DER TRAUM VOM MOULIN ROUGE:

TRANSMATIONAL LITERATURE AND WORDS IN FLIGHT

SABINA HOPFER

Presented as part of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English, University of Adelaide

South Australia

October 2004
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... 3

Signed Statement ......................................................................................................... 4

Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... 5

Der Traum vom Moulin Rouge: Transnational Literature and Words in Flight ......... 6

Works Cited ................................................................................................................. 71

Bibliography ................................................................................................................. 77
This thesis consists of two components, a creative and a critical. The major, creative component, *Soulträume*, is a novel that explores the psychological journeys of Zara, a Swiss migrant, and her Australian-born Lebanese partner, Doug. Travelling to Alice Springs to visit a friend, they are forced to question their identity and sense of belonging after an incident on the road. The novel incorporates ten bilingual passages that mix and switch between English and German. Juxtaposed with photos of Australian landscapes, they represent the linguistic conflicts and sense of displacement experienced by Zara.

*Der Traum vom Moulin Rouge*, the shorter, critical component, is an essay that discusses *Soulträume* within the field of transnational and interlingual literature, looking at the use of literary code switching and code mixing as a narrative device in the Australian novel. German passages are interspersed with the English text to support the interlingual and cross-cultural theme of the essay.
Both components of this thesis contain no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

8 October 2004
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all the people without whose help this work would not have been possible: my supervisor, Professor Thomas Shapcott from the University of Adelaide, for his patience, inspiration and continuous support over the past three years; my mentor, Dr Dominique Hecq from the University of Melbourne, for her much appreciated help with the novel; Dr Lee Kersten from the University of Adelaide for her informed reading of the essay and her insightful comments; Alex Kasman from the College of South Carolina for assisting me with the mathematical aspects covered in the novel; Jennifer Thompson and Eileen Moseley from Alice Springs for their time and assistance with those parts of the novel that refer to Indigenous Australian people and their culture; Wendy and Ian Mann for creating an opportunity for me to stay at their house while researching in Alice Springs; Anne-Marie Tapplin for ploughing through the first draft of the novel and giving me valuable feedback; James Roberts for proofreading the essay; my partner Christopher Lappas for his continuous emotional support and for being a wonderful reader and critic; and last but not least my family and all my friends for being extremely understanding and supportive throughout the whole project.

The Arnika story in the last chapter of the novel is my own English adaptation of “Wi d’Arnika zu ihrem Namen isch cho”, a story out of Zwärgegeschichte, a collection of Swiss stories by Jakob Streit.

Photo collection in the novel: Photos No. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 Copyright © Sabina Hopfer; Photos No. 3, 10 Copyright © Christopher Lappas; Photo No. 5 purchased in 2002 at an auction, photographer unknown. All digital enhancements by Sabina Hopfer.
**DER TRAUM VOM MOULIN ROUGE:**

**TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE AND WORDS IN FLIGHT**

In unserem Zeitalter, das durchtränkt ist von Lärm und Grellheit, sind nur wenige Menschen bereit, stillzustehen und Geschichten zuzuhören. Doch zuhören, wem überhaupt? Und wo sollen wir denn hinhören?

Ich will eine Geschichte erzählen, so wie Moulin Rouge sie jeden Tag erzählt, oder Ilija Trojanow in Die Welt ist gross und Rettung lauert überall. Doch wie gross ist sie denn noch, diese Welt? Sie ist klein geworden und verspricht nur noch wenig Rettung – Rettung vor dem Ertrinken in einem Informationenmeer. Aber retten, wen überhaupt? Euch, mich, uns, die wir pausenlos und ziellos umherwandern, bis der Tag zu Ende geht und wieder ein neuer beginnt?

Die Technologie ist zu unserem Lebensinhalt geworden. Das Internet spielt die Mutter, zu der alle Kinder gehören. Die Mutter, die jegliches Wissen und jegliche Weisheit in sich trägt. Die Mutter, die tausend Geschichten erzählt.

Wir glauben noch immer an einen alten Traum, den Traum der Leidenschaft. Vielleicht packen wir unsere Sachen einmal mehr und wandern aus ins Traumland Moulin Rouge. So wie die Migranten in Trojanows Roman davon träumen, in einen Film auszuwandern: "Der ganze Saal träumte davon, in den Film auszuwandern" (23). Das ist schön gesagt.


Moulin Rouge ist Lärm, der Vergessen und Glaube verspricht; es will Zauber sein, die Zuckerglasur auf dem bereits schimmelig gewordenen und vertrockneten Kuchen.


Die Uhr hier in dieser Universitätsbibliothek zeigt 17.25 Uhr; draussen wird es allmählich dunkel, der blaue Himmel will schlafen gehen, die Strassen möchten das Laub zum Tanzen aufwecken, und einige Ecken weiter treibt es den Poeten, den Singenden, in ein italienisches Kaffeehaus. Bevor er die Schwelle überschreiten, einen Café latte bestellen und seine kalten Hände daran aufwärmen kann, fangen ihn zwei dunkelbraune Augen, die den warmen Regen solange gesucht haben, wie es dauert, diese kleine Welt zu umreisen; Augen, die sich aus Erschöpfung in diesem kleinen Kaffeehaus eingesehen haben, wissend glaubend, dass der Traum vom warmen Regen als Illusion am Ende sterben muss.

Mittlerweile ist es 17.35 Uhr; einige andere einsame Wanderer, Lesende, Schreibende, Erkennnis Suchende haben sich zu mir gesellt, in dieser silent study area, die nicht mir gehört, die niemandem gehört, auch dem Lärm nicht, der in Form von Handies draussen bleiben muss, wo nun kein blauer Himmel mehr zu sehen ist, nur schwarze Dunkelheit, die die Erweiterung dieses Raumes ermöglicht. Und plötzlich gibt es von jedem von uns Einsamen einen zweiten da draussen, gespiegelt an einer Schicht Glas, das erst erzittern wird, wenn warmer Regen das Draussen in eine Impression des Augenblicks verwandelt.
17.50 Uhr lässt keinen grossen Spielraum mehr zu für das Übersetzen von federleichten Ahnungen, Wünschen, Sehnsüchten, die kreuz und quer in meinem Inneren, dort wo ein Herz sich niedergelassen hat, ein Netz von stürmischen Signalen weben. Zeichen von Rastlosigkeit und Ungeduld.

Jetzt ist es 18.00 Uhr geworden und ich könnte beginnen mit dem Schreiben von Geschichten, aber noch muss ich warten wie Alex in Trojanows Roman; warten auf Bai Dans Tandem, das mich mitnehmen wird in die Ferne. ¹ Also sitze ich da und versuche vor dem Hintergrund des Rauschens der Lüftungsanlage etwas zu kreieren, das Bedeutung verspricht, das Moulin Rouge neu erschafft, das Rettung bringt.

