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# 'The transnational turn in Australian literary studies

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# The Transnational Turn in Australian Literary Studies

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The surge of references in Australian literary studies over the last few years to the transnational dimensions of the national literature is a matter of some interest, especially when, over the same period, references to multiculturalism seemed to fade from public discourse in Australia. As a researcher with the Multicultural subset of the AustLit database, I have been intrigued by the recent calls for the internationalising of Australian literature, calls for exploring its connections to, its circulation among, and its influences both from and upon overseas readers and writers, institutions and ideologies. And I wonder why, in this transnational turn, multicultural literatures have not been accorded more significance.

In the past five years there have been a cluster of articles by leading scholars in the discipline who all point towards this transnational turn in the study of Australian literature. Robert Dixon, for example, in his essay 'Australian Literature-International Contexts' (2007), sets out a six-point plan for 'a transnational practice of Australian literary criticism'. This would include biographical work on Australian writers in relation to transnational cultures as well as research into the impact of transnational intellectual formations on careers in Australian literature. It would consider the relationships between international publishing, entertainment and media industries and Australian writing. A transnational approach would look at Australian literature in translation, examine the influences of overseas literatures on Australian writing and 'chart the international migration and local adaptation of literary forms' in genre-based research (23-24). Having emerged from a decades-long preoccupation with cultural nationalism, Australian literary studies, Dixon argues, is now ready to 'explore and elaborate the many ways in which the national literature has always been connected to the world' (20).

Dixon's enthusiasm for transnational approaches to Australian literature is shared by others in the field. David Carter, in his essay 'After Post-Colonialism' (2007), cites earlier essays by Dixon in which this train of argument was initiated.<sup>1</sup> Carter reiterates Dixon's point that 'the cultural nationalism of the 1970s and 1980s no longer seems adequate to understanding Australian literature, which has emerged into something transnational and transdisciplinary' (114). Carter concedes that postcolonial studies, which gained a hold in literary criticism in the 1990s, provided new perspectives and played a role 'alongside feminism and "multiculturalism" in shifting Australian literary studies beyond the national frame' (115). Yet literary postcolonialism, Carter maintains, has been limited in its contribution to Australian literary studies, especially now as the discipline moves into new forms of research. Carter is less interested in literary readings of transgressive texts and more attracted to forms of cultural history and print culture studies that draw on empirical research, similar in ways to the distant reading approach of Franco Moretti's work. Carter points to recent studies, such as those on colonial drama, the book trade and colonial newspapers in Australia, which exemplify this trend. These

new research approaches, he argues, will follow ‘the life of books into the marketplace and the public domain’ and redirect attention to ‘the circulation of cultures beneath and beyond the level of the nation’ (119).

This interest in pursuing Australian books and culture ‘beneath and beyond the level of the nation’ is, in part, related to the re-configuration of the discipline within its institutional contexts, as well as transformations which have occurred within national research priorities and frameworks. In this regard, Ken Gelder’s ‘Notes on the Research Future of Australian Literary Studies’ (2005) is helpful. Gelder notes that Australian Studies and Australian literary studies ‘are both increasingly hyphenated into other disciplines’. He is commenting here on the institutional imperative which results in literary studies being attached to other fields of research, Asian Studies, for example, and the pressures for the humanities as a whole to relate its work meaningfully to the market economy. He points out that in the current market a single-Australian-author study would have difficulty finding a publisher, whereas, his argument implies, research into connections between Australian writing and S.E. Asian writers and cultures, for example, could meet with greater market receptivity. Dixon, in an earlier published paper, makes a similar point. He explains that recent shifts in policy statements and documents of both the Federal Government and the Australian Research Council (ARC) reflect a transformation of research management and priorities away from single-discipline-based pure research towards interdisciplinary and applied research projects, encouraging research networks and collaborative publications across a variety of media. The effect of this on literature studies, Dixon argues, is that the discipline is ‘being dispersed into, other, neighbouring forms of scholarship’ (‘Boundary Work’ 35). For Australian literary studies, it has meant that the recent ARC funded projects go beyond the national paradigm, placing Australian literary culture in national-comparative, transnational, imperial or global contexts; they go beyond the literary by drawing upon the discourses and in many cases the methodologies of neighbouring disciplines, including history, cultural studies, art history, politics, ethics and anthropology. And some go beyond the academy, involving collaboration with non-academic personnel (35).

