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## El contestador australiano and the transnational flows of Australian writing in Spanish

### Abstract

'El contestador australiano y otros cuentos' [The Australian answering machine and other stories] is the title of a collection of short stories written in Spanish by Uruguayan-born Ruben Fernández. It was published in 2008 in Montevideo by the well-regarded publishing house Del Sur Ediciones. In 2009 Fernández was interviewed by the Uruguayan newspaper 'El País' and spoke about how his stories relate to his experience of thirty years as a migrant living in Australia. Many of the stories in this collection first appeared in Australia in the 1980s and early 1990s, a number of them as prize-winning entries in literary competitions, with several subsequently published in Spanish-language newspapers and magazines in Sydney. The Uruguayan publication is, in fact, a revised version of the 1993 book 'Querido Juan dos puntos', published in Sydney, with assistance from the Australia Council, by Cervantes Publications. This earlier collection was well received with reviews, interviews and front cover photographs appearing in the Spanish-language press in Australia at the time. Fernández is only one of a number of Spanish-speaking authors whose work flows between Australia, Latin America and Spain. In this article I discuss aspects of the literary infrastructure in Spanish in Australia that have supported the publication of fiction within this migrant community and analyse stories from 'El contestador australiano' to demonstrate the transnational dimensions of Australian Spanish-language writing.

### Keywords

writing, australian, flows, transnational, spanish, australiano, el, contestador

### Disciplines

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In her introductory discussion of melancholia and nation formation, Vilashini Cooppan reflects on the 'double movement' of melancholia in which the nation may be understood as 'both present and absent, territorially bounded and deterritorialized, confining and connecting, *often in the same moment*' (34, italics in original). She explains:

For the subject who attempts national identification, the nation serves as a melancholic lost object – an object that lies outside the subject and, for that reason, must be incorporated, be made inner territory. But the subject who looks to incorporate the national object lost to him or her, whether by virtue of geographical distance (for the exile and the migrant) or civic exclusion (for the raced, gendered and queered subject), will find a seemingly nonnational quantity at the very point of national identification, the loss of the national precisely in the moment of its claiming, and a national object ever haunted by a global elsewhere. (34)

For the migrant subject, particularly, this simultaneity of presence and absence is manifest in the experience of negotiating new parameters of identity within a host nation while bearing the markers, narratives and language(s) of another. It is not surprising that accompanying the migrant's efforts to participate in processes of national identification is an awareness of loss, resulting from distance and dislocation, and expressed frequently through nostalgia.

'It is often nostalgia that links the national and the transnational,' writes J. A. Brown-Rose in her study of Caribbean literature written in the United States (5). Brown-Rose makes the point that Caribbean writers located in the United States use nostalgia in their work as a critical device that allows characters and readers alike to evaluate the claims of nation and consider the complexities of transnational connections that shape migrant subjects. A similar argument could be made for the role of nostalgia in the literary production of Spanish-speaking migrants in Australia. This is not to assert that all migrant writing is nostalgic; although it has long been recognised as a significant aspect of migrant fiction in the Australian context, the tendency to reduce migrant writing to engagements in nostalgia has also been strenuously critiqued (Gunew). In the negotiation, however, between national and transnational perspectives and identities, a migrant writer's memories of a home left behind may be a catalyst for evaluation and critique of both the place-of-origin and the newly acquired home of the host country (Brown-Rose 5).