Es gibt Menschen, die sagen, im Warten lägen Geheimnisse verborgen, träfen sich die Träume aller Wanderer, aller Reisenden, derjenigen, die mit weit geöffneten Augen und freier Nase auf den warmen Regen horchen. Doch werde ich ihn überhaupt erkennen, wenn er kommt, Bai Dan auf seinem Tandem?

*

A writer who lives and writes in Australia yet starts an essay in a language other than English runs an enormous risk of losing readers before she has even had a chance to catch their attention. However, life in the end is all about taking risks, and somehow this writer is confident enough to believe that some readers will accompany her on her journey, unconcerned, perhaps even elated about the fact that they are not given a translation of the German text at this stage.

Further on in this essay, I will translate for my readers, not because I believe that every foreign text should be translated into the national language, quite the contrary: I wish

¹ Alex, the main protagonist and narrator of Trojanow’s novel *Die Welt ist groß und lauert überall*, leads a depressed and disillusioned life in Germany, where he has been living since he fled the Balkan with his family as a child. His outlook on life changes when his 99-year old godfather, Bai Dan, appears out of nowhere and invites him to a tandem ride around the world.
to make a point in favour of transnational and interlingual literature and discuss the problems literary translation may pose for multilingual writers.

But for now, why a dream of Moulin Rouge? Perhaps a metaphor helps the writer to stimulate the reader’s mind, making it wander. I invoke Moulin Rouge as a metaphor for a foreign new world, one full of passion and pain, a world in which these two emotions are the driving force behind the motivation to live, breathe and feel. The creation of a home outside one’s home. A world we dream of, yet one in which we are meant to flirt with the unknown, with homelessness, with taking risks and creating gaps that may bring pain – the pain of waking up to differences, untranslatability, to the mysterious, the uncontrollable. “Flirtation ... is for unsettling positions, for reinvention. It is not for commitment or possession. It provides constant desire by frustrating ‘knowability’ and the safe harbours of unquestioned loyalty” (Castro 241). Let us then call Moulin Rouge a home, yet not a home, a place perhaps where we encounter, as Castro does in the province of the novel, “that melancholic activity which finally creates a space for seduction, scepticism and ultimately, death” (252).

* 

ZARA, A PHOTOGRAPHER in her mid-thirties, of Swiss-Austrian parents, leaves Switzerland because she feels that her passion to create is stifled. She moves to Australia on an offer made to her by an Australian-based Swiss insurance company, to work for them as a secretary and in-house photographer. (The irony of the Swiss being obsessed with security, emphasised by Swiss insurance companies reaching to the opposite side of the world and enabling Swiss citizens to set foot in Australia, is evident.)
From a falsely secure 'Enge', built on concrete and threatening to crush her soul, Zara plunges into the open space of Australia, a country that harbours the danger of too wide a vastness for her to cope with. For three years she drifts aimlessly at the side of an Australian-born Lebanese man, a lecturer in mathematics, until she takes him for a holiday to Alice Springs to visit her friend Charlie. This is where Soulträume begins.

* 

Unlike Zara in Soulträume, Eva Hoffman in her memoir Lost in Translation didn't leave Poland on her own terms, on the whim of a mood and out of frustration for the country she grew up in. When her family left, she was thirteen years old, too young for such a decision to be her own. Hoffman had no choice but to follow her parents, who decided to leave Poland, like thousands of other Jews, after the Polish government had lifted the ban on emigration for Jews. The Hoffmans arrived in Canada with no word of English, thrown into alienation without any warning.

Lost in Translation is Hoffman’s story of the struggles of migration, sketched in minute detail, from her childhood in Poland to her adult life in America. Hoffman delves into every corner of her psyche to come to terms with the second Eva she started to become after migrating. The trauma of migration is rendered in one account, in one book, in one story.

A trauma that, according to Lewis and Jungman in their study of culture shock in short fictions, can be divided into six phases, which they outline as a graph of emotional intensity, based on a model created by social scientists in the 1960s (xviii). The experience of being foreign starts with a Preliminary Phase (preparations before leaving home country) and is then followed by a Spectator Phase (first impressions of the new country), Increasing
Participation Phase (more active role in the new country), Shock Phase (crisis of personality, identity, leading to depression and feelings of being lost between two cultures) and ends with the Adaptation Phase (end point of feeling foreign and lost), which in some cases is followed by a Re-entry Phase (return to home country).

Even though most accounts of migration, such as Hoffman’s, deal with these six phases in more or less detail, Lewis and Jungman’s theory that migration ends with the process of assimilation/integration is not necessarily shared by other, more recent critics. Benmayor and Skotnes, for instance, in their study on migration and identity, maintain that migration is not “a single movement and a single moment in time”, but much rather “a

---

2 Examples of Lewis and Jungman’s six phases in Hoffman’s Lost in Translation:

1) The first part, titled ‘Paradise’, in which Hoffman sketches her childhood to the point of leaving Poland, deals entirely with Lewis & Jungman’s Preliminary Phase, “which is generally marked by a rising sense of anticipation tempered by, or alternating with, regret at leaving” (xvii).

2) The Spectator Phase, in which the foreigner is a largely passive, but alert spectator, can be traced in the second part of Hoffman’s book, titled ‘Exile’, where Eva is to a large extent mute, due to her lack of English: “As the evening continues, I recede further and begin watching the proceedings as if I were an anthropologist of the highly detached nonparticipant variety. I decide that my role in life is to be an ‘observer’ - making a poor virtue out of the reality that I feel so very out of it” (131).

3) The Increasing Participation Phase, during which the person begins to engage in those areas of the culture that they find interesting, is also accounted for in Hoffman: “In uneventful Vancouver, I’m enough of a curiosity that I too enjoy the fifteen minutes of fame.... The local newspaper takes me up as a sort of pet, printing my picture when I give a concert at the Jewish Community Center and soliciting my views when I come back from a bus trip to the United Nations, on which I’ve been sent after winning a speech contest” (133).

4) The Shock Phase is marked by severe identity crisis. “It is as though the sojourner’s awareness of the ability to function well in the host culture has triggered an awareness of the completeness of separation from the home culture. It is at this stage that all life can seem artificial and pointless” (Lewis and Jungman, xix). The person feels lonely and finds it difficult to communicate their feelings to others. “Because I’m not heard, I feel I’m not seen. My words often seem to baffle others. They are inappropriate, or forced, or just plain incomprehensible. People look at me with puzzlement; they mumble something in response – something that doesn’t hit home.... What do I look like, here? Imperceptible, I think; impalpable, neutral, faceless” (Hoffman 147).