Interestingly, Dixon also mentions, albeit briefly, that in pursuing such transdisciplinary, transnational research, ‘it may become necessary to have a second language’ (42), a point which he takes up again in his later paper, asserting that cross-cultural comparisons will become a significant aspect of research and that ‘Australian literary studies needs to be more aware of non-Anglophone traditions’ (‘Australian Literature-International Contexts’ 17).

Dixon’s suggestions just cited are, however, somewhat of an exception amongst these papers in gesturing towards the need to consider the works of writers from non-Anglo-Saxon cultural heritages, or works written and published in languages other than English in studies into the transnational dimensions of Australian literature. Underlying much of the discussion is an assumption that Australian literary studies will accommodate this transnational turn holus bolus, and that non-Anglo-Saxon writers and writing – multicultural writers and writing – are but one aspect of Australian literature’s transnational scope, with neither more nor less potential for investigation. Dixon’s

comments go furthest towards acknowledging the significance of cultural and linguistic multiplicity in the transnational considerations of Australian literature. Carter, in his article previously cited, does acknowledge the impact of multiculturalism on Australian literary studies but does not offer further discussion of the place of multicultural studies within the discipline, focusing instead on literary postcolonialism and its shortcomings.<sup>2</sup> Gelder gives somewhat more consideration to multiculturalism in his paper 'Us, Them & Everybody Else: The New Humanities in Australia' (2005), although only to point towards its faults: its troubled associations with 'authenticity' and its tendency to rely on 'generalisations' (61, 62).<sup>3</sup> Throughout most of these papers, in fact, research into the transnational dimensions of Australian literature appears to be mostly assigned to mainstream Australian literary studies, meaning that attention will continue to be directed towards the works of Anglo-Celtic Australian writers, in English, or possibly, with regard to overseas circulation and reception, to the translations of these works. In other words, although the scope and reach of Australian literary studies may expand as the discipline goes global, there is no accompanying assumption that the corpus, or the canon, of Australian literature will be radically altered.

In this transnational turn, then, multicultural writing, although manifestly transnational in so many of its aspects, risks remaining sidelined. Jessica Raschke, in a 2005 article in *Overland*, charted what she terms 'the rise and fall of "multicultural" literature' in Australian literary studies. Beginning in the 1970s with anthologies (some multilingual), moving through the 1980s with journals dedicated to writers and writing from diverse cultural backgrounds, multicultural literature in Australia, Raschke argues, achieved its most significant impact in the 1990s with increased publication of multicultural literary works and the compiling of *A Bibliography of Australian Multicultural Writers* (1992).<sup>4</sup> In the mid-90s, however, the multicultural momentum, both in literature and in public life, began to wane. A 1991 article by Robert Dessaix, in which he dismissed multicultural literature as second-rate and called for migrant writers to 'learn the language' and 'join in some of the myriad conversations already taking place in the country they've arrived in,' signaled the beginning of this decline.<sup>5</sup> By mid-decade, the Demidenko hoax had left Australian readers wary of ties between authorship and cultural identity and prominent Australian writers such as Les Murray and David Williamson were incorporating attacks on multiculturalism into their work (Ommundsen 81-82).

This backlash against multiculturalism was related, as well, to the change in federal government in 1996, and Raschke cites Ommundsen's observation that during the Howard years the terms multicultural and multiculturalism were actively avoided in statements from government departments and officials (26). James Jupp points out that the Howard Government 'virtually withdrew the Commonwealth from any direct concern with the cultural and linguistic aspects of multiculturalism' and abolished both the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research (274). Raschke sees this closing down of discourse regarding cultural and linguistic diversity as being broadly applicable to Australian writing. She asserts that in Australian society and culture 'there does remain an imbalance towards white or Anglo tradition in Australia's realms of power and influence, including in Australian publishing and literature' (26).