In the short story 'Lo que no fuimos' [That which we were not], by Ruben Fernández, an unnamed narrator returns to the city of his youth, where he meets a woman to whom, in the days and nights preceding his departure years before, he had failed, through cowardice, to declare his affection and attraction. In the intervening years of his life as a migrant he had suffered bouts of nostalgia, brought on, as he says, by a scent, a gesture, a pair of immense eyes ['Por años deambulé por los laberintos de la memoria recordando los sueños que tuve de ella. Confabulada con un olor, aliada a un gesto, a unos ojos inmensos, la nostalgia atacó muchas veces' (*El contestador* 16)]. The story is both an evocation of the power of nostalgia and, at the same time, a rejection of its snares and entrapments. The first sentence makes this clear, as the narrator declares: "La nostalgia suele atacar a traición" (15). In English a literal translation would be 'Nostalgia tends to attack treacherously;' alternatively, it might be expressed as: 'Nostalgia may strike when least expected,' though this loses the sense of deception conveyed in the Spanish original. The association of nostalgia with betrayal is integral to this brief, three-page narrative and the lines that follow in the opening paragraph underscore the sense of nostalgia as a force lying in wait, lurking, choosing its time, attentive to any moment of carelessness through which the past might be insinuated into the narrator's present. Upon returning to visit his country of origin and his city, this emigrant again meets the woman from his past, so it seems. There is, however, in this second half of the narrative, a sense of indeterminacy as to whether the 'ella' or 'her' to whom the narrator refers is the woman of his past or more generally the city of his youth. At the end of his visit, as the narrator boards the plane to leave, he realises that he and the woman will never see each other again, that through his years of absence something of his city has been lost to him irrevocably, and that chasing his own ghost is useless. ['Contra la ventanilla del avión, seguro de que no volveríamos a vernos más, aprendí que hay una dimensión de mi ciudad para la cual yo estoy irrevocablemente perdido. Que no hay reencarnación posible, que es inútil la osadía de perseguir el fantasma de uno mismo.' (17)] The story closes with the narrator realising that, too late, he has also lost his cowardice ['Y supe que, demasiado tarde, había perdido ya la cobardía' (17)] implying that through the process of writing the narrator has at last found the courage to express how much his city, and the woman he left there, mean to him.

For Australian Spanish-speakers reading 'Lo que no fuimos', its evocation of a home, a love and a world left behind, clearly resonated at the time of the story's writing. Fernández had migrated from Uruguay to Australia in 1978. The city of the narrative is not explicitly

identified; there are no street names or references to buildings or landmarks; the city could be in any Spanish-speaking country, allowing readers to superimpose their own pasts and experiences of migration upon the narrative. With one exception: as the narrator describes the nights prior to his departure he mentions going from nightclub to nightclub and uses the expression ‘de boliche en boliche’ (15), a term particular to *rioplatense*, or Spanish from the Rio de la Plata area of Uruguay and Argentina. Hispanic Australian readers of the story would have been well-aware of the author’s national origin, as by the time he wrote this story Fernández was gaining a reputation as a writer of quality prose. ‘Lo que no fuimos’ was submitted in 1990 to a literary competition organised by the cultural association ‘La Peña’ in Sydney, where it won first prize; since then it has been republished a number of times. It first appeared in the Spanish-language literary magazine *Actas* in 1991; it was included in Fernández’s collection of short stories *Querido Juan dos puntos* [Dear Juan colon], published in Sydney in 1993; ten years later it appeared online in the Sydney-based Spanish-language e-publication *Hontanar*; and in 2008 it was included in the author’s collection of short stories *El contestador australiano y otros cuentos* [The Australian answering machine], published in Montevideo. Several of the other stories in *El contestador australiano* have similar publication histories, circulating widely among Australian Spanish-language readerships and then reappearing in the Uruguayan book.

For Australians who do not speak or read Spanish, the literary world just described may seem foreign, even unknown. Yet for decades Spanish-language writing has thrived in Australia; some of it nostalgic, and some of it, like ‘Lo que no fuimos’, critiquing nostalgia. Serious, playful, humorous, diverse, Australia’s Spanish-language writing is a significant body of literature that deserves greater recognition and scrutiny. As Australian writing in Greek or Italian or Chinese has attracted a body of critical writing over the years, both in those languages and in English, so too should Australian writing in Spanish be acknowledged for its production and circulation within the nation as well as outward to the Spanish-speaking world (Jacklin ‘Desde Australia’). In this article I would like to discuss aspects of the literary infrastructure in Spanish in Australia that have supported the publication of fiction within this migrant community and then turn to two more stories from *El contestador australiano* to demonstrate the transnational dimensions of Australian Spanish-language writing.

To briefly sketch the background to Spanish-language writing in Australia, the earliest work can be dated to the mid-nineteenth century, when Galician-born Rosendo Salvado came

to Western Australia and eventually became Abbot of the New Norcia Benedictine Mission north of Perth, where he lived for nearly half a century and wrote diaries in Spanish (Esposto; Zivancevic). Salvado's memoir, an account of his first years in WA, was published in Italian in 1851 and translated into Spanish in 1853. Although widely read in Europe at the time, it was not translated into English or published in Australia until 1977.