5) The Adaptation Phase is marked by feelings of belonging, by a wish to be accepted by the host country, and by “a sense of shared fate concerning current events in the host country” (Brislin, qtd. in Lewis & Jungman xxii). In the third part of Hoffman’s book, titled ‘The New World’, she tells us that “This goddam place is my home now, and sometimes I’m taken aback by how comfortable I feel in its tart, overheated, insecure, well-meaning, expansive atmosphere. I know all the issues and all the codes here.... I know who is likely to think what about feminism and Nicaragua and psychoanalysis and Woody Allen.... It fits, and my surroundings fit me” (169-70).

6) The final stage, the Re-entry Phase, is marked by a ‘culture shock in reverse’ that the person returning to their homeland experiences. In Lost in Translation, Hoffman, while returning to Poland for a visit, falls ill with a “semi-hallucinatory high fever” (239) – a sign perhaps of her body reacting to the ‘culture shock in reverse’ that she experiences.
long-term if not life-long process of negotiating identity, difference, and the right to fully exist and flourish in the new context” (8).

This long-term negotiation of difference, which begins with physically arriving in a foreign country, is a result of our human need to find resemblances between the past and the present, the old and the new. As Paul Carter in Living in a New Country claims, “the very possibility of comparison implies a conceptual vocabulary that can be transported from one place to another”, and the novelty of the new country “resides not in its absolute strangeness but in its strange familiarity” (2). And this strange familiarity, according to Carter, causes “the property of selfhood [to fall] into doubt” (3).

* 


* 

Whether a person decides to emigrate of their own free will and become an expatriate, or whether they are forced to emigrate, becoming exiles, the psychological implications are much the same according to Lewis and Jungman, even though the former sets out with certain expectations and a drive to compensate for shortcomings in the home country,
while the latter may leave with feelings of confusion, homesickness and fear of what will come.

Expatriates, like Zara in *Soulräume*, were ready to leave a nest that had become too crowded and cold to live in, a home which was understood as a space of negative belonging; or to quote Renée Green, an artist, filmmaker and writer who lives in New York and Vienna: “The home place itself harbored elements of horror.... ‘Home’ doesn’t necessarily signify something that’s homey. It can be something quite terrifying, and I guess that’s related to the notion of the ‘Unheimliche’ (the uncanny)” (146-47).

The main character in Nicole Mones’ *Lost in Translation*, Alice Mannegan, also an expatriate, left America for China because she could no longer cope with her father, a small town politician, who endorses a white America policy that discriminates against foreigners. In China, the land of her dreams, Alice finds a new home of positive belonging by immersing herself fully in a culture alien yet fascinating to her, waiting to re-invent herself “because here in China the self could always be reinvented. She, too, could become someone else. Eventually. Or so she’d told herself all these years” (248).

Yet, even though Alice speaks Chinese fluently and is successful in making a living in China as a translator, it becomes evident towards the end of the book that she has been living inside a dream, escaping into an exotic, romantic idea of China, which is far removed from reality. Her Anglo-Celtic features will always give her away as the ‘other’ and distance her from the Chinese people and their culture. Lin, the “true Chinese man” she loves, at the end accuses her of being trapped in clichés:

---

3 Even though Mones’ novel carries the same title as Eva Hoffman’s memoir, Mones was not an exile like Hoffman, but rather an expatriate, who chose to live and work in China for several years. She still travels between China and America regularly.
"You say you care for China! Is this all you care for, this vanished miasma of – of paintings and poems? Of mandarins and" – he finished with chilly contempt – "women with bound feet?" ....

"You are who you are. An interpreter. An American woman who speaks Chinese. No more. Don’t you know what we say? You can move mountains and alter the course of rivers more easily than you can change a person’s nature!" (343-44)

Alice’s dream of re-inventing herself in a ‘new’ country finally clashes with reality when her father is dying, forcing her to wake up to her true self and return ‘home’ to America, to face who she really is – an American with an American past and a flimsy Chinese present. And so Alice’s dream of Moulin Rouge shatters when reality, in the form of death, enters.

Both Alice in Lost in Translation and Zara in Soulräume leave their father(land) to find a new mother(land). Alice lost her mother when she was still a child; Zara lost her mother symbolically, when her mother fully embraced Switzerland by becoming a Swiss citizen and selling all the property she owned in Austria.

For both Alice and Zara, America and Switzerland respectively are countries of negative belonging. Both feel embarrassed when asked about where they come from, and both try very hard to lose themselves within their ‘chosen’ countries.

Exiles, on the other hand, were forced out of their countries due to political upheaval, war, or censorship. Usually deeply attached to their countries, they feel deprived of their homeland, which they may come to see as a lost paradise. Eva Hoffman describes her native Cracow as such a paradise, which stands as a home evoking feelings of comfort, of ‘Heimlichkeit’ and positive belonging. Whereas expatriates may be blinded by a romantic idea of a new life in a new country, exiles may be prone to fall victim to nostalgia for their homeland.
Even though their motives for leaving are different, exiles and expatriates struggle alike with ‘old’ and ‘new’, ‘past’ and ‘present’, with their search for a new home, or their lamenting of a lost home. Both in the end have to come to terms with their double selves, their in-betweenness. Zara in Soulträume and Eva in Lost in Translation both become storytellers as a result of their experience of migration: Zara an oral storyteller of children’s stories, Eva a writer of books.

Yet, even though the experiences of migration may be very similar for both exiles and expatriates, for all émigrés in fact, some critics point to the danger of not clearly distinguishing between forced and chosen exile. Graham Huggan, postcolonial critic and lecturer in postcolonial studies at the University of Munich, explores the discrepancy between historical experiences of migration and the metaphorisation of migration. Referring to literary and cultural critic Caren Kaplan, Huggan notes that “travel metaphors – including those of migration – risk levelling out discrepant historical experiences, blurring the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary forms of movement, and at worst acting as an alibi for the privileges of a worldly cosmopolitan elite” (119). Theories of migration, Huggan concludes, “are a reminder that theories of displacement are always historically inflected, but equally, that the scattered histories of displaced and relocated peoples are also records of the metaphors they have used to justify their movements – and chart their quests” (126).

Ian Buruma, in an essay on the romance of exile, pursues a similar argument, looking critically at the notion of exile and its metaphorical use by modern intellectuals: “One way of creating more clarity in these matters is to separate metaphor from reality. ... We need to agree that the word ‘exile’ means banishment, not loneliness”. Buruma further argues that “exile is surely no fun” and that the ‘genuine outcasts’ are not fashionable figures; that
“they have nothing in common with the multicultural intellectuals whom we honor as the poets of postcolonial discourse.”

Buruma refers to Heinrich Heine, the German poet, as a typical example of the modern literary exile, who is “more precisely an expatriate, someone who has chosen to live his life away from his native country.” Living in exile provided Heine with a political distance and a freedom from censorship necessary for his critical reflections on his culture of origin. “Exile, in this sense, is not so much metaphorical as metaphysical; it gives meaning to a way of life” (Buruma).