Another critic who has been pointing towards a certain neglect of multicultural writers and writing in Australian literary studies is Sonia Mycak. In a series of articles Mycak has drawn attention to the literary production by multicultural writers whose work in languages other than English exceeds the bounds of the nation in ways that closely match the predictions of Dixon and others.<sup>6</sup> Mycak's overall argument is that an enormous amount of transnational writing has been produced in Australia and overseas by writers of diverse cultural and linguistic heritages but that, to a significant extent, Australian literary studies has been unaware of its existence. This may appear an extraordinary claim, given the substantial number of multicultural anthologies published over the past three decades – as both Mycak and Raschke outline – and the considerable bibliographic and critical work accruing since the 1970s through the efforts of writers and scholars such as András Dezséry, Sneja Gunew, Lolo Houbein, Jan Mahyuddin and many others. Mycak acknowledges the significance of this existing work and the accomplishment of previous scholarly work, yet she asserts that the bulk of transcultural writing in Australia continues to be neglected. Rather than emphasise the decline in public discourse of commentary relating to multicultural issues or texts from the mid-1990s, as Raschke does, Mycak argues that even during the earlier decades of literary enthusiasm for multicultural writing, much of Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse writing went unnoticed by Australian literary studies and, she maintains, this continues to be the case.

Mycak asserts that, neither mainstream literary production, through anthologies and journals, nor research infrastructure such as library catalogues and databases adequately reflect the extent or diversity of multicultural writing in Australia. She explains that most academics and librarians have not yet recognised the full extent of the literary networks through which the majority of multicultural writing is sustained. These include cultural events, festivals, literary competitions, community newspapers, newsletters, journals and almanacs, all of which encourage the writing and reading of poetry, prose and drama in the first language of each community. Plays are written and performed, novels published and sold, poems and short stories printed in newspapers and newsletters or collected and distributed within each cultural and linguistic community. Often these works circulate without leaving the community and, therefore, anyone outside of the specific cultural or linguistic group would have difficulties accessing this cultural production. In terms of AustLit records, the existence of community newsletters and newspapers in languages other than English has been recorded where literary work has been identified, but this documentation process requires linguistic proficiencies specific to each cultural community, and Australian literature researchers, no matter how multilingual, will not have all the required language skills.

On the other hand, Mycak also points towards multicultural literary work which does travel; indeed, increasingly this work travels internationally. Mycak makes the point that numerous writers who migrated to Australia following the Second World War have, in recent years, begun to publish their work overseas, either in their country of origin, or in countries of international diaspora. Much of Mycak's published research has focused on writers of Ukrainian and eastern European heritage and, for these writers, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the opening of Eastern European borders has meant that post-war

migrants have been able to travel to their counties of origin and, in numerous cases, are now publishing there. However, once again, these publications are not always appearing in the library catalogues or on other database records for Australian literature. Again, I can attest to the gaps in this regard in the AustLit records, as many of the publications that Mycak cites were not previously recorded by the database.

Literary works such as these, published both in Australia and overseas by writers from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, illustrate perfectly ‘the circulation of cultures beneath and beyond the level of the nation’ that Carter indicated would be the focus of new research in Australian literary studies. They circulate beneath the level of the nation in that their publication and circulation occurs below the radar, so to speak, of the national infrastructure of Australian literary studies. Because, in many cases, these works are not lodged in state or the national libraries, they have remained unrecorded by Libraries Australia and by the AustLit database. They operate beyond the level of the nation in their publication overseas in diasporic communities or in the writer’s country of origin, again with the result that they have eluded the attention of most researchers in Australian literature and, therefore, go unrecognised and unremarked in critical studies. These works also illustrate Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the ‘nonterritorial transnation’, in that they are generated through and reflective of sets of identity practices that are not confined by geographic location (173). Comprising globally dispersed communities, the transnation, Appadurai argues, ‘retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity’ (172). Mycak gives an example of an Australian author writing in Latvian who has published short stories in Latvian-language newspapers in Australia, England, Germany and Canada (‘Transculturality’ 63). My own work with the AustLit database confirms that such diverse publishing practice is common among Australian authors who continue to write in languages other than English.

