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Which World, and why do we worry about it?

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Which World, and why do we worry about it?

Abstract

The paper looks at various meanings of 'World Literature' (widely read books; great works of transcultural influence; a disciplinary structure and practice), assessing Australia's place in each and what might underlie a wish to belong to any.

In particular, it locates the last focus of scholarly discussion in French and US sites and the drive to reform Comparative Literature studies, examining possible factors leading Australian universities to engage with such debates and possible effects on local practice.

The paper notes how Postcolonial literary studies called for this kind of reform of comparative literature and pushed towards a 'world literature' under its own rubrics, and asks whether World Literature is not a means of sidestepping the inconvenient engagements of postcolonial work.

It takes Aboriginal writing as a case study of what might happen under a World Literature regime as formulated by the leading voices in the debate.

Keywords

world, why, which, do, about, we, worry

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Which World, and why do we worry about it?

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The question 'Is Australian Literature a World Literature?' seems at first glance an odd one. By definition, Australian literature is that produced by Australians, mostly consumed by Australians, and critically evaluated predominantly (though not exclusively) in relation to its national context. If the obvious answer is a clear 'no', then why is it being asked? What else might it mean? To find answers, we can look at three 'scenes of reading': firstly, the public arena of the literary industry; secondly, the scene of our own academic reading, and thirdly, the scenes that may result if we do move towards a World Literature framework for reading Australian literature.

In the first case, we often find complaints amongst writers or in the press that our literature is not being read widely enough, and amongst critics that as a whole it is not loved enough. There is a regular ritual wringing of the hands because we have not had another Nobel Prize winner or that writer X is better known in Sweden than at home (Neill), and each literature festival produces an obligatory grumbling that overseas superstars get more attention than home-grown talent (Courtenay in Bauer 17, Keneally in Krausmann 56). In this respect, being part of world literature means having a significant number of readers outside of Australia. Asking the question whether Australian Literature is a world literature in this context reflects both a legitimate desire for wider audiences on the part of writers and a dubious strategic mix of nationalism and ongoing 'colonial cringe' amongst the would-be arbiters of culture.

This kind of world-literary belonging is possible because of multinational publishing and global distribution networks, and is the easiest to attain, though it is most visibly attainable at the level of popular formula fiction (as studies of the AustLit database have shown). Carter Brown, *The Thorn Birds*, and Arthur Upfield are 'world literature,' though we might not all care to be represented globally by them (Ensor, Hetherington). Thanks to international literary prizes and the movie industry, a few works from higher up the literary ladder have also made it to world markets: *Schindler's Ark* and *Oscar and Lucinda*, being but two examples. We can even point, thanks to Otto Haag's research, to a sizeable number of Aboriginal texts translated and published in most of the major European languages and Turkish, and to Oodgeroo and Sally Morgan circulating in Japanese (Arimitsu 9) and Pilkington, Weller, Morgan, Alexis Wright and Kim Scott in Chinese (Haag, Hu, Wang 53, 56; Ouyang Yu 68). Aboriginal writing is also published and studied in India (Sharrad). So yes, we are a world literature in the general sense of sales, even if we continue to be anxious about not matching our national sports teams in visibly 'punching above our weight' on international circuits.

There is a second kind of world literature in this public scene of reading, still attached to books and writers' reputations rather than academic concerns, though more related to the latter than mere sales overseas. Here, Australian world literature means having those texts that operate in a global network of literary intertextuality, both within writers' circuits and academic discussions. In this sense, Basho, Rumi, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Joyce and García Márquez are part of world literature because of their wide translation and adaptation across many different cultures and periods. This cultural engagement is more complex than just appearing at international writers' festivals and getting picked up at the Frankfurt Book Fair for translation. The desire for belonging to this kind of world lit. club might well reflect a traditional yearning for Arnoldian touchstones and Bloom-ing canonicity, moderately expanded to take in more than 100 Great Works of mostly European origin. In this context, it is easy to find many leading Australian writers who are consciously part of a world network of literary influences (Brian Castro, David Malouf, Janette Turner Hospital, for example), but not as easy to single out one who would have the kind of influence on world writing and scholarship that, say Faulkner or the Black Mountain poets have had. Perhaps Les Murray has such an international reach; possibly Patrick White? Again, since I am going to increasingly focus on Aboriginal writing as a case study, we can think of how Colin Johnson's *Mudrooroo's* work (itself functioning as Aboriginal writing despite its author's disqualification from Aboriginality) draws on Camus, Richard Wright, and later Foucault, while Alexis Wright and Kim Scott both connect with other postcolonial fabulists such as Wilson Harris, García Márquez and Salman Rushdie. In this sense, Aboriginal literature, usually corralled into a micro-national subalternity or global minority enclave, is also part of world literature.

The second scene producing the question of our national literary place in the world is constructed from the institutional history and politics of tertiary literary teaching and rehearsed in the scholarly literature containing keywords such as 'diaspora,' 'transnational,' 'globality.' World literature in this context is not just the sum of books circulating around the globe, nor yet the corpus of international intertextual influence and dialogue; it is an institutionally structured object, World Literature: an academic disciplinary field of texts selected to fit some comparative framework, and a particular approach to reading them. This is, perhaps where the pointy edges of our opening question start to rub. Abrasive contact, though, is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it is implicit in Goethe's ideal of a *Weltliteratur* that would produce mutual self corrections as the result of national cultures being thrown up against each other (Goethe quoted in D'haen 96). To answer why we want to ask whether Australian literature is a world literature in an academic context, we need to attend to two scenes of reading: one local, the other American. Perhaps juxtaposing them will produce the kind of light Goethe envisaged; certainly it will generate friction, maybe some heat.