Maria Tymoczko, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts, who specialises in medieval Irish literature and translation theories, makes a very similar statement in an essay entitled “Postcolonial writing and literary translation”:

Many post-colonial writers choose to live abroad, writing about their culture of origin from a vantage point of another nation, in part because of the ideological pressure and censure ... that they are subject to within their native framework. Joyce is an example of such a writer, and he was outspoken about the impossibility of writing freely about his culture from within Ireland, making explicit the necessity he saw of exile if he was to be an artist. (24)

Although Joyce would not usually be classified as a postcolonial writer, his case does show, however, that Tymoczko’s statement not only applies to postcolonial writers but also to many other writers who are exposed to censorship, Heine’s example included.

The motif of the exiled writer, albeit a much more bleak and tragic version, has been adopted by Chinese-Australian writer Ouyang Yu throughout his work, first appearing in his poetry collection Moon over Melbourne, particularly in a poem titled “Song for an Exile in Australia”: 

16
in a poemless season
in Australia
I read my poems of the past
like a stranger in hundreds of years
reading books left to him by his ancestors
I see thousands of lines
shoot past the edge of dreams
but my paralysed brain can't pull itself out of
the wheel-chair of imagination
like my decayed body
(14)

The image of a lost, confused, and dried up exiled poet foreshadows the central theme in Yu's second collection of poems, *Songs of the Last Chinese Poet*, an epic poem consisting of 97 stanzas/songs. It portrays the life of an exiled poet who juggles two cultures, two languages, translating between East and West, giving in to the West's supremacy at the end, his struggle with identity forever unresolved:

... i am more an archaeologist
of identities than of anything else
i mean that identity is something resembling the part of
history
you are keen on unearthing
when you get to the bottom of it you find
what is originally supposed to be this becomes that
my English is bad and I'm afraid that I do not explain
myself
let me put it another way
identity is a piece of tang
that serves only to show the existence of non-tang
if you get it out of the earth
forget about identities
i’m really not interested in archaeology and stuff like that
you can’t get a mayan an Egyptian a greek a roman an
indian a chinese
civilisation from the middle of australia
(12-13)

In Yu’s latest work, The Eastern Slope Chronicle, the motif of the exiled poet is again taken up, with the novel based on the ancient poet Su Dongpo, who was a political dissident and an exile in Eastern Slope for four years. To research Dongpo’s life, the narrator, Dao Zhuang, returns to Eastern Slope, which is also his own hometown. While trying to find material on Dongpo, Zhuang begins to identify with the poet:

Somewhere at the back of my mind, the vague idea came again that somehow I was this Eastern Slope Su who, after re-birth nine hundred years later, had the misfortune ... of having to be exiled to a country out at the edge of nowhere and mix up with aliens, and that I was only a corrupted version of Eastern Slope Su because I could not even write half a prose poem, not even one tenth as well, having to be content with passing on the knowledge of a language to a people only interested in its business side as a tool for vulgar communications, a language that he had brought to its pinnacle of refinement in his days, and had since been deteriorating to the degree of barbarism. (311-12)

With a narrator perceiving himself as a corrupted version of the ancient, successful exiled poet, Yu refers again to the image of a struggling and lost exiled poet, someone he
understands as a contemporary rather than an historical figure. More prominently than in
the narrator Zhuang, however, this contemporary exiled poet figures in the character
Warne, Zhuang’s roommate in Australia. Warne, a well-known poet in China before he
migrated to Australia to escape political alienation, is a migrant living on the margins of a
society, in which his life has no meaning.

Unlike in Heinrich Heine’s and James Joyce’s cases, the exiled poet’s life in Yu’s
works is not freed up by migration, but instead, migration leads him to confusion,
passivity, and a continuous struggle with his identity – a struggle which proves to be
harmful rather than fruitful for the poet’s writing self. As he is no longer capable of writing
powerful poetry and no longer successful in publishing his work, he stops writing
altogether, overwhelmed by the overpowering experience of alienation. In this respect,
Yu’s exiled poet suffers the fate of Buruma’s ‘genuine outcasts’.

Marc Robinson, even though drawing attention to a distinction between forced exile
and voluntary expatriation in his collection of texts on exile written by writers from
different countries and centuries, rests in general on “an elastic understanding of exile.....”
(xiii), which defines voluntary expatriation as an equally prevalent style of exile. He
maintains that “the meaning of exile expands as the terms denoting it proliferate, each label
suggesting a slightly different cause of displacement and response to its rigours. ... The
circumstances and styles in which natives devolve in exiles may differ widely, but the
dilemmas they confront are often the same for all displaced figures” (xiv).

Unlike Robinson, Buruma is convinced that “the choice to live in a metaphorical
exile is in fact already a form of privilege, something only people who face no real danger
can afford”. Expatriate intellectuals “might operate in the margins of a modern democratic
society, without political authority, but that does not make him an outlaw or an exile”.

19
El-Zein, a modern intellectual and lecturer in environmental engineering at the University of Sydney, who migrated from Lebanon to Australia, views migration just as such a privilege: “Migration as rebirth. Migration as a form of freedom. Migration as merit rather than birth. Migration as invigorating self-reflection and cultural enrichment, new bonds and new friends” (75). And this is not only true for men like El-Zein. Women may also perceive exile as a form of liberation; liberation, for instance, from patriarchal rules and stigmas that undermine female pursuit of knowledge and creativity. For such women exile may entail a positive change of self-exploration and a psychological as well as spiritual pilgrimage.

To spin the tale of migration as a privilege towards a conclusion, migrants become, like colonial settlers, usurpers of place (El-Zein 78). El-Zein argues that because migrants usurp place by recreating their lives and living quarters to reflect their emotional needs and personal stories, they are less entitled to sympathy from their host-country than they claim they deserve. “Whether I like it or not, every time I go through Redfern I am reminded that I have become part of the colonial history of Australia and ... must share the guilt” (El-Zein 78).

Indigenous Australians would probably very much agree with El-Zein’s view, considering the fact that a large percentage of the Indigenous people are still less well off than migrants on their arrival, excluding refugees. Writers like Ouyang Yu and Brian Castro, however, do show that the forms of racism and oppression experienced by Chinese migrants in Australia, for instance, are not dissimilar to the ones experienced by Indigenous people.

What these opposing views lead us back to is the discussion of forced exile versus voluntary expatriation. El-Zein’s definition of migration is probably to be understood more
as a definition of voluntary expatriation than of forced exile, even though in his essay he does not draw such a distinction. Ouyang Yu and Brian Castro, on the other hand, look at migration more from the viewpoint of forced exile.

Migration, whether voluntary or chosen, whether a privilege or not, almost always results in a settling in the in-between, in the moving. As Carter states: “An authentically migrant perspective ... might begin by regarding movement, not as an awkward interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but as a mode of being in the world” (101). One might add that this perspective is a very contemporary one, which has set the trend for the ‘global village’ we live in, in the sense that “living in a new country is [no longer] an eccentricity: it is the contemporary condition” (Carter 8).