As Mycak’s research has focused thus far on writers and writing from eastern European heritage, I would like to draw attention to the literary work of other communities of Australian multicultural writers that also has the potential to illustrate how the transnational turn might be reflected in Australian literary studies. There are, of course, significant bodies of work originating or associated with practically every cultural group that has settled in Australia and examples could be provided for the transnational dimensions of Vietnamese-Australian, Lao-Australian or Philippine-Australian writing, to name just three groupings within the broad category of Asian-Australian writing.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this article, however, I would like to discuss certain transnational aspects of two bodies of writing from culturally and linguistically diverse communities that have not yet received substantial critical treatment in Australian literary studies.

It is odd that Arabic-Australian writing has to this point attracted so little critical attention.<sup>8</sup> Lebanese migrants have had a significant presence in Australia for decades. More recent migrants from Iraq, many of whom have come as refugees, are forming another distinct cultural community. Writers who have come to Australia from these and other Arabic-speaking nations have produced, and continue to produce, a substantial body of Arabic-language work. The AustLit database shows over 60 works published in

Arabic in Australia since the 1960s. Among these are novels, collections of short stories and poetry, and autobiographies. The database has records for works by 29 writers of Lebanese heritage, 16 of Iraqi heritage, as well as works by a handful of writers of Syrian, Jordanian, Palestinian, Egyptian, and Arabian backgrounds. Sydney's Arabic-language newspapers have occasionally carried poetry and since the 1990s there have been at least three literary journals in Australia publishing material in Arabic. One of these, *Kalimat*, can provide non-Arabic-speaking researchers (such as myself) an important point of entry into Arabic-Australian writing, as this quarterly journal was published in English and Arabic in alternating issues, for twenty of its twenty-four issues.

*Kalimat* began in March 2000, under the auspices of the Australian-Syrian Cultural Council and was edited by Raghid Nahhas, a marine biologist who had migrated to Australia from Syria in 1988. Its first issue was in English, its second in Arabic, with alternating English and Arabic issues continuing until 2005, when the journal became semi-annual and was published in English-only format over its final four issues. Publication was suspended in 2006, but a website is maintained, with contents listed for each issue and information on the editor and editorial advisors as well as a complete list of contributing authors. The subtitle for *Kalimat* changed a number of times over the journal's history: beginning as 'An Australian-Arabic Literary Quarterly', with issue 6 it became 'An International Periodical of English and Arabic Creative Writing' and finally, for its last English-only issues, 'An International Periodical of Creative Writing'.

Through its seven years of publication, *Kalimat* was a significant transnational literary undertaking. Through its bilingual publication schedule, the journal aimed to provide a means of communication between Arabic writers resident in the Middle East, writers from the Middle East who have migrated to Australia and continue to write in Arabic, and Australian (and some overseas) writers from other cultural backgrounds writing in English. Through *Kalimat*, English-speaking Australian readers could become familiar with poets from Syria, Lebanon and other Middle Eastern nations, as their work frequently appeared in translation in the English issues. Similarly, the work of Australian writers was translated into Arabic, making their poems and short stories accessible to migrants to Australia who continue to read in Arabic, and to readers in the Middle East, where the journal also circulated.

For a number of writers who had migrated to Australia from the Middle East, *Kalimat* provided an important opportunity to have their work published. Migrant writers including Fadil Khayyat, Khalid al-Hilli and Yahia al-Samawi (all from Iraq), and Kendy Estphan, Jamil Milad Dwayhi and Shawki Moslemani (from Lebanon) had work appearing in the journal. Ali Alizadeh (although Iranian-born, and not Arabic), who writes in English and whose work has been published in numerous other Australian literary journals and anthologies, contributed to Issue 23 of *Kalimat*. The final issue of *Kalimat*, issue 24, featured translations into English from Arabic of poems by Abdyagooth, an Omani writer living in Perth.