This is because of different intellectual histories and structural formations in each country. The propounding and theorising of World Literature has come to us primarily from the US as a corrective to a narrowly national construction and practice of American Studies (Dimock & Buell, Damrosch 2009) and to the longer influence of Comparative Literature as a disciplinary

formation based on mainly Eurocentric principles (Damrosch, Spivak 2003). Even admitting the current need for some curricular renewal in the US academy, we might wonder why the turn to World Literature occurs now and with some apparent vigour. In the American Studies context, for example, there have been studies of how Fenimore Cooper interacted with Europe and was received there more favourably in France than at home until after D.H. Lawrence and then Leslie Fiedler reinterpreted him for American readers (Dekker). There have as well been studies of the transnational nature of Afro-American cultural politics for quite some time (Kanneh). Within Comparative Literature, we could point to all the work on US literary links with Japan going back at least to Lafcadio Hearn, and the wealth of comparative scholarship between American writers and Latin America. Perhaps the problem there has been one of disciplinary boundaries: that such work has occurred under the labels of Asian or Hispanic Studies, obliging departments of Comparative Literature to hold to their origins around English Literature and its ties to Europe. If so, then the solution might well be restructuring departments or research programs rather than existing curricular models within them. To select but one example, University of California Santa Cruz had an excellent program running under Cultural Studies and currently has interdisciplinary teams working on Urban Studies, and 'Borders, Bodies and Violence.'

World Literature, however, seems to want to replace American Literature or at least to modify it by sitting alongside of it, and to renovate Comparative Literature, though suggested solutions so far are by no means radical changes. Expanding the syllabus under a rubric of the epic to bring Gilgamesh alongside Odysseus, Sundiata and Arjuna (see Damrosch) may well broaden the reading horizons of students, but it may not alter the conceptual framework in which they are presented. That may well perpetuate a facile liberal 'family of man' ideal which homogenises difference into universalist archetypes. Gilgamesh, after all, is easily packaged into the West-centric 'cradle of (our) civilisation' myth that I for one learned in primary school some decades ago, and which indicated to late-colonial children in the Antipodes a vision of the world that firmly centred everything on the Mediterranean. Even Arjuna can be presented as belonging to the Sanskritic mother-lode of Europe's languages. The oral epic, whatever its origins, may also be taught within an implied narrative that suggests historical progression towards the contemporary western print text as most evolved mode of cultural expression.

The felt need to come up with such new packages for university teaching of literature would appear to connect to internal pressures such as the ongoing anxiety over multiculturalism and student relevance, and to external pulls such as the post GFC need to supplement university income with international fee-paying students, most of whom are no longer from Europe. World Literature as it has been put forward so far represents a useful compromise in that it pacifies politicians and conservative scholars calling for a return to cultural roots while providing enough cultural variety to satisfy those looking for more socially inclusive offerings in the classroom. In addition, the expansion of syllabi to include Gilgamesh and Arjuna reflect general shifts in America's population and foreign policy: a post-9/11 attempt to show an acceptable interest in the Middle East, and recognition of the number of South Asians now holding influential positions in US society. Wai Chee Dimock shows how the Twin Towers catastrophe energised the push to

World Literature by forcing people to the realisation that we are all now part of the world in ways we had not thought possible: the world is in our midst as we are out and about in the world ('Introduction', Dimock & Buell). Karen R. Smith in her article "What good is World Literature?" (2011) provides a clear chart of the political history of World Literature in the US and notes that there has been "a rhetoric of moral crisis through which the study of international literature figures as a source of redemption" (585). Then, too, there is the broad intellectual turn to matters of globalisation. One example is *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization*, edited by Rob Wilson and Christopher Leigh Connery (2007). Literary studies, whatever their institutional structure, have to keep up with the times or they face being made redundant.

Arguments over the benefits and shortcomings of World Literature in part derive from the particular American experience of postcolonial studies. Although it in fact had US origins in that servicemen from the Pacific theatre of World War Two returned and began to teach Australian literature, it and other writing from the British Commonwealth (Robertson) failed to take on, and later, when it was introduced through minority identity politics and most visibly amongst academics of South Asian origin, it was, and in some cases still is (see Byrd xix, xxxi), seen as socially troublesome and something foreign, something not relevant to a nation that spent a long time denying it had an empire. When advocates of postcolonial literary studies visited the US in the 1980s differences between the American and Australian academies became manifest, Helen Tiffin being perhaps the most vocal in taking Comparative Literature to task for its canonical Eurocentrism, but others like Alamgir Hashmi also looking for a wider comparative scope and a more critical methodology (Tiffin 1983, Hashmi). In more recent times it has been 'hyphenated Americans' in the university system (Gayatri Spivak, Gloria Anzaldúa and Epifanio San Juan Jr being some key representatives), or scholars coming at literary studies from other politicised positions — as Marxists, feminists or queer theorists (Neil Lazarus or bell hooks or Audre Lorde) — who have taken up the critique of 'establishment' constructs.