* 


* 

WHAT HAPPENS IF migrants, or more specifically exiles, return to their homeland? Unlike exiles, expatriates hardly ever choose to go back.

As an adult, Eva Hoffman returns to her childhood Cracow/Poland for a visit, waking up to the fact that the present Cracow does not represent the Cracow of her past, the Cracow she nostalgically dreamt about all those years. She compares her return to a writer “revising [her manuscript] backward from the middle” (242), which is necessary for an
understanding of the whole story. “It is strange ... that the Looking Glass through which I step into the past releases me to go into the present. Perhaps now I can get the different blocks of my story into the right proportions” (241). As pointed out earlier (see footnote 2), Hoffman experiences Lewis and Jungman’s ‘culture shock in reverse’ by falling ill with a semi-hallucinatory high fever. Having visited Cracow after all those years, she realises that she would never be able to fit in again, living the life she had created for herself in America, with all the freedoms associated with it.

In Yu’s novel The Eastern Slope Chronicle the narrator Dao Zhuang returns to China for a research project, hoping at the same time to find a job ‘back home’. Zhuang, after living in Australia for ten years, becomes aware of his inability to belong fully to either of the two cultures, Chinese and Australian. His move away from China has resulted in his defamiliarisation with his past and his culture. The experience of ‘culture shock in reverse’ leads him to return to Australia, even if there are certain aspects of Chinese culture that will always define him. Having gone too far west, returning east for good seems impossible.

For most colonized people, such as Indigenous Australians, it is similarly impossible to return to their former lifestyle and their native traditions. Faced with duality, colonized people are leading a Janus-type existence, which compels them to blend the familiar with the unfamiliar, the old with the new. A syncretism of old and new, Eastern and Western, traditional and modern, is often the result – a syncretism most evident in the literature produced under situations of alienation, oppression, and displacement; literature commonly referred to as postcolonial.

*
DER ZUGVÖGEL ÜBERFLIEGT Grenzen und verbindet Länder mit seinem Singen; migratory birds connecting north and south, at home in both hemispheres, never doubting their paths of flight. Inbegriff für diejenigen Menschen, die wie Daedalus fliegen wollen. But "is the man who flies still and only a man? When he is a bit bird? Thus hybrid." (Cixous 65). Menschen, die wie Zugvögel sterben wollen, ohne nur einer einzigen Heimat angehört zu haben.

*

DISPLACEMENT NEED NOT stop the flow of creativity as experienced by Ouyang Yu’s poet Warne. It can just as well cause the opposite and enhance a displaced writer’s urge to give expression to her self and her experiences through her writing. Some displaced people turn for the first time to writing as a tool to add meaning to and make sense of the experience of migration. For one writer the act of writing may be cathartic, for another an escape. In both cases, though, the act of writing prevents them from losing their identity, ultimately turning into a path towards a sense of belonging. Writing transforms, enlightens, heals, but most of all empowers. Whereas in our everyday lives we are often speechless, in the world of writing we are capable of screaming, dreaming and relieving ourselves.

Belonging or not belonging, that is the question. A home for every displaced person. A home for every displaced writer. And because humans are creatures of definition, categories were finally created to give texts written by displaced people a place within the huge field of literature. In the late 20th century, many terms were born to embrace this ‘new writing’, which is different in style, form, flavour and content to the canon: migrant writing, ethnic literature, Migrantenliteratur, Gastarbeiterliteratur, multicultural writing, transnational literature, and Commonwealth literature.
Considering the following texts written by migrants, it becomes evident that the theme of migration runs through all of them: Eva Hoffman’s memoir *Lost in Translation*; all of Ouyang Yu’s poetry and prose; Ilija Trojanow’s novel *Die Welt ist gross und Rettung lauert überall*; Nicole Mones’ fictional tale *Lost in Translation*; Rosa Cappiello’s *Oh Lucky Country*, a Dantesque novel about migrant life in Australia as an inferno; David Martin’s *Foreigners*, a collection of short stories about living in a different country; Antigone Kefala’s *Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children*, a story about a Greek girl’s experiences in Australia; Ania Walwicz’s experimental poetry; Katarina Cosgrove’s *Glass Heart*, a novel in which the narrator traces the steps of her grandmother back to Greece; Gilian Bouras’ *A Fair Exchange*, an Australian expatriate’s account of her life in a Greek village; Emin Sevgi Özdamar’s *Mutterzunge*, four stories about the language struggles of a Turkish woman living in Germany; and Yann Martel’s *Self*, a tale about a French Canadian growing up between different languages.

Even though universals can be found in most texts dealing with the theme of migration, an umbrella term to categorise them poses problems not only for critics, but more so for the writers themselves, because many of them, especially if they have lived in a particular country for a very long time, reject the restriction of any such abstract categorisation, as it emphasises what they try to get away from: the state of not belonging.

Salman Rushdie, for instance, in one of his essays written in the 1980s, regards the term ‘Commonwealth literature’ as a ‘beast’ – a false category that shouldn’t exist, simply because most of the so-called Commonwealth writers “deny vehemently that they belong to it” (*Imaginary Homelands* 61). In an attempt to define the ‘beast’, Rushdie’s unease with and dislike of the term becomes evident:
'Commonwealth literature', it appears, is that body of writing created, I think, in the English language, by persons who are not themselves white Britons, or Irish, or citizens of the United States of America. I don’t know whether black Americans are citizens of this bizarre Commonwealth or not. Probably not. It is also uncertain whether citizens of Commonwealth countries writing in languages other than English – Hindi, for example – or who switch out of English, like Ngugi [a Kenyan writer], are permitted into the club or asked to keep out. (Imaginary Homelands 63)

Rushdie further claims that the danger of creating a category for migrant writers is to create a ghetto, to segregate, and to push migrant writers back into a marginal position, one that they actually try very hard to get away from.

This view is confirmed by Australian writer George Papaellinas, who speaks in similar terms in his introduction to Homeland, an anthology in which Australian writers compose an idea of homeland:

The categorisation of particular writers (according to their cultural or chromosomal origins), or their writings (often regardless of subject matter, aesthetic, politic or most importantly, language), is said to be done in order to redress marginalisation. I think it encourages marginality. ... I can’t see ... that the best strategy for defying the ghetto one has been allowed, is to invent another and ghetto-ise oneself. (xi)

Another Australian writer opposing classification is Brian Castro, who is critical of reductive categories as they gradually eliminate the writer’s inner life. “It is precisely by classifying that we demolish nuances, tones and flows … the very dynamics of being” (92). Castro claims that the subversiveness of so-called minor literature – which is caused by its authors pushing language to its limits and transforming it, thus pushing social, national and
linguistic boundaries – is in fact what threatens traditional minds and leads them to classifications.