Latin American presence in Australia dates from 1837, when Ramón Friere, who had been President of Chile in 1827 before being ousted by a military coup and sent into exile, visited the colonies and stayed for more than a year (Del Río 169). The Victorian gold rush of the 1850s brought a small number of Latin American migrants who stayed on in Australia, numbering approximately 500 by the 1890s (Del Río 170-171). However, to this author's knowledge, no writing has yet surfaced from this group of South American migrants.

Small scale migration from Spain was also occurring in the latter decades of the 1800s, with groups of Spaniards settling in Melbourne where they worked in hotels and restaurants; in far north Queensland, where they found work in the sugar cane industry; and in Western Australia, where they took up farming (Torrent). Little writing in Spanish from these early communities has been traced, with the one important exception being the work of Salvador Torrents, a Catalan migrant who published prolifically in Spanish-language anarchist periodicals in Spain and New York, beginning in the 1920s and continuing until just before his death in 1952 (Keene; Mason; Seaton).

The first writing in Spanish to be published in Australia resulted from the wave of Spanish migration which occurred between 1958 and 1963. *Operación Canguro* was a joint Spanish and Australian government supported scheme which brought out workers to participate in labour-intensive sectors of the Australian economy (García, *Operación Canguro*). Nearly 8,000 Spanish migrants arrived as part of this scheme and along with the cohort of labourers came a number of journalists who established in the mid-1960s the first Spanish-language newspapers in Australia, *La Crónica* in Melbourne and *El Español en Australia* in Sydney. It is from this point that creative writing in Spanish in Australia was established as these newspapers provided a weekly space not only for reporting of news and current events but also for poetry and short stories (García, 'La Crónica').

The third wave of migration from Spanish-speaking countries began in the 1970s and continued through the 1980s, as political violence escalated in Latin America forcing thousands to seek asylum overseas. Australia took significant numbers of refugees from

Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, and later from El Salvador. To give an impression of the rate of escalation of migration from Latin America, according to García, from 6,000 Latin Americans living in Australia in 1971, the number rose to 43,000 by 1981 ('Memorias' 109). Latin American migration has continued through the 1990s and into this century, though it has been dominated by those arriving with student visas, or those coming under the Skilled Migration Plan and Family Reunion Plan (Del Río 174-175). Today there are more than 110,000 Australians speaking Spanish at home and, for more than four decades now, this linguistic community has supported an active writing culture through its newspapers, magazines, writing groups and literary competitions and it has produced over 200 book-length publications.

Fernández was one of the many Spanish-speakers coming to Australia from Latin America in the 1970s. He had studied medicine in Uruguay and had qualified to teach high school Biology (Vaz). During his adolescence his mother's dictatorial control within the family home ['una "dictadura puertas adentro", en su propio hogar, liderada por una madre "un poquito esquizoide"'] resulted in his spending most of his time in the streets, and later, when his country too fell into dictatorship, he was motivated, at 24 years of age, to put as much distance as possible between himself and an Uruguay that had become inhospitable ['Motivo suficiente para poner toda la distancia posible entre él y un Uruguay que se había vuelto demasiado inhóspito'] (Vaz). In Australia, he first found work as a cleaner, a construction labourer and a musician playing harp. He had learned the Paraguayan harp as a child and later, living in Melbourne, he found that his musical skill could provide him with some income. By the early 1980s he was employed as a journalist and radio announcer in Spanish, working for SBS Spanish-language programming. He would eventually become executive producer for SBS Spanish, retiring in 2011 after 28 years with that organisation. Now, in 2015, Fernández has relocated to live in Montevideo, though he returns to visit Australia periodically. It is worth emphasising that the Sydney in which Fernández worked is a city of many languages, one in which it is not uncommon for adult migrants to continue to live predominantly in their language of origin, despite the use of English in the workplace. Fernández was able to maintain his first language even in his employment and in his 2009 interview with the Uruguayan newspaper *El País* Fernández remarked on how, after more than 30 years in Australia, he continued to live and think in Spanish, although he speaks English fluently. This ability to conduct both his personal and professional life in his first language has been due in no small part to the vitality of cultural production within the

Spanish-speaking migrant communities in Sydney, including not only radio programming, but also its newspapers, magazines and social clubs.