Moreover, in each issue the journal ran a major-length article, written by Nahhas, providing an overview of the career and works of one author. In English issues, authors

from the Middle East were featured while the Arabic issues canvassed Australian authors and their bodies of work. Included among these were articles on Judith Beveridge, Manfred Jurgensen, Sophie Masson, Carolyn Van Langenberg, and Eva Sallis. In this manner, the journal contributed with each issue to transcultural and transnational dialogue, bringing English and Arabic readers into contact with writers whose work might otherwise remain inaccessible and unknown. This particular instance of transnational dialogue, it should also be noted, was a continuance of work that Nahhas had previously undertaken when he translated into Arabic a selection of Australian poetry, which ranged from Aboriginal songs, and poems by Charles Harpur and Mary Gilmore, to more recent works by Les Murray, David Brooks and Judith Beveridge, among the more than 70 poets included. This translation work was supported by a grant from the Australia Council, and the collection was published in Syria in 1999, the year before *Kalimat* began.

*Kalimat* has not been the only Arabic-language literary journal in Australia; there have been at least two others: *Joussour* and *Algethour*. The former was, like *Kalimat*, a bilingual publication; the latter, apparently, was in Arabic only. I use the past tense, but in honesty I am unsure whether either or both of these have ceased or whether they continue to publish. The first is listed in Libraries Australia as being held at the National Library and at the NSW State Library, with the National Library holding issues from 1995 to 2001. The second is not listed at all and I only became aware of it through an advertisement in Issue 9 of *Kalimat*. *Algethour* may, in fact, be the same publication as *al-Judhur*, which the Libraries Australia database identifies as being published quarterly by Algethour Cultural Association in Melbourne, but which, the database also indicates, is ‘Not yet held in an Australian library.’<sup>9</sup> This lack of catalogue documentation supports Mycak’s assertion that Australian literary studies – through its infrastructure and consequently its analysis – remains unaware of certain areas of literary production in languages other than English, literary production which in important ways exceed the bounds of the nation.

The work of Yahia al-Samawi, one of the Iraqi-born authors featured in *Kalimat*, may further illustrate this gap in Australian literary studies with regards to transnational writing. Al-Samawi is referred to in several issues of *Kalimat* as a leading Arab poet. Since coming to Australia, he has published six volumes of poetry, one translated into English (by Eva Sallis) and another five in Arabic. Before migrating here, Al-Samawi had published poetry collections in Iraq as well as in Saudi Arabia, where he had fled after persecution, imprisonment and torture under Saddam Hussein’s regime. He has an international reputation among Arabic readers and he returns to the Middle East to appear at writers’ festivals, and he has read at festivals in Australia, including Adelaide Writers’ Week. His poetry has appeared in anthologies, with one of his poems included in the collection *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2009). When one consults Libraries Australia, five volumes of al-Samawi’s poetry are listed, though under different spellings of the author’s name, a result of transliteration into English. In terms of critical response to al-Samawi’s work, there have been two columns published but only one lengthier piece, and the latter published, not surprisingly, in *Kalimat*.<sup>10</sup> This article by Ala Mahdi provides numerous references to critical work in Arabic that has appeared



overseas, as well as quotations and analysis of poems by al-Samawi that have been published, with some frequency, in one of Sydney's Arabic-language newspapers, *el-Telegraph*.