The oppositional relationship between identity politics and postcolonial studies on the one hand and Comparative Literature and canonical formations of English and American Literature on the other, has arguably had the effect of pushing the latter into internal reforms that have not fully inspected their own assumptions or causes. In making this generalisation I am aware that a lot of critique has come from within departments of Comparative Literature, including from key proponents of World Literature like David Damrosch ("How American is World Literature?" 2009). Nonetheless, Damrosch in *How to Read World Literature* notes that some books are "culture bound", written 'in house' for a local audience (2). This immediately raises the question of whether world literature by its very nature selects for universality — meaning of course, as any postcolonially aware reader will know, choosing texts whose codes mostly overlap with those the reader is familiar with. So World Literature becomes books from around the world that operate according to cultural values of the person designing the World Literature subject: or, 'My Literature from all over the place'. This becomes clear towards the end of Damrosch's book when he describes how we should build our own corpus of world literature as a personal shopping list

starting with our favourite writers (126). The ‘my’, of course, in a hegemonic space, quickly becomes the collective ‘our’ of the dominant group. As a personal project there’s nothing inordinately dangerous here, but as an institutionalised structure, it leads to the blindness and exclusions that postcolonial, feminist, multicultural and minority literary studies have been exposing for decades.

Damrosch does allow for difference. He sees reading as a shuttling between us and the text in which “its distinctive qualities will impress themselves on us” (3) — all good and fine, but how we process that distinctiveness becomes crucial: we can dismiss it as incomprehensible, as sub-literary, as eccentric. Damrosch talks about how World Literature helps us to trace the unfolding of patterns across centuries and geographical boundaries. He uses the epic as a genre frame on which to make comparisons, examines different plays around the theme of sight and blindness, and uses class as a base for comparing French and Japanese writing. In all this there seems to be a New Critical reading practice that takes a lot for granted. Only when we begin with a critical stance toward our own values can we use it to show up the limits of our own assumptions and think about why it is different and how that works in its own context. Perhaps if we add Damrosch to a model of postcolonial reading of the Spivak kind, then we might really hope to arrive at a properly World Literature both as a body of work and as a reading practice.

From a postcolonial or indigenous perspective, Goethe’s utopian humanist cosmopolis, the ideal behind notions of comparative literary studies, carried the seeds of a Eurocentric parochialism that was exported under imperialism as a tyrannical belief in the supremacy of Enlightenment Reason. In this sense it could be argued that the formation of Postcolonial Literature was an attempt to engage in a properly global comparative project, albeit with limitations — notably the fixation around Anglophone writing. This has since been surpassed, with the ‘discovery’ of (or return to) francophone postcolonial writing (represented these days by Edouard Glissant) and the obvious but slow to develop intersection with Latin America, mediated by Walter Dignolo. Claiming this kind of priority for postcolonial theorising, is, nonetheless, partly a waste of time, since, as Theo D’haen charts for us in his recent *Routledge Concise History of World Literature*, the stand-off between utopian homogenising into cosmopolitan humanism and utopian preservation of (sub)national specificities of language and culture goes back at least to differing interpretations of World and Comparative Literature by Goethe and Hugo Meltzl two to three centuries ago (D’haen 53-7).

The fact that the argument has a long history does not, of course, dismiss the validity of the argument. Gayatri Spivak is often cited by those discussing World Literature for her call to remodel the disciplines (summed up in her 2003 lectures, *Death of a Discipline*). It is worth noting that she actually criticised the spread of Commonwealth Literature years ago for precisely the same reasons: the denaturing of textual ‘bite’ by taking books out of their historical and cultural context and consuming them as anodyne representatives of some essentialised national cultural identity and style (“How to Read a Culturally Different Book” 1994). Her comments then cause me to ask now, is World Literature doing the same thing? Is it a retreat from all the work Spivak herself has done to keep postcolonial studies focussed on questions of cultural power and

literature's connection to social struggle? Is World Literature a means for the academy in America to sidestep the political engagements of postcolonial literary studies so often denounced by conservative politicians? Is it a way of producing an impression of cosmopolitan liberal cultural reach without really changing the way we read, manage literature as a cultural product, or behave in relation to the world? We have spent a long time in both Australian and postcolonial literary studies fighting free of the pejorative use of the term 'provincial' by T.S. Eliot following Arnold's example and, along with notables such as Chinua Achebe, dismantling the arrogance of its opposite term, 'universal'. Does World Literature bring back universality under a new guise of globalised cosmopolitanism — at least in its implied subject formation of those teaching and studying it?

Here I pause to ask again what happens when we push the boundaries of literary studies out from the national to the transnational to the global? If we consider a recent and important theorising of things from an American indigenous perspective, the opposing terms Comparative and Postcolonial are both part of a push to planetarity that has its roots in the cosmo-imperialism of Captain Cook's Enlightenment voyage of terrestrial and celestial discovery as he viewed the Transit of Venus and the islands of the Pacific. We can follow an intellectual route from national to diasporic to planetarity that encompasses both postcolonial studies and World Literature theories, and from an indigenous perspective, all of this "impulse to world is the setting-to-work of the colonizer, even if that work is to reconfigure the world so that it might be kinder, and gentler" (Byrd 38). From Jodi A Byrd's Native American viewpoint, indigeneity challenges

the analyses of a 'postcolonial' and imperial United States [and other settler-colonial nations] and ... the larger field of poststructuralist theory. Indigenous peoples, our ongoing colonization and our historical dispossessions and genocide continue to be pushed toward a vanishing point within critical theory and diaspora studies at the same time that our presence calls into question, disturbingly so for some, progressivist politics that continue to produce race and equality as the primary sites for strategic engagement within participatory democracy. (Byrd 3)

The 'native' serves as a discursive site through which liberal multicultural democratic ideals move and against which they operate to shore up a national and global-imperial status quo. Postcolonial studies at their best draw critical attention to complexities of this and to the ultimate need for the decolonisation of all peoples, but indigneneity highlights the impossibility of that need being met under existing structures and shows how postcolonial critique is itself complicit with those structures. My concern here is that World Literature, even if it has similar utopian goals, is even less able to promote or perhaps even to hear the claims of indigenous writing.