When Fernández first arrived in Australia, Sydney's Spanish literary scene was well-established. The Spanish Club in Sydney had been operating since 1961 and had held literary competitions since 1968. Mari Paz Moreno [who also writes as Mari Paz Ovidi], a migrant from Spain and a contributor to Sydney's Spanish-language writing scene for decades, notes in her autobiography that these literary competitions were 'the starting point of all the literary activity that is taking place today within the Spanish-speaking community in Australia' (45). The competitions attracted numerous submissions every year and Ignacio García's compilation *Concurso literario Club Español de Sydney 1968-1996* [Sydney's Spanish Club's Literary Competition 1968-1996] assembles over one hundred winning works from nearly three decades of literary activity. These annual literary competitions were promoted in the Spanish-language press, which often published the winning entries, thus assisting this local writing in Spanish to reach the increasing population of Hispanic migrants. By the late 1970s, the first of Sydney's Spanish-language magazines, *Vistazo* and *Versión*, were in circulation with others soon to follow in the 1980s. From the mid-1980s, Fernández became involved in this literary activity; his story 'Muy tarde' [Very late] won third prize in the Spanish Club's literary competition in 1986 and 'Asi no' [Not like that] won second prize in 1990. His story 'El contestador' won first prize in 1993 and was published that year in the newspaper *El Español en Australia*. 'Asi no', along with 'Lo que no fuimos', were published in *Actas*, which had as the magazine's subtitle 'Revista de las artes y la cultura de la comunidad de habla hispana en Australia' [Magazine of arts and culture of the Spanish-speaking community of Australia]. This magazine was short-lived, publishing for only three issues, but each of these carried short stories and poetry by local writers, and as *Actas* folded other Spanish-language magazines in Sydney started up. By the early 1990s, Spanish-language writing in Australia was well-established, with many dozens of writers whose work appeared regularly across a variety of publications (Jacklin 'Desde Australia').

When, in 1993, Fernández had enough material to publish a book a short stories, he was fortunate to receive funding from the Australia Council for the Arts and the collection *Querido Juan dos puntos* was published by Cervantes Publishing, a Sydney-based company established by another Uruguayan immigrant, Michael Gamarra, who saw that the Spanish speaking community needed a local publisher to bring to print the literary work being produced here. Gamarra was also the editor of one of the magazines mentioned above,

*Versión*, and was a writer of short stories and *crónicas* and was, like Fernández, very much a producer of creative writing within this growing literary culture. In his book *Tres décadas de la emigración uruguaya en Australia (volumen II)* (2008) [Three decades of Uruguayan emigration to Australia (volume II)], Gamarra explains that the support received from the Australia Council to publish Fernández's stories was an acknowledgement of the quality of his work, as had already been recognised by the prizes gained through the literary competitions cited above (111-113). This recognition from the Australia Council was no small feat, as the support it has offered over the years to writing in languages other than English has been limited.

When *Querido Juan dos puntos* was published, it was given substantial coverage in the Spanish-language press in Sydney, receiving newspaper and magazine reviews and with Fernández featured on the cover of one of these magazines, *30 Días*. *Querido Juan dos puntos* was not the first book-length publication in Spanish in Australia – there had been more than twenty other books published here by then – but a number of factors combined to bring this collection more attention than previous Spanish-language works had received. First was Fernández's public profile as a journalist with SBS, making him well-known to most of Sydney's Spanish speakers, as well as to the editors of the Spanish-language press. Second, the early 1990s was the peak period for Spanish-language writing in Sydney, with a sizeable Spanish-reading population, a vibrant and growing infrastructure, and for a brief period access to government support for migrant and community language projects. The Australia Council funding which *Querido Juan dos puntos* received illustrates the apparent mainstream interest at this time in Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity.