As only a small proportion of al-Samawi's poetry has been translated into English, extended literary critique of his writing will be the responsibility of researchers with linguistic proficiency in Arabic and, in terms of Australian literary studies, al-Samawi is just one of many Arabic-Australian writers whose work will, without doubt, challenge conceptions of a national literature. In pointing out the present lack of critical focus on the literary production of Arabic-Australian writers, however, I am not claiming that literary work in all languages other than English has been previously ignored. Like Mycak, I recognise the important work that has accrued over the last two to three decades with regards to literary production in Australia in languages such as Greek and Italian and that is currently being undertaken in, for example, Chinese.<sup>11</sup> With regards to Italian-Australian writing, Rosa Cappiello's *Paese Fortunato* is an instance of transnational literature acknowledged as integral to Australian literature. First published in Italy in 1981, it was translated by Gaetano Rando and published in Australia in 1984 as *Oh Lucky Country* and in the years since has generated an enormous number of critical responses.<sup>12</sup> However, Mycak is also correct that there are substantial bodies of literary work in other languages that await full documentation and that deserve investigation and critical analysis. A transnational approach to Australian literary studies will, in time, offer comment not only on those multicultural texts which are translated into English but also will contribute to the reading of literary production across languages and cultures.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting that in one of the two columns on al-Samawi cited above, the experiences of the Iraqi-born writer are set next to those of Chilean-born Juan Garrido-Salgado, another poet who arrived in Australia having fled persecution in his country of origin (Walker par. 9).<sup>14</sup> Like al-Samawi, Garrido-Salgado had poetry published in his home country and has had another four volumes published in Australia since his arrival. And as al-Samawi is but one of a number of Arabic-Australian writers whose literary output awaits Australian critical commentary, so Garrido-Salgado is among the many Hispanic-Australian writers whose work deserves more extensive consideration in Australian literary studies.

Hispanic-Australian literary production has, on the one hand, been fairly well documented, both in library catalogues and in database coverage such as that of AustLit. On the other hand, though, critical commentary on this substantial body of work has been almost non-existent.<sup>15</sup> In terms of appreciating transnational dimensions of Australian literature, this neglect of Hispanic-Australian writing is an oversight in need of correction. Garrido-Salgado is one of more than 50 Chilean-heritage authors listed in AustLit. In total, the database has records for 130 authors born in South America, 9 from Central America and Mexico and another 22 from Spain. Since the 1970s, when Australia began to receive its largest influx of Spanish-speaking migrants as a result of political repression and violence in Latin America, more than twenty anthologies have been published, most in Spanish but some bilingual. Spanish-language newspapers have been available since 1965 and newsletters from literary and cultural groups have

circulated occasionally. One of these, *Hontanar* continues as an internet-based periodical and carries poetry and short stories along with news, editorials and topical content from both Australian-resident and overseas Spanish-language authors. While its front page features a photo of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, its content is decidedly transnational ranging from Australian cultural events and current affairs to Spanish and Latin American politics and literature.

For a number of Hispanic-Australian authors, *Hontanar* has meant that their creative work in their first language can be read not only by other Spanish-speakers in Australia, but also by readers in their countries of origin. In a recent issue, Mexican-born writer and academic Susana Arroyo-Furphy reflects on matters of migration and transnational narratives of identity. Her grandfather was from Spain; her grandmother was an Indigenous woman from Mexico; she has married an Australian and now lives in Brisbane while her children live in Spain and the rest of her family live in Mexico. As well as writing for *Hontanar*, she has written short stories published in a web-journal from Venezuela, and an academic article in a web-journal from Mexico. The latter provides commentary and analysis of work by one of Australia's early multicultural writers, the Spanish monk Rudesindo Salvado who came to Australia in 1841 with a group of missionaries recruited to the New Norcia Mission, Western Australia, and who published his memoirs in Italian in Rome in 1851. Clearly, transnational circuits of literary production and reception can lead researchers in quite unexpected directions.