In the North American context where the echoes of William Bennett can be heard in Senators calling for the removal of postcolonial studies from curricula, and amplified to distortion in the Tea Party, the smuggling back in of postcolonial ideas under cover of Comparative or World Literature labels might be a very positive strategy (Scholes, Lazarus). However, in making this subversive step, there is the danger that Emily Apter and Spivak point to: the ironing out of the

native, the subaltern, the incommensurate, by middle-class, first-world assumptions, linguistic hegemony, and a tradition of privileging the literary manifest as cosmopolitan classic texts, either deriving from or measured in relation to, a Western canon.

Arguably, the humanities academy in Australia has been more consistently attuned to the cultural politics of establishing a national literature and seeing it in relation to other postcolonial literatures. Walter F. Veit, one of the few teachers of Comparative Literature in Australia charts the debate about globalising the study of literature through his teaching at Monash University and his involvement in the International Comparative Literature Association. This was mostly a US connection culminating for Veit in Henry Remak's Bellagio symposium in 1981 (417-20). It is clear from this that in disciplinary terms, the comparison of national literatures in the US went down the Comparative Lit. path, while other erstwhile colonies of Britain chose to work within and against English Literature structures under the label of Commonwealth and then Postcolonial literary studies. Theo D'haen provides a comprehensive history of this in Chapter Four of his *Concise History*, noting that postcolonial literary studies took about a decade to assume the prominence in the US that it had taken on in other parts of the world (135), although it did have a presence in attention to the Third World, largely dealt with in universities under area studies and social science rubrics. The difference is significant, since the latter has been focussed on resisting and undoing a normative emphasis on European tradition, while the former has remained for much longer focused on exactly that Western corpus, the work of the postcolonial having been carried out largely under the identity politics of Black and Asian-American literatures or area studies, notably Latin America and China-Japan. This leads to a history of separated discussions manifest in Veit's faulting Robert Dixon for moving discussion of Australian literature into transnational contexts without considering European theory (430). Veit makes one important observation of the possibility of cross-disciplinary dialogue in pointing to Albert Gérard's work on African literatures, carried out under Comparative Literature auspices but also published and influential in Commonwealth/Postcolonial circles (421-2). Nonetheless, Tiffin and postcolonial scholars in general would seize critically upon the words used by Veit's favoured champion of a new history of 'interdependent' world literature, Adrian Marino, who looks to Universal literature as a path beyond Western models of World literature, and sees the result as "assimilation de la littérature universelle à une seule et indivisible 'république des lettres', dans l'esprit le plus authentique du XIIIe siècle" (Marino in Veit 416). Veit is on stronger postcolonial ground when he cites the 2002 *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory*, edited by Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdés, concluding with it that "the new history of literature has to be constructed as a relational, contrapuntal, polycommunal, polyethnic, multiperspectival comparative history." (Veit 424).

What may be the problem here is a genuine misunderstanding of the term 'assimilation'. Emily Apter takes up this cultural symptom as a model for a properly differential practice of world (or universal) literary studies. Emily Apter addresses this in her article "Untranslatables: A World System". She tracks different terms and models of postnational literary studies, noting how "the humanities tends to reimpose national periodizing strictures on knowledge-fields, some of them

inherited from area studies” (582) and that all formations of world literature “fail to answer fully the challenge of making comparative literature geopolitically case-sensitive and site specific in ways that avoid reproducing imperialist cartographies” (583). (In passing, I might say that this describes quite well what postcolonial literary studies has been attempting for some time.) Apter goes on to suggest, drawing on her own forte of translation studies, what Homi Bhabha has talked of in cultural terms as ‘incommensurability’ and she calls ‘untranslatability’. We could study world literatures for what they don’t manage to say to each other or for how they are *mis*-translated in moving from one geopolitical space to another. Her aim of non-imperialist practice is spoiled a little by her correction to the approved practice of the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophes* when she says, “ideally it would have a companion volume covering Asian, African, Indian and Middle Eastern languages” (585). Postcolonialist sensitivities will immediately see that this is yet another iteration of Macaulay: one volume of Europe equals the rest of the world put together; and there is no mention at all of South America, the Pacific or Australia — all rich linguistic and cultural sources of dissonant ‘vocabularies’. So even at the abstract level of Apter’s critical suspicion of globalising structures, in Diana Brydon’s words, “We may use the same terms but we do not stand on the same conceptual ground.” (17).

Apter’s quest for a properly transnational comparatism, while it insists on recognition for difference, seems to be underpinned by a desire for some neutral machinery of universal humanism: “must”, she cries, “the names for language, including the names for translation, always revert to a predicate of *ethnos*?” (589). She turns to the descriptive models of Franco Moretti and a kind of evolutionary biologism (592) to handle comparative literary history. In itself this is not unlike Helen Tiffin’s earlier call for a descriptive sociological literary analysis as a way of avoiding presumptuous Eurocentric evaluations of culturally different postcolonial texts, but the postcolonial project operates to attend properly to *ethnos* as it finds expression in its social situations; it doesn’t seek to transcend a predicate of *ethnos* (Tiffin 1983). Can one, in fact, or should one try to, get away from an ‘ethnic’ predication of writing from oppressed minorities? (‘Dalit’ might not be an ethnic category, but it functions in many ways as ‘Aboriginal’ does in both national and transnational contexts.) Does World Literature, even as it attends to untranslatable differences and spatial and generic discontinuities within it (592), iron out difference? What would it take to implement Apter’s ideal pedagogy of strategic bafflement through presenting students with untranslatable comparisons (not unlike Spivak’s pedagogy of unsettling speaking and reading positions in the classroom, or Damrosch’s “salutary cultural shock”) (Damrosch, “How American is World Literature?”; Apter 594, Spivak 2003, Kopper 403)?