Perhaps due in some measure to the coverage his book received, Fernández was awarded in 1996 an Australia Council fellowship to write a novel focussing on Australia's Spanish-speaking community and issues of migration and cosmopolitanism. Fernández lived for a year in Costa Rica writing the manuscript for this work but the novel was never completed. In the interview with *El País* previously mentioned, Fernández indicated he was still working on it and hoped that it would one day be published (Vaz). This *El País* interview was to promote the revised version of *Querido Juan dos puntos*, now titled *El contestador australiano y otros cuentos* and published in Montevideo by del Sur Ediciones. Of the eighteen stories in *Querido Juan dos puntos*, sixteen re-appear in *El contestador australiano*, along with four new stories that did not appear in the earlier volume. This new publication in Uruguay of stories written in Australia, some with explicit Australian settings and characters,

others with Uruguayan or Latin American settings, provides a strong basis for reading Fernández's work as transnational literary production.

The term transnational, of course, is burdened with a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. Stephen Clingman in *The Grammar of Identity* (2009) suggests, and then discounts as restrictive, the view that 'transnational fiction is written by, and directed towards, migrant and multilingual communities, who exist in multiple and in-between spaces' (8). Clingman, like many others arguing in favour of a transnational perspective, focuses a good deal of his attention on canonical writers such as Joseph Conrad, Salman Rushdie and J. M. Coetzee, whose work – while clearly exceeding the category of the national – is rarely read under the limiting label of 'migrant writing'. Although I agree with Clingman that the transnational is a broad field – and he cites Wai Chee Dimock to claim that perhaps '*all* writing has an element of the "transnational"' (8) – I want to argue for the particular and even obvious transnational dimensions presented by migrant writing such as that found in *El contestador australiano*. In an earlier publication, I suggested that the turn of attention in Australian literary criticism to the analytical category of the transnational should not limit itself to canonical works (of predominantly Anglo-Celtic authors) but look as well to multicultural and multilingual writing for complex understandings of the transnational dimensions of Australian culture (Jacklin 'Transnational Turn'). By definition, migrant literature is writing that, in its production, has already crossed national boundaries and, in its narratives, often challenges assumptions that continue to associate imagined communities and identities with national formations *and* geographic boundaries. With the focus in this article on writing produced by a migrant community, of particular interest is the potential for these texts to demonstrate how national identity may be complicated by issues of language and cultural heritage. They also raise the question of whether a national literature – Australian literature – is limited to works in English. Because these texts are written in Spanish, they appear foreign and inaccessible to most Australians. And yet, I would argue, they are both Latin American *and* Australian writing.

When Vilashini Cooppan asserts that 'the world beyond the border, the cultural other outside the compact – is in fact always already inside, always already present in the very movement and process of national formation' (cited in Dixon and Rooney, xxi), it is reasonable, I argue, to examine migrant literature as a cultural practice that is beyond while also within the nation. Migrant writing may comprise any number of the many worlds within the nation to which Cooppan directs our focus when she writes of a 'national territory that

furthermore understands itself never to have never been purely itself, purely national, but instead as always constituted, in both its imperial and anti-imperial modes, through a co-constitutive relationship with some internal and external other' (18). Spanish-language writing in Australia, from the nineteenth-century diaries of a Galician-born Benedictine Abbot, to the early-twentieth-century *crónicas* of a Catalan anarchist, to the late-twentieth-century short stories of a writer whose life has moved from Uruguay to Australia and back again, all contribute to the flows of writing through which readers across the globe have encountered something of day-to-day life in Australia.

The two collections of short stories *Querido Juan dos puntos* and *El contestador australiano*, with the first published in Sydney and the second in Montevideo, demonstrate the beyond and within operation that characterises so much of Australian writing in languages other than English. The title story of the second edition, “El contestador australiano”, appears in the earlier collection simply as “El contestador” [The answering machine]; thus, we notice immediately that the ‘Australian-ness’ is highlighted in the Uruguayan publication, while it goes unremarked in the title of the earlier Sydney publication. Although there are slight variations in the two versions of the story, the setting is explicitly identified in both, as the central character recalls shouting to his parents, ten years earlier, ‘¡Estamos en Australia, *for fuck’s sake!* Allá ustedes con sus benditas historias de política, de presos torturados y de palos. ¡Me tienen hasta acá! Si el Flaco quiere pudrirse soldando en un taller, allá él. Yo voy a ser policía, porque eso es lo único que quiero ser’ (Fernández, *El contestador australiano* 7, English italicised in original). [We’re in Australia, for fuck’s sake. There you go with your bloody politics and prisoners and torture; I’ve had it up to here! If Flaco wants to rot in a welding shop, fine for him. I’m going to be a policeman because that’s the only thing I want to be.] As the quote demonstrates, while the story is written in Spanish, it incorporates English phrases and sentences, with the main character, Walter, switching between the two languages. The opening sentence establishes that Walter has been in Australia so long and has spoken Spanish so infrequently that he would have an accent now even when he thought in that language [‘Tendría que escribirles – reflexionó esa mañana, en español. Lo practicaba tan poco que a estas alturas tendría acento hasta al pensar, se rió interiormente’ (7)]. And yet, almost all his thoughts appear on the page in Spanish, giving the impression that he *is* thinking in that language. A moment later, though, as he is drinking his morning coffee, he burns his mouth and swears, this time in English, though relayed in free indirect discourse in Spanish. [Se quemó la boca con el café y puteó, esta vez

