She calls for a 'micro-politics [and] a micro-aesthetics' (Felski, *Uses* 133), with her phenomenological emphases on individual readerships. Literary Studies, as institution and as a range of practices, self-evidently needs to be plural, incorporating places of higher learning such as Schools of Literary Studies, or English, or English and Creative writing, or even English *with* Cultural Studies; as well as other places where literary criticism takes place, including schools of professional training, and of media and literary journalism. Literary Studies is the sum of these historically mappable institutional formations, a field that does not, of course, form a unified entity. As literary critics we love—and can be exhausted by—our internal debates over methodologies, approaches, theories, canons and the breaking up of canons. But, as this essay is seeking to argue, in all of these overlapping institutions there *is* a common thread for us to pursue, as we ask again, where and how authority is constituted in Literary Studies. How is meaning made (and often complicated beyond the tweet) in the multiplicity of methodologies and audiences in Literary Studies? And what kinds of meaning-making urgently need to be addressed, made and re-made, in Australia and Australian Literary Studies today?

In the spirited spirit of Dorothy Green, this article asks the internal question of how meaning, or the question of meaning, finds traction within our overlapping methods and approaches; but Literary Studies also must have an *outward gaze* to political and cultural environments, including the current masters of Humanities funding (in Australia: government and its instrument the Australian Research Council, the Universities, and even Industry) who are asking how we present what we do, how we make a difference, what kind of authority we have, or might claim to have. A certain aspect of this essay, then, is to act as an historical checklist for older academics (a list that they of course will need to constantly amend and refine), and it will hopefully be a provocation to younger academics in the field, asking them why and how they want to be aboard this Titanic-like vessel. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that 'authority' or 'meaning-making', two intersecting but not identical categories, may not be

what younger scholars see as the motivation or goal of their work. Do ‘play’, or ‘escape from meaning’, or subversion of the status quo, or something else, better describe our activities?

If we, for the sake of the argument, propose that there is a desire for purpose (if not ‘meaning’) in our work, we might list some of the overlapping motivations for creating meaning or purpose espoused by literary critics, reviewers, writers. Ventriloquizing such diverse beasts, we might hear them say:

1. I emphasize aesthetics—beauty, form, wordplay, effect - aligning in different ways with the work of Matthew Arnold, Oscar Wilde, Harold Bloom (Felski) ‘worries that the slightest concession to aestheticism will lead to the rise of a “retrograde religion of art” akin to that advocated by Harold Bloom—that it will “allow a thousand Blooms to flower”.’ (Felski, *Limits* 165)

Or:

2. I desire to speak and write authoritatively/powerfully/convincingly about certain cultural works, authors, ideas of value, beliefs; to convince others of my position, judgment, argument, values; akin to Nietzsche, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, C. S. Lewis, Harold Bloom, even Dorothy Green, or many Marxists. This may be a version of the sermonizer of old in our contemporary ears.

Or perhaps:

3. I seek to challenge or expose or demystify *authority* per se, particularly that of hegemonic institutions, offering critique, critical thinking, questioning, suspicious readings, akin to Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Althusser, Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, Vance and Nettie Palmer, Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, Terry Eagleton, and other members of the broader ‘social and/or political mission’ of literature, and literary studies.

Or:

4. I am motivated to be part of a post-critical emphasis on affect, what Felski describes as the attempt to ‘de-essentialize the practice of *suspicious reading* by disinvesting it of presumptions of inherent rigor or intrinsic radicalism – thereby freeing up literary studies to embrace a wider range of affective styles and modes of argument’ (Felski, *Limits* 3). Literary Studies merging with cultural Studies and creative writing, perhaps.

Or:

5. I seek to be part of a post-critiquing emphasis in Literary Studies, on archiving, literary history, museum studies, the history of the book and of markets, serving posterity.

Many of us have dipped our nibs in several of these wells. But let us turn now to examine a concrete example of a literary critic from an earlier generation, just back in the later twentieth century: Melbourne scholar, poet, editor and critic, Jennifer Strauss. In her eloquent and historically-rich eulogy, delivered in 1991 for a fellow literary critic, Dorothy Green, Strauss

wrote about four influential Australian women writers—Mary Gilmore, Judith Wright, Dorothy Green, and Veronica Brady—and the very different ways in which they ‘made meaning’ in their practices. Of Veronica Brady, Literary Studies academic, Loreto sister, Australian icon and much-loved figure, and her essay ‘Intellectual Belief and Freedom’ (19), Strauss writes:

... Brady pulls no punches in declaring that unless intellectuals concerned for freedom recover a belief of the kind she has been describing, then they will remain ‘locked in a narrow and parochial confine’ ... ‘on the margins of society ... where we have been condemned to a merely aesthetic existence, without influence or consequence.’ The belief she calls for is in an ‘other’—God being a possible but not necessary name—which exists as a ‘contra-factual dimension’ which opens existence to possibilities which challenge any notion that our physical and social circumstances are the ultimate reality. Brady defines her position through the argument of the theologian Max Horkheimer that a longing for justice is characteristically human, but also manifestly unable to be satisfied in secular history. It can only be satisfied by the existence of an other which is implicit in the very existence of the longing: that is, an other which implies that the present order is not the final order, and one which unites and empowers all those who will not and cannot come to terms with its injustice.