Doug, Zara’s partner in my novel Soulträume, who was born in Australia of Lebanese parents, refuses in a similar way to be categorised. He is adamant about being seen as Australian rather than Lebanese, about belonging to the majority rather than a minority. In Doug’s case, however, denial and shame are the driving forces behind his rejection of everything Lebanese, whereas Castro’s, Rushdie’s and Papaellinas’s point of view stems from an understanding of their heritage and their writings being part of a multicultural society, which should be free of opposing categories.

However, regardless of how many writers like Rushdie, Papaellinas and Castro reject being categorised, such rejections are mostly ignored by literary critics, and even by some migrant writers. The ‘beast’, as Rushdie says, has taken on a life of its own (Imaginary Homelands 61). Within the Australian context, names such as Manfred Jurgensen (German-Danish-Australian poet, novelist, and critic), Sneja Gunew (Slavic-Australian critic), and Con Castan (Greek-Australian critic) stand out – writers and critics who speak in favour of categorisation.

In an anthology edited by Jurgensen and published in 1981, Jurgensen settles for the term ‘ethnic literature’. This term, along with the title of the book, Ethnic Australia, clearly suggests that the writers’ backgrounds are used as the defining agent.

Later, in an essay appearing in Sneja Gunew’s and Kateryna O. Longley’s book Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations, Jurgensen proposes a multicultural aesthetics to define what he by now has come to call ‘multicultural writing’, along with other writers in the book. He claims that for a particular text to be classified as multicultural, it has to display evidence of a multicultural imagination. “A multicultural
imagination is a transformational imagination, involving a transference of imaginative speech, in content and form, in semantics and grammar, in vocabulary and semiotics. It is recognizably ‘open’, volatile, incomplete, in a state of becoming” (30). Thus, subject matter and birthplace are no longer sufficient for a particular author to be classified as a multicultural writer. Rather “it is in language that the imaginative transformation called multiculturalism takes place, and it is the imaginative quality of language which identifies the writer as multicultural” (34).  

And finally, in an essay entitled “Transformative Identities of Literary Multiculturalism”, Jurgensen elaborates on his idea of a multicultural aesthetics, now using the terms ‘migrant’, ‘ethnic’, and ‘multicultural’ interchangeably. He establishes three phases of imaginative transformation, which the migrant author or ethnic writer experiences in his/her search for an authentic literary self. First, the writer retains a native culture perspective and responds to the host culture’s concept of self with critical detachment or outright rejection; second, the writer gradually recognises the need to adopt new visions allowing for cultural mediation; and third, the writer’s imagination adapts in a language of creative cultural transformation.

These three stages of imaginative transformation echo, to a certain extent, Lewis and Jungman’s analysis of culture shock, from participation through to adaptation phase, as discussed earlier.

Gunew and Longley in Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations discuss what they call non-Anglo-Celtic Australian writing as opposed to the terrain

---

4 Hatzimanolis, in her book review of Striking Chords, questions Jurgensen’s multicultural aesthetics and the function of a multicultural imagination, claiming that it is unclear who the subject of this multicultural imagination is. “The sort of aesthetic criteria that have been influential in constructing the idea of the imagination as a specifically bourgeois male realm masquerading as neutral remains unchallenged in Jurgensen’s essay. By implication then, Jurgensen’s idea of a multicultural aesthetics nostalgically transcends issues of gender and class” (142).
labelled Australian literature. They roughly divide non-Anglo-Celtic writing into three areas: the first they call migrant writing, which is writing that juxtaposes the old and the new cultures. The second group they describe as corresponding with the second generation after immigration, not giving it any label however. The third group is “made up of those who forge new languages and new representations”, whom they call cross-cultural experimental writers (xxi).

In a later book, entitled *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*, Gunew draws attention to the unease of such categorisation, proceeding from the term ‘ethnic minority writings’ – a term originally created for Canadian literature by Canadian critic Enoch Padolsky – and wondering if this phrase is the best way of referring to them (3). “In Australia these writings have had currency first as ‘migrant writing’, then as ‘ethnic writing’, and more recently as ‘multicultural writing’” (3). The problem with the term ‘multicultural writing’, however, is that it leads to reductive homogenisation because texts written, for instance, by an Italian-Australian author and a Vietnamese-Australian author, may not have many common points except perhaps certain thematic preoccupations. More often than not however texts are thematically lumped together under the banner of multicultural writing due to their dealing overtly with the migrant experience, and this again leads to a representation by tokenism, which is problematic in itself (23).

In order to avoid the problems of homogenisation and representation by tokenism, Gunew ends up settling for the term ‘ethnic minority writing’, as it signals, along with Padolsky, “that such writing needs to be seen always in relation to something designated ... as ethnic majority writing....” (23).

Con Castan, in an essay published in 1996, argues that all three terms, ‘migrant’, ‘multicultural’ and ‘ethnic’ are not fully satisfactory. The term ‘migrant’, Castan claims,
has more validity when applied to texts rather than writers and it is therefore possible to speak of migrant literature, referring to texts dealing with the migrant experience, regardless of whether they were written by non-Anglo-Celtic or Anglo-Celtic writers (76). The term ‘multicultural’, on the other hand,

should be used only to describe a whole national formation, such as the nation itself or the national literature, but should not be applied to writers or to texts except in special cases where it is accurate. It can also be appropriately applied to a reading position from which a large number of texts can be productively interpreted. (77)

The term ‘ethnic’ is unsatisfactory because it stands for the non-Anglo-Celtic group of people and thus creates “a group - the ‘old established Australians’ - who are above ethnicity, free of it, while all the others are marked by its stain” (78).

Castan proposes instead a new term, ‘minority ethnic’, an adaptation of Padolsky’s ‘ethnic minority’, which he claims can be applied to a text, to writers, or to a grouping of these. He prefers to place ‘minority’ first in order to draw attention to the fact that there are also ‘majority ethnic writers’ and ‘majority ethnic texts’. He claims, “such a balancing removes any suggestion that the otherness of the minority is due to their being ethnics while the ethnically unmarked group are not” (79). Majority and minority together make up the ‘Australian’, despite a degree of otherness in the relationship of one to the other. This otherness, however, is, according to Castan, not an otherness “that defines an identity of the self but a series of selves which make a composite identity” (79).