en voz alta y en inglés' (7)]. The migrant's complex relationship with his first language and with the English of the majority culture is thus highlighted from the opening page of the story.

Code-switching continues throughout the narrative, as the voices on the answering machine that Walter, who has become a policeman, listens to while attending a potential crime scene, switch between the Spanish and English. The first voice on the machine says: 'Raúl, soy yo. Por favour llámame que es urgente' [Raul, it's me. Please call me, it's urgent] (9). An English speaking voice a page later says, '*Raoul, this is David Horton. We are a bit short of staff, mate. If you're sick or something, please let us know. Hope it's nothing serious. Bye*' (10, English italicised in original). Other voices leave messages in Spanish for Flaco, with varying degrees of familiar address, and the reader gradually realises that Raúl, or Flaco, the owner of the answering machine, is the same Flaco that Walter said could go rot in a welding shop, and we realise that, bizarrely, Walter has been called on police duty to the scene of his estranged brother's death. The story ends with Walter picking up Raúl's phone, calling their mother and struggling to speak to her, ultimately unable though to tell her that Raúl is dead. Instead he promises her that he'll visit soon.

The story, then, offers two migrant experiences: Walter has rejected the weight of the political past experienced by many from South America. At one point he uses the term 'los sudacas' (8), a derogatory expression used in Spain for South American migrants and which sounds even more negative within Walter's thoughts, as he remembers how South American migrants in Australia looked at him in his police uniform. And he criticises those who make no effort to adapt, who pretend that their new country will conform to them. ['Pretenden que el país se amolde a ellos'] (7). His brother Raúl, we learn from the messages on the answering machine, is separated from his wife, and is struggling financially; he has a number of Spanish-speaking friends who ring, invite him to barbeques, asking if he is well and expressing concern for him, but his body is in the flat for eight to ten days before a neighbour notices the smell and the police are called. There is a disjunction between the familiarity and affection of the messages in Spanish, in which Raúl is called 'compadre,' 'chaval' and 'Che', and the lonely, isolated death he experiences. It is difficult to say whether the story is commenting on the possible superficiality of the compatriotism and familiarity conveyed in the messages, or whether it is a criticism of the surviving brother, who listens to the affection in the messages for Raúl and feels acutely his own isolation. From either perspective, it is a poignant representation of a Spanish-speaking world within the English speaking nation.