Would David Damrosch’s adoption of texts in translation solve the problem of World Literature if only 0.7 percent of literary works published in the US are translations (Slater 925), and if anthologies are used that “value largeness” in their very nature as encyclopaedic, and thus potentially wash away small literatures in a flood of global sampling that favours more accessible/ familiar texts (Kopper 404)? What would be practically possible, even with the remaining spread of material in print, when effective presentation of difference in the classroom

requires an appreciation of source social context? Would it take a semester option, a year-long subject, a major subject sequence, a degree, to be more than an exercise in exotic variety or irritating alienation? In a postmodern world where students have less and less sense of their own cultural history, what would be needed to inculcate a transcultural awareness of ‘dischronologies’ (Apter 595)? Could World Literature do the work that such shaping of ‘new cartographies of the present’ (597) demands? Does it need to, if Postcolonial Studies are already attempting to rethink global systems? How can the two productively speak to each other? — a question addressed directly by both Debjani Ganguly and Diana Brydon, to whose work I am indebted. Is it a case of two disciplinary formations experiencing a productively abrasive mistranslation as they try to communicate between different intellectual languages?

Asking whether Australian literature is a world literature is very much prompted by the American push for World Literature coinciding with our own concerns about internal directions for literary studies in academe. The rub between the two different systems causes me to ask on the one hand how an outside perspective can usefully cause us to scratch itches we didn’t realise we had, and on the other hand whether this is just another case of colonial provincialism following one more global metropolitan trend. In Australia, we too have had a narrowly nation-framed and often nationalist programme of promoting the study of Australian literature and society. In this regard, a corrective turn to examining our transnational links seems appropriate, though that in itself does not necessitate introducing World Literature as a discipline. A broadened syllabus of comparative international literary study might be a radical correction to the triumph of economic rationalism and xenophobia during the eleven years of the Howard government, or it could be a compliant move in accordance with national economic interests and foreign policy demanding we skill ourselves for the global market. Given our different position in time and cultural space from that of the US as nation in the world, as academy in the international pecking order, and as literary player in the global marketplace, Australia might require some continuation of nation boundedness and even cultural nationalism in our literary studies as a contingency against being consumed by what is cheaper to produce and more readily available from centres of greater population and corporate power. On the other hand, our greater degree of monolingualism and insularity makes the push into other cultures and languages socially and ethically desirable. The apparent decline in student interest in Australian Studies topics under any disciplinary rubric is perhaps the result of the success of postcolonial emphases on difference penetrating into schools and into a whole plethora of subjects from Anthropology to Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Whiteness Studies and Critical Multiculturalism — students are overexposed, possibly overwhelmed with complexities they don’t want to handle. Perhaps a World Literature package would provide a welcome and productive relief affirming the possibility of common human aspirations and fears.

Any attempt to correct nationalist myopia by showing how Australian literature is actually world literature and that our imaginations must be stretched accordingly (which is what I take Wai Chee Dimock’s aim to be in relation to the United States), is admirable. But it comes out of a particular globalising moment and an intellectual history of debate that allows us to inspect the

prospects and problems in its motivations and likely outcomes. This is merely to follow on from questions about the 'worlding' of World Literature raised by John Pizer and Djelal Kadir (in D'haen 70-1, 95). It is evident, for instance, that much of the contemporary scholarly discussion around the idea of world literature relates to French attempts to broaden their cultural horizons as that nation becomes increasingly multicultural and its cultural hold on *outremer* declines. Etienne Balibar and Pascale Casanova are just two of the many names that could be cited in this regard. The fact that both the US and Australia now ask whether we are or should be a world literature is an indication of how entrenched the global cultural value of French theory has become.

Like the US, Australia is also part of the post-9/11 globalised world. Australian universities are now measured by international benchmarks and rely for both reputation and income on a regular flow of overseas students coming here to study. Most of these students want to take vocationally-oriented degrees, and there is pressure on Humanities departments to increase international enrolments. World Literature stands a better chance of attracting them, perhaps, than Australian Literature or the often unfamiliar or politically threatening label of Postcolonial studies. The exception in the international student market is a selection of exchange students from Europe, Canada and the US. They do often take Australian studies subjects for their exotic appeal, but also come with requirements to take subjects that will get them credit back home, and that puts some pressure on us to offer things like American or Comparative or World Literature subjects.

