

Anglistik/Amerikanistik
 Prof. Dr. Horst Prießnitz

Nicola Evans
 Program Officer
 Publishing, Literature
 The Literature Board of the
 Australia Council
 Australia Council for the Arts
 181 Lawson Street Redfern
 Sydney NSW, Australia 2012

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 Prof. Prießnitz
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 439-2152/2365
 (0202)439-2901
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Madam,

As a subscriber and contributor to Australian Literary Studies I have been deeply shocked by the bad news that the Literature Board of the Australia Council is considering cutting funding of the so far only internationally acclaimed scholarly journal of Australian literature. As I understand it, these considerations are not grounded in an alleged lowering of standards but in the by no means surprising fact that ALS is, as it has always been, an 'academic' journal with a comparatively small number of subscriptions.

I am not quite sure what the term 'academic' means in your country. I sincerely hope Marcus Clarke was making fun when in The Future Australian Race (1877) he prophesied that "The Australians will be freed from the highest burden of intellectual development." (p. 21). In this part of the world 'academic' has no pejorative connotations; on the contrary, the term stands for solid top-quality research which has always been a matter that only a small qualified and influential minority has been able to enjoy.

Talking of minorities: I find it extremely hard to believe that it is the Literature Board of all institutions which is turning the fact that ALS is a minority-orientated publication, into an argument against its editors and contributors. If the institution, which is to represent the literary culture of a whole country, feels it should reduce the possibilities of a small, highly qualified - 'academic' - minority to express their

views and to have them discussed internationally, then there is something rotten in the state of Australia.

May I also remind you that the number of subscribers to ALS is in no way identical with those who read it. You may well regret that so few European libraries subscribe to this publication, - a situation which I have been trying to change (see the enclosed bibliographical article) - , but those which have, will certainly not buy any of the so-called 'majority' journals you seem to be in favour of.

Given Australia's poor cultural reputation in this part of the world, and given the poor supply of books and publications which can be quoted to counteract this, and also given the many prejudices which have been sown by British literary criticism and taken root, you could do your country and its literature no greater disservice than to stop ALS from disseminating reliable and unbiased views of its literary culture. Instead of tinkering about with what sounds like the prelude to its final abolition, you should be discussing means and ways to secure its long-term survival.

Let me assure you that for me and my colleagues, who have been working hard to rid Australia of her fools'-paradise-cum-holiday-island-type of cultural image and to write it into the - academic - curriculum, the death of ALS would mean the end of Australia as an - academic - subject. I can see no alternative whatsoever to the patient, unobtrusive, and self-critical presentation of Australia's specific contribution to world literature in English. No Australian Studies Centre in any part of the world will be able to replace the loss should the journal be abandoned.

As it happens, your Government has chosen 1995 as the year in which Australia is to present herself to a wider public in unified Germany. I happen to be involved in some of the - academic - activities, which will accompany the event. It may not be totally without interest to my listeners to learn that it is the most 'academic' of all Australian scholarly literary journals that is going to be sacrificed in favour of some dubious purposes. And I shall not hesitate to add that, as far

as I am concerned, the end of ALS will mark the end of Australia's - academic - career in my university. There are many other exciting areas of academic study waiting around and ahead of us.

With the expression of utmost incredulity, I remain,
yours truly

(Professor) Horst Prießnitz