The story 'Como por arte de magia' [As if by magic] appears only in the more recent Uruguayan-published collection, and it too portrays something of the dilemmas of living between cultures and languages, albeit with a lighter touch. The central character of this story is a young man named Carlos Romualdo Garmendia who lives in Fairfield in western Sydney and works at his parents' video rental shop. He is bored with work, and bored with going to Saturday Spanish classes. As a one-point-five generation Colombian-Australian, he speaks Spanish as well as anyone he knows, although his accent is mixed, as the narrative tells us, between the Spanish of his parents and that which he has acquired in the back seat of a Holden, and both are mixed with bits of English ['aunque mezclaba el acento de sus padres con el otro, adquirido en el asiento trasero del Holden, y ambos aún, con retazos de inglés repartidos cada tanto, como para no dar demasiado el brazo a torcer' (90)]. A page further in the story, Carlos's mother reflects that her son speaks Spanish more like a 'rioplatense' than a 'colombiano' (91), due no doubt to his Uruguayan-Australian girlfriend, Margarita (his companion, presumably, in the back seat of the Holden). The story proceeds through a set of coincidences, involving a video of Margarita's parents' recent trip to Montevideo, which lead to young Carlos becoming obsessed with the Argentinean, and perhaps Uruguayan, tango singer and composer Carlos Gardel, and eventually believing that he is a reincarnation of this foundational figure of the tango. There is a neat twist in having the Carlos of the story fixated on Carlos Gardel, as Gardel too was a child migrant and, arguably, a transnational subject. Versions of Gardel's origins vary, with some claiming he arrived in Argentina as a two-year-old with his mother Berthe Gardes from France. Later in life, Gardel was to claim Uruguayan birth, although Argentines dispute this (Payssé González). There is no dispute, however, that Gardel died in a plane crash in Colombia in 1935. Interestingly, and probably not coincidentally, the Carlos of the story 'Como por arte de magia' was born in Colombia and arrived in Australia as a two-year-old but, after seeing the video taken by his girlfriend's parents in Montevideo, is flooded with memories of having lived in Uruguay, where he has never been. Indeed, the narrative makes the point that the nightclubs of Montevideo which Carlos remembers no longer exist, even in the memories of those still living in that city ['poseído de una memoria ajena y sorprendente, dando detalles de boliches que ya no eran, que ni siquiera existían en la tenaz memoria de los montevidEOS vivos' (92)].

The story is a humorous critique of inherited nostalgia, or 'postmemory' (Hirsch), or what Susanne Wessendorf terms 'second generation transnationalism' in which children of migrants experience a longing and, in many cases, act upon that longing, to relocate to a

home country they have never known. In 'Como por arte de magia', Carlos dreams not of a spatial relocation, but of a psychological and physical morphing – he spends hours in front of the mirror combing his hair with gel to fashion himself after this archetypal figure of Argentinean and Uruguayan culture and talks of nothing by Gardel and his tangos, until he becomes such an embarrassment to their friends in western Sydney that Margarita convinces him to see a psychologist. While taking a humorous approach, the issue of one-point-five or second generation longing for cultural re-connection with a homeland never known is a global phenomenon and its representation played out in this story set in Fairfield may be recognised by Spanish-language readers as both comic and perhaps painfully true. It is another example of a transnational reality within, and simultaneously beyond, the bounds of the nation. Moreover, the emphasis here on the power of fantasy fits with Cooppan's thoughts on the connections between the nation and 'fantasy's topology, in which there is no clear before and after, inside and outside' (24). The Carlitos of this story continues to live in western Sydney, but his subjectivity reflects, and his physical self comes to embody, attributes drawn from well beyond the nation.

These two stories above have a particular and explicit Australian setting. Many of the other stories in *El contestador australiano y otros cuentos* resemble 'Lo que no fuimos' in their lack of specificities of place, except that which is marked by language. Michael Gamarra has commented that, in reading these stories, anyone familiar with the language of Uruguay may be relocated imaginatively in the geographic particularities of the region through the exactness of the language of *rioplatense* more than anything ['sin que se lo mencione específicamente, el espacio geográfico es el típico rioplatense. Los modismos, las frases, los diálogos, ubican de inmediato al lector en aquel ambiente ciudadano' (112)]. The specifics of place through language are important to bear in mind as one considers the representations of the many other worlds found within the Australian nation.

Spanish-language writing produced in Australia offers a diverse field of cultural production that is strikingly, conspicuously, transnational. Its practitioners and the literary infrastructure that has supported this writing for more than four decades have connections with Spain, with Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, with Mexico, El Salvador and Colombia. This diversity of origins, however, should not be collapsed into a pan-Hispanic migrant community. Fernández has been quoted as saying: 'We don't have a Spanish-speaking community. That's something in the mind of some Australian guy who doesn't speak Spanish, but certainly not in our mind' (Ang et al. 33). Fernández, here, is drawing attention

to the differences and, at times, conflicts that can exist between, for example, Spanish and South American migrants, or, between those from South and Central America. If the body of texts that I am concerned with – those written by Spanish speakers in Australia – is to be read as transnational, as relevant, interesting and integral to Australian literature while at the same time comprised of, or pointing to, other national inflections and connections, then obviously the particularities of these transnational texts – their differences as well as their complex intersections – deserve our attention. Australian literature will be richer for their inclusion.

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