Having made the changes, however, the pedagogical and political questions raised above have still to be considered. This occurs within a general climate of bureaucratic management, neo-conservative political populism and economic 'rationalism'. Subject offerings have to be standardised across Faculties, the 'brand' must be sold, efficiencies of delivery are demanded. World Literature might be a positive attempt on the part of English Departments to claim back some of the territory that Cultural Studies and Communications departments have annexed. It might be a good way of supplying the literary-cultural contexts that Language departments have been forced to give up. But it could also be a very convenient managerial solution whereby a whole range of African, Caribbean, Indian, Indonesian, Pacific and Latin American subject offerings get boiled down to the one convenient package. Most of the advocates for World Literature end up suggesting collaborative teaching and research as a way to accommodate the range of knowledge required to provide a proper spread of cultural material in a World Literature subject (Damrosch in D'haen 69; Spivak 23; Veit, 422). On the face of it, this is a sensible proposition, and one that holds out the promise of preserving the kind of genuine difference that theorists look for, but in Theo D'haen's words, "What gets taught, then, and how it is taught in final instance depends upon the individual teacher or at best (and sometimes worst) a team of teachers." (94). University administrators love to push the idea of team teaching onto staff as a supposedly 'more efficient' way of managing workload. Practice shows that while it can be very stimulating for staff and student alike, it is by no means less work for anyone, and needs careful planning to ensure clear coherence. Way back in 1971, Kendrick Smithyman looked at the emergence of Commonwealth Literature in universities across the world and observed that its

reformist idealism was “a handy fiction [built on] compartmental thinking swayed by departmental exigency” (18). Perhaps we could say the same of World Literature.

Wai Chee Dimock’s introduction to the compilation of essays on how to reconfigure American Studies under rubrics of planetarity begins with the figure of crisis (9-11 and Katrina). This is a strategy not unknown in cultural movements (see Smith) and one shown by Robert Scholes to be a staple of conservative arguments as much as progressive ones. The push to culturally certify the ‘citizen of the world’ can result in both a liberalised openness or an extended version of old canonical ‘cultural literacy’. Opening up the borders of the US or of the concept of nation per se, may be a positive correction of nationalist enclosure or it may have the effect of extending the boundaries — porous or not — in a totalising reach to the world. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a “broadening of the evidentiary ground” (Dimock 6) to avoid parochial shortsightedness, but that phrase and the extension of thinking to “the planet ... as cradle” (8) doesn’t escape the spatial container metaphors that Dimock otherwise wants to dispense with. Our problem is that the structuring of learning as a set of disciplines carries with it the idea of mastery of a field, whether its material is stratified or modularised. If we do away with the nation as the dominant frame for selecting and thinking about literature, we are still likely to operate in models of “territorial sovereignty” (3): Australian might be replaced by something regional, say the Caribbean, or something temporal like Nineteenth Century Literature, or socio-political (Settler writing) or a generic package (the sonnet, the Gothic novel) — or World Literature. And unless we return to taken-for-granted ‘Great Works’ in good Arnoldian style, comparison still needs some underpinning set of concepts that institutes a ‘space’ of its own: postcolonial, Nobel winners, cosmopolitan writing. Maybe an ideal would be a flat system in which ‘we just read stuff’, dipping haphazardly into an ever-shifting ocean of texts, but of course that would be to surrender to market forces, and give up any idea of rigorous intellectual enquiry.

Global suspicion of ethno-nationalisms, national concern over new generations of students culturally and temporally distanced from the Anglophone national literary canon, and the effects of globalising consumerism have resulted in lower enrolments in Australian and Postcolonial subjects and Humanities departments need to find fresh ways of attracting student numbers. David Damrosch also sees a commercial factor driving the push to world literature whereby global publishing combines pursue an international market through anthologies of translated texts. As he points out, this has implications: “Students in Taiwan or Nigeria will learn about the literatures of the world through English translations organized by the United States.... this global market will need teachers. Presumably the graduate discipline of Comparative Literature will train those teachers” (2009). If Australia is to go down the comparative and world literature path, who will train our teachers? Will we become part of the ever-expanding empire of the Norton anthology? Damrosch properly notes that US disciplinary boundaries and practices require considerable rethinking if the ideals of world literature are to be achieved, and we might ask ourselves where we need to reshape our own.

One answer might be that our writing is already world literature, and that different approaches within our various Australian packages could be beneficial. The distinction between national and international in literature is less and less tenable. Nations are like ships flying flags of convenience: crewed by people from everywhere and connected to all kinds of ports of call. In this sense, Australian literature *is* world literature: it contains stories of life under the Khmer Rouge (Alice Pung's *My Father's Daughter*), fantastic narratives of women working in Australia pulling their house to bits because of traumas induced in the Balkans fiasco (*My Sister Chaos*), Australians from Coober Pedy going back to live in Greece (*Palimpsest* by Kathryn Koromilas), Fiji Indians living in Melbourne and marrying a boy from India found on the internet (Shalini Akhil's *The Bollywood Beauty*), a mixed-race detective in Apartheid South Africa (*Let the Dead Lie* by Malla Nunn), and more. It also depicts Australians living on a Malaysian rubber plantation (*The Plantation* by Di Morrissey), reporting on the war of liberation in Eritrea (Tom Keneally's *Towards Asmara*), working on a mission in New Guinea (*Keeping Faith*), unravelling mysteries in North Africa, Sicily and Poland (Roberta Lowing, *Notorious*), and exploiting a herbal cottage industry in India (Inez Baranay, *Neem Dreams*). Arguably it has always been this kind of world literature whether we have wanted it to be or not, and it supports the general shift from assumptions of coherence to confessions of multicultural dissonance advocated by Mary Louise Pratt, Robert Scholes, Gayatri Spivak and others (Smith 595-6). Perhaps we could do more work, however, on effecting the corresponding shift from bodies of texts to reading strategies, outlined by Damrosch in *What is World Literature?* (Smith 598) and discussed by Spivak as open process, with the caveat that its disruptions of complacent self-confinement in a world-aware ethics should not become self-defeating by scaring students too much (*Death of a Discipline* 26). There is also the fact of ongoing real effects — social, legal, cultural — of nation boundaries and the proposition of a postcolonial and globally aware scholar like Diana Brydon that there is no necessary contradiction between recognising the nation, working with postcolonial models that call the nation in to question, and admitting to global dynamics that often seem to be in opposition to both: "People can operate on a number of complementary scales at once without having to make absolute choices among them." (13). World Literature, then, might have to — perhaps should — come into play within a framework that studies rather than displaces the complex relational interactions across many spaces of identity and cultural production.