Castan further defines minority ethnic literature as literature written in a language other than English, while majority ethnic literature applies to all writings in English, “by or about Anglo-Celts or ‘minus-one ethnics’” (79). Here, Castan uses the previously
abandoned terms, Anglo-Celts and minus-one ethnics, instead of the new replacement terms, majority ethnic writers and minority ethnic writers. Later in his essay he claims that literature written in English by minority ethnic writers “doesn’t fully belong to this category [minority ethnic literature] even though they might come from writers who have been strongly fashioned by a minority ethnic culture.” (79)

Castan’s terms, minority ethnic and majority ethnic, are useful when applied to writers, yet when he applies them to texts, they become confusing and unspecific. What does he mean by “doesn’t fully belong to this category”? To be consequent, I believe, Castan should use minority ethnic literature to mean all literature written by minority ethnic writers, regardless of whether the texts are produced in English or a language other than English. Therefore, Rosa Cappiello’s *Oh Lucky Country*, originally written in Italian and later translated into English, or Dimitris Tsaloumas’ early poetry (*The Observatory, The Book of Epigrams*), written in Greek with English translations, as well as Tsaloumas’ later works, no longer written in Greek but in English, and Antigone Kefala’s poetry, written in English, should all be categorized as minority ethnic literature.

Castan’s definition of minority versus majority ethnic literature becomes even more ineffective once we take into consideration writers like Manfred Jurgensen. Jurgensen writes both in German and in English and has published novels and collections of poetry in both languages. Which of Castan’s categories would fit Jurgensen’s work, minority or majority ethnic literature? Especially in a case like Jurgensen’s, it becomes evident that the use of only one category, namely minority ethnic literature, clearly prevents confusion.

*
MOVING OUTSIDE OF the Australian context, let us consider three other studies that are of interest here. Even though they also discuss umbrella terms for texts written by exiles and expatriates, their terms are more open and therefore less restrictive in their meaning.

Heidi Rösch in her paper “Migrationsliteratur im interkulturellen Diskurs” discusses three different terms: ‘Migrantenliteratur’, ‘Migrationsliteratur’, and ‘interkulturelle/interlinguale Literatur’.

‘Migrantenliteratur’ refers to literature written by migrants and is also termed ‘Ausländerliteratur’ (literature by foreigners). Rösch claims that Migrantenliteratur as a genre (in English ‘minority literature’) creates problems because it is a very open term, which emphasises “die Biographie, Lebenssituation und den gesellschaftlichen Status des Autors bzw. der Autorin” but neglects “die literarische Komponente”.

Rösch further explains that ‘Migrationsliteratur’ developed from the term ‘Gastarbeiterliteratur’, which was created by Syrian-German writer Rafik Schami and Italian-German writer Franco Biondi. The term referred to literature specifically dealing with the theme of Arbeitsmigration (work-migration). Migrationsliteratur describes all literature in which the main theme is migration, regardless of whether the author migrated to Germany as a Gastarbeiter or a student, or whether s/he was born in Germany as a child of Gastarbeiter. Migrationsliteratur also opens itself up to native German writers writing about migration, such as, for instance, German writers, inhabitants of East Prussia, who either escaped in 1945 or were expelled from there afterwards, or German writers who were Jewish and migrated to Palestine, Israel. Even though some authors see Migrationsliteratur as separated from the literature written by native German writers, Rösch claims that “dennoch ist das Konzept der Migrationsliteratur prinzipiell losgelöst von der
Autorenbiographie zu sehen und durch ihren Bezug zur deutschen Gesellschaft offen für all AutorInnen, die sich ... daran beteiligen wollen”.

‘Interkulturelle/interlinguale Literatur’, according to Rösch, refers to literature that promotes cultural exchange, dialogue between cultures, and the mixing of cultures, not only dealing with migration thematically, but also stylistically, sodass “Gehalt und Form wichtig werden”. Interlinguale Literatur plays with ‘Sprachgrenzen’, but also with cultural and philological borders, indem sie “das hierarchische Verhältnis zwischen nationalen und sprachlichen Gruppen thematisiert” (Rösch). This means that interkulturelle/interlinguale Literatur can only be analysed “im Kontext einer allgemeinen Literaturwissenschaft” (Rösch).

To mention just one example of interkultureller/interlingualer Literatur, Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s uses a mixture of Turkish and German as a stylistic tool in Mutterzunge, creating a dialogue between the two cultures.

From Germany to Canada, Iranian-Canadian writer and critic Ali Negahban takes a similar approach to Manfred Jürgensen in that he proposes a multicultural aesthetics by way of what he calls the ‘uprooted text’. He understands the uprooted text as belonging to a new genre of migrant writing that embraces “all texts that emigrate from dominant languages and create, or search for, their own sets of signs elsewhere”.

Using Bakhtin’s concepts of the ‘chronotope’ (which suggests a dominant structure in which the writer encodes his/her text and the reader decodes it) and ‘dialogue’ (which is carried out among chronotopes), Negahban defines the uprooted text as one that “defies all conventions and structures made by others” and that “becomes a battlefield of divergent chronotopes that are intratextually and intertextually involved in a never-ending dialogue”. The uprooted text bridges the old and the new, the first culture and the second culture, the
mother tongue and the other tongue, and thus creates “a set of signs that refers neither to the host nor to the original culture. A set of signs that refers to a world in-between” (Negahban).

Last but not least, American critic Azade Seyhan, in her recent book *Writing Outside the Nation*, discusses the term ‘transnational’ in relation to writing, a term she borrows from social theorist Arjun Appadurai, who uses it in his study of globalisation to refer to movements and formations that operate beyond the boundaries of the nation. Seyhan defines transnational literature as follows:

> Following Appadurai’s usage, I understand transnational literature as a genre of writing that operates outside the national canon, addresses issues facing deterritorialized cultures, and speaks for those in what I call “paranational” communities and alliances. These are communities that exist within national borders or alongside the citizens of the host country but remain culturally or linguistically distanced from them and, in some instances, are estranged from both the home and the host culture. (10)

Even though Seyhan also uses the terms ‘diasporic’ and ‘exilic’, I prefer ‘transnational’. The notion of transnational creates an imaginative link to the notion of translation, and thus inevitably a link to the translatability and untranslatability of cultures and their texts.

To summarise, I consider Seyhan’s notion of transnational literature as well as Rösch’s of interkulturelle/interlinguale Literatur the most appropriate terms of classification as they are both universal in scope, not relying on a ‘minority’ versus ‘majority’, or ‘us’ versus ‘the other’ dichotomy. Both terms can be applied to all literature occupied with a dialogue between cultures, and both underline the interlingual and intercultural aspects of writing that this essay focuses on.
GROWING UP IN SWITZERLAND means to grow up with linguistic hybridity and multiplicity, and to constantly imagine new ways of ‘being Swiss’ by moving between Français, Italiano, Deutsch, and several different dialects of Schwitzerdütsch. (Not to mention Rumantsch, which is spoken in the eastern part of Switzerland.) In my own case, added to that mix was the Steirische Dialekt of my father, who had moved from Austria to Switzerland, only to end up as a Gastarbeiter. I grew up surrounded by children of Gastarbeiter, a world as exciting as it could be confusing.