Hispanic-Australian writing has contributed to another instance of unexpected transnational connections, further demonstrating the potential for reading across languages and cultures. Australian poet MTC Cronin's book *Talking to Neruda's Questions* was published in Sydney in 2001 as a chapbook limited to 100 copies. In this poetry sequence, Cronin responds to William O'Daly's 1991 translation of Pablo Neruda's *Book of Questions*, a work completed shortly before the poet's death and published posthumously. Three years following the first edition of Cronin's book, it was republished in bilingual format in Chile; the translator was Juan Garrido-Salgado. Connections between Chile and Australia are documented in the numerous works of Chilean writers who migrated here, such as Garrido-Salgado or Sergio Mouat. They are also documented in a recent bilingual collection of migrant memoirs sponsored by the Chilean embassy, titled *Under a Southern Sky / Bajo un cielo austral* (2005). However, a bilingual publication in Chile of work by an Anglophone Australian poet is, to the knowledge of this researcher, unprecedented. Further, the translation of Cronin's poetry into Spanish was followed by Garrido-Salgado translating other Australian poetry, with poems by Dorothy Porter and Judith Beveridge published in the Columbian online magazine *Arquitrave*. Like the translation of Anglophone Australian literature into Arabic cited previously, these Hispanic-Australian intersections underscore Dixon's argument that research into Australian literature in translation will be a significant aspect of the transnational turn in Australian literary studies. Importantly, however, they also bring into focus the role that literary production in languages other than English in Australia often has on the translation and overseas circulation of Australian Anglophone work.

An example of transnational writing by a Mexican-born writer now living in Australia will serve to illustrate a final point and bring this article to a close. Like the other poets previously cited, Mario Licón Cabrera published a number of books of poetry before coming to Australia and since migrating he has continued to contribute to literary magazines in Mexico. His recent bilingual collection *Yuxtaposiciones (Back & Forth)* (2007) opens with the poem 'Bruma-Bloom' in which the poet traces his nomadic life, from Chihuahua to San Francisco, back to Mexico D.F. and Tepoztlán, and on to Sydney. He writes: 'one belongs to where one lives and here we are. / But in our skin and memory we still live *there*, / and we've had so many *theres* in our nomadic life.' 'Uno es de donde uno vive, y aquí estamos. / Pero en nuestra piel y memoria todavía vivimos *allá*, / y hemos tenido muchos *allás* en nuestra nómada vida.' The English version precedes the Spanish, as it does for each poem in the collection, an indication, perhaps, of the linguistic circumstances of the poet's *here*. And yet, as the collection continues, the languages begin to spill across from one version to the other. The poem 'Parks' compares the crowds in Chapultepec in Mexico City with the paucity of visitors to Sydney's Centennial Park. The Spanish phrases '¡Tres millones de cabrones!' and '¡Un pinche diner!' appear untranslated in the English version, as does the name the poet bestows upon Centennial Park: 'El Parque de la Soledad.' In 'Hermosillo City Blues', set in Mexico, the line in English 'like a real loafer' (referring to the poet sleeping on a park bench) remains untranslated in the Spanish version. And in middle of the collection with the poem 'Song/Canción', only one version is given, which opens and closes with the line 'Motionless Estadiza Noche Night', with the English words embracing the Spanish. The juxtaposition of languages throughout Licón's poems demonstrate the back and forth qualities of the poet's reflections on identity and location, signaled by the collection's title. It also suggests that linguistic divides need not be impenetrable and that for many Australian writers the languages of origin in which they choose to write can, and should, continue to enrich Australian literary studies.

Bilingual literary work like *Yuxtaposiciones* in the Hispanic-Australian context, or *Kalimat* in the Arabic-Australian context, operate across linguistic and cultural borderlines. Other works cited previously, such as the volumes of poetry of al-Samawi in Arabic or the online journal *Hontanar* in Spanish, also push at the boundaries of Australian literature. For the transnational dimensions of the nation's literature to be fully acknowledged and appreciated, Australian literary studies will need to devote further attention and resources to works such as these. As Dixon remarks, 'Australian writers and Australian literature have never been confined to the boundaries of the nation' ('Australian Literature-International Contexts' 20). Bibliographic research published over the past two decades has documented a wealth of literary material originating in this country in languages other than English. But as Mycak has argued, and as this paper has also illustrated, the full extent of this writing from diverse linguistic and cultural heritages has yet to be recognised. If a transnational approach to Australian literature is to contribute significantly to our understanding of Australian culture, identity and writing, then a focus on multicultural literature circulating both locally within cultural communities and internationally across transnations should be an integral part of that research agenda.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Carter cites Dixon's earlier papers 'Australian Literary Studies and Post-Colonialism,' and 'Boundary Work: Australian Literary Studies in the Field of Knowledge Production'.