This version of ‘theology’ does not only imply a social critique, it also demands action—and, moreover, provides, in Brady’s argument, that final authority for action that neither positivism nor liberalism have been able to supply. (Strauss)

This kind of spiritual and spirited response to questions of meaning-making and authority is scarce heard these days, at least in Literary Studies. And for Strauss it is quite different to Dorothy Green’s more secular motivations. In Strauss’s estimation, for Green:

[the] precipitating factors were recognition of the shocking possibilities of nuclear warfare and an ecological consciousness that the world was threatened not only by the potentialities of nuclear ‘power’ (whether martial or peaceful), but by the immediate realities of various forms of environmental pollution. (Strauss, 11)

As many would agree, Dorothy Green’s motivations for reading and writing literature were preeminently moral and political. The authentic individual scholar needed to speak up for the individual worth of literary works, and to delineate the good and evil that individuals perpetrate, particularly in relation to war and nuclear disarmament. This common thread of social justice between Brady and Green is what Strauss stresses, in relation to the question of meaning-making in Literary Studies.

Political engagement, and literary representations of ideological and political injustices, have long formed a focus for writers and literary critics. The same can be said of novelists and poets. But how much impact is our work having today in this arena? As we have seen, this question can be reduced to Admin-speak: what is your citation rate? How visible are you to your discipline, your University, the ARC and so on. Or if you’re a literary writer, what are your sales figures, who reviews you, is the Australia Council and other grants bodies familiar with your work, what prizes have you garnered? Such measures seem a long way from the careful, thoughtful, honoring motivations delineated by Strauss, of the four women she discusses. The

voice that emerges from Strauss's eulogy is informed, critically astute, placing itself within an Australian literary tradition, seeking to understand and honour the multiple, urgent, motivated literary voices of that tradition.

Questions of value linked only to quantification seem measly in the context of Strauss's description of purpose, as they do in the light of popular and literary author Jeanette Winterson's characterization of art and writing, cast in her typically exuberant style:

Creativity in all its forms is a passionate engagement with making something happen. Like falling in love, art is a disturbance of what is; a reordering of existing material; an encounter with otherness; and a baffled certainty that what is happening—long or short, brief or lasting—has to happen (the urgency of love and making). The happening of art renews, replaces or renames the tired old clichés of the obvious. Love changes us. Art changes us... As Christians—often Quakers—...philanthropists, whether conservative or socialist, knew that man shall not live by bread alone, and that if bread was scarce, food for the soul was even more important. (Winterson)

Does the work of Literary Studies seek to 'make something happen', to point to and promote ideas and forms that are challenging, transformative, have impact within a context of meaning-making? What kinds of meaning-making is Australian Literary Studies a part of, or *leading* today? Or differently, is there something that is stunting or hampering diverse, passionate and meaningful address in Australian Literary Studies? To many ears such *purposefulness* may seem simply idealistic, at best, or naïve, in the context of bureaucratic, neoliberal policy—and the debates it nurtures or silences—in Australia and internationally today.

In April 2016, Tully Barnett wrote a *Conversation* piece in which she compared the public responses to chief scientist Ian Chubb's delivery of two reports to the nation: *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia Report* (October 2014), and *The Importance of Advanced Physical and Mathematical Sciences to the Australian Economy* (March 2015). The latter received tumultuous media and public attention. The former was barely noticed, according to Barnett. Graham Turner and Kylie Brass, the co-authors of that Humanities report, declared that internally the sector was vigorous and productive, but as Barnett and co-author Julian Meyrick have written in a later essay, in regard to arts funding, and more generally around approaches to the work of the arts and humanities:

Measurement methods in Australian cultural policy have been antithetical to retention of genuine knowledge. As a result, proofs for value are in a constant state of erasure and re-inscription.... A hyper-focus on economic arguments for the support of arts and culture generated a body of data that, in a crisis, had little persuasive force. And the intellectual costs of the hyper-focus were high. Over three decades, public discussion about culture in Australia was channeled into a narrow rhetorical register that allowed numerical evidence to replace experience as the arbiter of sense, creating thin understanding at a policy level. (Meyrick and Barnett)

Meyrick and Barnett's focus is on the history of cultural policy-making in contemporary Australia, and the ways in which cultural value is being understood and assessed today. This is the broader, external context in which we as Literary Studies practitioners ask our questions about meaning-making, authority, impact and value within our discipline. The pincering of

value into narrowly economic, quantifiable terms, at the expense of their fuller manifestations, is registered by Meyrick and Barnett both in the external machinations of cultural policy-making and in debates around funding for the Humanities. But it is also registered in the arena of literary practitioners' self-understanding about the impact and authority of our practices. Are we being cowed into submission, made to consider the worth of what we imagine, do, and make, preeminently in the context of the master's discourse, in thin, quantifiable, economic terms?

Meyrick and Barnett lean on Hannah Arendt's notions of experience and 'world' for an understanding of the context in which knowledge is made and disseminated:

Arendt's notion of "world" is one that connects experience, knowledge and measurement in a meaningful way. A better grasp of the relationship between these determinants, and not further production of numerical data in the hope governments will accept it as evidence of value assessment is what cultural policy needs right now. (Meyrick and Barnett online)

Rather than simply demonizing quantification, 'value assessment', or the effects of 'cultural policy', our own disciplines' self-understandings of meaning, value, impact and authority are being seen by such scholars as intimately and robustly *intertwined* with such questions. They cannot help but be. It is the ways in which we, as practitioners of writing, criticism, scholarship, critique, literary history and literary journalism respond, or fail to respond adequately, powerfully, to *both the external and internal questions of meaning-making* that is at stake. How is Australian Literary Studies asking what is urgent, what has cultural value and authority and impact, what is crucial, now? These are potent questions today, as they were in Dorothy Green's time.

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