Putting Australian literature out into a global context could have the negative effect of permitting neglect of work yet to be done within our borders. We have our own multilingual population: we just don't have the structural logic in higher education to easily accommodate subject packages that reflect this, and, as work by colleagues like Michael Jacklin shows, there is still insufficient basic research being done to record the many texts by Australians in languages other than English (Jacklin). However, a planetarist approach might usefully allow discussion of internal cultural diversity. Under the strong ongoing current of assimilationist attitudes, students of 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' or 'Aboriginal' backgrounds might well resist being put in the academic spotlight as representatives of difference, especially when high schools only include 'their' writing as second-class texts for sociological thematic discussion.

This brings me to our third scene of reading: the one that comes into focus once the question of whether we are a world literature has been asked in our institutional context. If we take Goethe's ideal of national cultures rubbing up against each other in the practice of World Literature, what happens to transnational or sub-national literatures? What happens when Aboriginal writing or writing about Aboriginal issues goes global? How is it read? What work does it do? How would a World Lit. rubric change that?

To begin with an answer to the last question, from looking at overseas receptions of some transnational Australian work, it is clear that we all like to consume the other as a mirror in which to see our own concerns more clearly, or a window through which we can obtain touristic views of exotic difference (Sharrad 2010, 2011). Thus Thomas Keneally is best known to Germans because his Oskar Schindler assists in the national reassessment of ethical responses to the Nazi era, or his family's river town origins provide the curious with a feel for early settlement in a strange country, perhaps fuelled by the knowledge that many Germans migrated to Australia (Pedersen, Haag). The positive side of this is that a book like *Schindler's List*, with its extra cachets of Booker and Hollywood contract, is taken up as an example of the second kind of world literature: fine writing with clout in a transnational literary network, and helps with the overseas marketing of Australia as more than just kangaroos and coral reefs (Haag 9). In a World Literature context, it is likely that only *Schindler* would be on the syllabus, and whether that was a fair representation of Australian literature or even of the Keneally oeuvre is open to question. In an Australian Literature offering in Germany it might be more likely that *Bring Larks and Heroes* or *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* would be selected, though the German translation of the latter (*Australische Ballade*) is not a promising start to reading such a specifically historical and racialised story. It might get a better hearing in a Postcolonial Literatures in English context. One problem is that although we are driven to consider seriously "the idea of literature as a world-system of production, translation and circulation" (Ganguly 122), once we actually get to grips with what is produced, we are forced into reductive structures we are rightly suspicious of or excessive demands on our competence, time and even limits of interest. Interrogation of this last item is, of course, a necessary and salutary aspect of the critical world literature project, but it remains a limit nonetheless. Damrosch may expand the hermeneutic circle into an interactive ellipse, but an ellipse still has a boundary to it.

Given the site of the main discussions over World Literature informing this conference, what might we expect for Keneally's work in a course in the US? Clearly any Indigenous studies subject that included his work would have *Jimmie Blacksmith* on its reading (or screening) list, although it would be more likely only to offer comparative studies in indigenous writing. American courses in Australian Literature would be likely to run either *Bring Larks and Heroes* or *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, but World Literature, again, would most likely only consider the Booker winner, *Schindler's Ark*, currently I believe the only Keneally work to be on university reading lists in the US, and then mostly in the context of Holocaust studies (Birns). *Schindler* would also have the edge in an American context because of its declared links to people

like Truman Capote (Pierce 122). There was a keen following in the States for *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, often as a result of the film, but in that case it usually meant cinephiles loving the sweeping shots of the bush and Schepisi's technical skill and being thrilled by the novelty of seeing Aboriginal actors on the screen (personal conversations). American reviews of Keneally's work — apart from the many columns recounting how he was given the Schindler story — have all emphasised the universal humanist element of Keneally's spinning a good yarn about “decent, ordinary men and women” facing moral challenges (Herbert, Steinberg, Weinraub). Usually there is mention of his Irish roots and his venture into American history, *Confederates*. It would be possible to stage a lively class discussion about the world politics of famine and the West's selective engagement in nationalist struggles or the nature of international aid projects by including *Towards Asmara* or *Bettany's Book* or even to discuss the possibilities for understanding across cultural difference and trans-national politics if readers were offered the comic juxtaposition of Aboriginal artists and terrorist hijackers in *Flying Hero Class*. This is all to elaborate on a point made by Debjani Ganguly, who sees Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* or Keneally's *The Tyrant's Novel* as directing our attention to “emergent literary topographies that cannot be circumscribed by postcolonial geographies of Europe and its others” (121). However, it is hard to see any of these titles appearing in Comparative or World Literature subjects as they are presently constituted.