<sup>2</sup> In another brief article, a paper given at a symposium to celebrate the launch in Japan of *Diamond Dog: Contemporary Australian Short Stories: Reflections on Multicultural Society* (2008), Carter presents the case for Australia being 'both more and less multicultural than we might think.' See Carter, 'Is Australia a Multicultural Country?'

<sup>3</sup> Gelder's recent co-authored work with Paul Salzman makes similar arguments with regard to multicultural literature. Most of their discussion of multicultural writing deals with the 'shaky ride' it has experienced 'through the 1990s and into the new millennium' (47).

<sup>4</sup> Ommundsen, in her article 'Multicultural Writing in Australia,' indicates that research into multicultural literature began in the late 1970s, leading to the publication of several bibliographies and databases, and their eventual consolidation in the AustLit database.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Raschke. Raschke gives a detailed account of Dessaix's critique and responses to his article from writers and academics involved in multicultural literature.

<sup>6</sup> These include 'Beyond Critical Orthodoxy', 'Case-Study: Multicultural Literature', 'Inter-Cultural Aspects', and 'Transculturality'.

<sup>7</sup> Recent anthologies have been published from each of these cultural communities. See Ngoc-Tuan; Viravong et al.; and Cheeseman and Capili. Supporting the argument that such work frequently remains undocumented by literature infrastructure, Cheeseman and Capili's book is yet to appear in Library Australia's listings; it does appear in the Blacktown City Libraries catalogue.

<sup>8</sup> Ghassan Hage's *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging* is an important collection but is very limited in its coverage of literary work.

<sup>9</sup> This, despite the fact that the first date for the journal is 1999 and the description for the database record is based on a 2002 issue. One might wonder why not a single library holds a copy.

<sup>10</sup> See Bruce 'A Poet's Story', Walker 'The Torture of Yahia', and Mahdi, 'Yahia as-Samawi'.

<sup>11</sup> For Greek-Australian literature, see for example, works by Con Castan, George Kanarakis and Helen Nickas; for the Italo-Australian context see works by Charles D'Aprano and Gaetano Rando; and with respect to Chinese-Australian writing see works by Wenche Ommundsen and Ouyang Yu.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that *Paese Fortunato* has attracted critical commentary in both languages, with 22 reviews and critical articles written in English and 2 in Italian listed in the AustLit database.

<sup>13</sup> One important contributor to the transcultural and translinguistic commentary being suggested is Anne Fairbairn. For over twenty years she has been involved in literary mediation between Arabic and English-language readers and writers. See, for example, her 1986 article 'Anne of Arabia: At the Mirbed Poetry Festival, Iraq' and her 2008 article 'An Appreciation of the Poetry of Maher Kheir'. In the latter, she includes 'transcreations' from Arabic into English of poems by Kheir, a Lebanese poet and diplomat. Fairbairn's literary mediation was acknowledged in Nahhas's *Whispers from the Faraway South*, with a critical article on her work and several of her poems in Arabic and English.

<sup>14</sup> Walker, Al-Samawi and Garrido-Salgado were present at the 2006 Adelaide Writers' Week. See also Garrido-Salgado's poem 'Sonnet', which describes Yahia al-Samawi reading a poem in Arabic at a Writers' Week event.

<sup>15</sup> The one article I have been able to locate commenting on Hispanic-Australian literary work is Erez Cohen's 'Non-Anglo and Non-Aboriginal Australian Multiculturalism, the Third Side of the Black/White Divide', in which Cohen draws upon literary works in Spanish by migrant writers including Garrido-Salgado.

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