As for Aboriginal writing itself, how might Comparative or World Literature handle it? From one point of view, inclusion in either subject structure could enact a salutary shift from confinement to minority national status to gaining respect for demonstrating a complex set of identities that includes global presence (such as Eleanor Ty claims for Asian-American writing). On the other, establishing a comparative transnational circuit can turn out to be the same appropriation to one's own centre as previous systems also produced. Joseph Roach, for example, in critiquing the drama of world systems such as the World Bank, puts Australian Aboriginal theatre into connection with US first nations, but ends up subordinating it to a story about the musical *Oklahoma*. Centrifugal global outlook ends up as centripetal national vision (Dimock & Buell 172-83). Translation itself is no help, since, as Oliver Haag notes, one of the most translated ‘Aboriginal’ titles in German is a spurious New Age fantasy by American writer Marlo Morgan (Haag 8). We could add that the same fakery is an outcome of Lawrence Buell's planetarist model of “ecoglobalist affects” (Dimock & Buell 12). A subject in comparative indigenous writing would be viable, and certainly has been on offer in a number of countries. This in itself is a positive phenomenon, and it does allow for a concentrated look at specific dynamics of cultural expression and production, but it can also lead to distorting ‘translations’ of one mode of indigeneity into another country's terms, as we sometimes see in the conflation of Dalit and Aboriginal cultural politics in India. Also, one might object to it on the grounds that it ghettoises such work and implies a literary mainstream and series of marginal curiosities. Subjects in Comparative Literature as they are currently devised are unlikely to find room for indigenous writing, unless there is some rubric such as ‘comparative protest literature’, or ‘the trickster in contemporary fiction’ that would make selection more probable. As we have seen in a number of

cases, a work that approximates to the vogue for metropolitan diasporic cosmopolitanism à la Salman Rushdie or Ben Okri, such as Kim Scott's *Benang*, Mudrooroo's *Masters of the Ghost Dreaming* (and now Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*), is likely to travel well and find its way onto courses overseas, otherwise stories that can be romanticised in Western terms of self-discovery or adventure (*My Place*, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*) are the ones that will be most readily available internationally. The stories that are told about such works in the overseas classroom will also be crucial. As with Keneally's American reception, if all that the student learns is the capacity of humanist universalism to absorb all difference, then that is not altogether a great outcome for World Literature or Aboriginal literature. On the other hand, though, the critical self-inspection of theory and structural reform is both intellectually necessary and a means of gaining traction in the global academy, to use the words of Diana Brydon, "How many of the founding assumptions of disciplinary practice can we throw into question and still complete our work?" (8). How much do we sacrifice to a global capitalist machinery of constant flows and rebrandings of our 'product' in undertaking changes otherwise defensible on good ethical and theoretical grounds?

That is not to say we should not keep up the pressure to have subjects that include texts of difference. Even the appeal of the exotic can have unforeseen positive results. It might enthrall someone to come and talk to Aboriginal people, shake up the Australian conversation about indigenous issues, even to take up work in providing services to Aboriginal communities. That certainly happens. It has happened through Commonwealth and Postcolonial literary studies — think of Adam Shoemaker and Eva Rask Knudsen, for instance. In Indigenous Studies, whether that be in Canada or the US or New Zealand, Aboriginal writing would almost certainly be used comparatively to reflect on local situations and clarify specific issues. But would it happen in a World Literature rubric? Would it even be likely to appear at all? Of course, if we were teaching a World Literature subject in Australia, we could (perhaps) argue that there were existing subjects providing access to Aboriginal writing, but that would be to dodge the issue of excluding indigeneity from the World. And if we were looking at Australia's place in World Literature subjects offered overseas, what would we want to see included and how would we want to see it taught? Would, or should, we have any say in that? World Literature may well be a reform intended to correct the narrow range of Comparative Literature subjects in the past, but in its wider extent, will it have the same negative effect of flattening the cultural horizon that postcolonialists critiqued and have been criticised for (see Theo D'haen's survey of objections and qualifications to the postcolonial project [136-50], or Spivak 2003, 81-2)?

To return to a Comparative Literature context, Walter Veit ends his discussion of a possible global comparative literary history by noting that "global interdependence" will always generate a surplus of meanings around texts that resist "hegemonic domination of the correct understanding of Australian literature." (430). We might add that minority literatures within the nation have the same effect. Perhaps instead of World Literature or even World *Literatures*, we need to consider that still in this age of globalisation there are several *worlds*, every one with their own particular socio-political dynamics their own cultural agendas and modes of expression. And while there can be channels of communication amongst all of them, there will be some aspects that just don't

transfer smoothly or at all across borders. To give adequate recognition to Fourth World literatures, maybe we do need a transnational framework of study to avoid their being ghettoised within their immediate countries, but we also need something that is not homogenising and privileging of major economic powers: we need *Worlds Literatures*. This might be informed by using a structural ‘distant reading’ approach to understand forces behind global cultural transmission, but could also resist any implication of a universalist, objective viewpoint (the spaceman as the ultimate in enlightenment reason viewing the planet as an undifferentiated whole — Brydon’s objection to some of the ‘planetarity’ of Spivak and Dimock (15-16, 20-25) — by juxtaposing it with something more complex such as Itamar Even-Zohar’s ‘polysystems theory’ and Spivak’s unsettling self-reflexive inspection of positions. World literature is not the solution to all our problems, merely another expression of a set of ongoing problems; we need it in our toolkit as an ideal and a corrective addition, but we need to hold it against other structures as well, structures that rub abrasively up against its boundaries. In that kind of multiform context, the many components of an always already global Australian literature perhaps can all be given their proper place in the world community of literatures.

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