I still clearly remember an occasion while walking to school with my Italian friend and telling her about the dinner we’d had at home the night before. I spoke of Zwiebeln and Paprika. My friend, whose mother was Swiss like mine, but unlike mine, had grown up in the region we lived in, whereas my mother was born and raised in a canton situated further southwest, soon corrected me. “Zwiebeln?” she said, looking at me with raised eyebrows. “Bölle, you mean.” Then she continued, listing all the delicious dishes her mother created every day that had the spice Paprika in them. For a while I listened patiently, but then I grew more and more frustrated. “I wasn’t talking of the spice,” I interrupted her, “but of that red vegetable, the one of which there is also a green and a yellow variety.” A stern look on her face, then a sudden laugh, accompanied by a wide grin across her face: “You mean peperoni! They’re called peperoni, not Paprika!” Not liking at all that she corrected my language, I replied, “But peperoni is the Italian word. In German it’s Paprika”. She shook her head in the manner of someone who was years older than me. “Don’t be silly! Everyone here calls them peperoni, just ask the other kids at school.” And so I did, eager to prove her wrong. As soon as we got to school I went up to every other kid in our class, trying to find out what they called the red, green, and yellow vegetable with the white seeds. “Peperoni, why?” every single child gave as an answer.

I walked home frustrated, angry, and ashamed that day, not being able to understand why my parents had taught me all the wrong words. Once at home, I went
straight to our fridge. On the shopping list pinned to it, I wrote in large letters the word ‘Bölle’. The next day my mother came home with a question mark on her face. “Was sell denn da heisse? Weli Bäll hesch du gmeint?” Balls, she thought I wanted, balls to play with. I rolled my eyes. “That’s the right word for what we call Zwiebeln,” I huffed and stormed out of the kitchen.

That evening my father came to my room, inviting me to have some ‘Marillenkuchen mit Schlag’ with him and my mother. I looked at him, slightly terrified, wondering if he was offering me some weird cake with a hiding, to punish me for speaking rudely to my mother. I pretended I was doing some extra homework. Later my mother looked in and asked why I hadn’t joined them for ‘Aprikosenkuchen mit Schlagrahm’, apricot cake with whipped cream. My father’s mystery was unravelled: he had simply dropped the cream and only given me the Schlag – which in German usually means a slap across the face.

And when I would listen to my grandmother in Austria tell stories (and she told many stories in her life), she would start every second sentence with the word ‘ofta’, keeping me amazed at how many things would happen to her so ‘often’. Only much later did I find out that ‘ofta’ meant ‘dann’, and then I was finally able to follow her stories.

* 

As has by now become evident, language plays a major role in the definition of texts written by transnationals, whether dealt with thematically, formally or stylistically. Language forms a key issue for every transnational writer, insofar as it raises the question of what language one should write in. The question following on from this one is if the choice of a particular language over another is perhaps a political statement.

Both in James McGuire’s study on Moroccan writer Abdelkebir Khatibi, who writes both in French and Arabic, and in Kwaku Gyasi’s essay on African literature, the previous
question is answered in the affirmative. If African writers, for instance, choose to write in the colonial language (French or English), they betray to a certain extent their native language by submitting to the culture and politics of the dominant language. A writer’s choice of a particular language marks his/her affiliation with the cultural, social, and political context of that language. As Barthes says: “le langage n’est jamais innocent” (qtd. in Gyasi 75).5

If, to quote El-Zein, “belonging is a form of betrayal”, meaning betrayal of the homeland, in the sense that “homeland defined you in some ways” whereas “physical home did not” (72), then betraying one’s homeland means betraying one’s native language, one’s identity. This implies that an individual’s identity is primarily defined by his/her native language. Whether this is true or not is an ongoing debate between traditional (conservative) and modern (liberal) language theorists.

Mary Besemeres, in her study Translating One’s Self, proceeds from a traditional theory of language which views a person’s native (or natural) language as the strongest link to their expression of self. Moving from one’s native language into a foreign language is considered as a potential loss of self, as a rupture rather than a personal gain. Besemeres is interested in how the self is shaped by natural language, how it is “constituted by language” (17). She prefers the notion of ‘self’ to that of ‘identity’, as she understands ‘self’ as a more inward category, compared to ‘identity’, which she regards as more external and therefore charged with a “societal census”. “A person’s identity is their answer to someone else’s question ‘who are you’.... ‘Self’ refers to a person’s whole inner life, which is not exhausted by this one question....” (21). Besemeres uses the term ‘self’ as an

5 For postcolonial writers such as Abdelkebir Khatibi, a way out of this language dilemma is to re-appropriate and defamiliarize the colonial language, so it reflects the imagination of the postcolonial writer. I discuss the concept of foreignisation, which is not only common in postcolonial, but also in transnational writing, later
approximation for ‘person’ or ‘human being’, and for the French ‘personnalité’. Her study is concerned with “how a particular self at any time depends for its expression on a particular natural language” (10) and “to what extent a person is defined by cultural assumptions specific to his or her language” (23). She discusses the migrant’s bilingual self, the experience of bilingual schizophrenia as a result of the rupture in one’s natural language.

Besemerés’ theory of language is traditional as it proposes faithfulness to one’s native language and culture, leaning towards a nationalist view of language. Her study reflects the initial struggle transnational writers experience with the old and the new, their holding on to the past, which defined them in a way that the new present, the new language, and the new culture are not capable of doing. And in this, Besemerés’ theory of language echoes El-Zein’s theory of homeland, quoted earlier, in which homeland stands as a fixed entity in a person’s identity, one that is betrayed when exchanged for a new place.

Aneta Pavlenko’s essay on negotiation of identities in cross-cultural autobiographies, on the other hand, is based on a more modern language theory, which proceeds from the idea that learning a second language creates positive influences on a person’s experience of identity. Referring to poststructuralist theorist Wenger, who states that “because learning [in general] transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity” (qtd. in Pavlenko), Pavlenko sees identities “not simply as discursively constructed categories of self but as lived experiences of participation in specific communities”. She applies this language theory to thirteen transnational autobiographies, also termed language learning memoirs, which were published in the United States, among them Lost in Translation by Eva Hoffman. All texts discuss language issues in at least one chapter. And
all texts were written in English by writers who learnt English as a second language. Pavlenko does, however, not state at what age the authors learnt English.

Pavlenko states that in the process of learning a second language we are constantly renegotiating our identity, as language generally shapes who we are, how we position ourselves, and how we are positioned by others. The written medium allows [bilingual] authors to explore links between multiple languages and selves in ways that were previously non-existent and/or impossible: challenging the essentialist notions of self, deconstructing various ethnic, national, colonial, and gender identities, creating new discourses of hybridity and multiplicity, and imagining new ways of ‘being American’ in the postmodern world. (Pavlenko)

Brian Castro, referring to his Portuguese-Chinese-French-Australian writing identity, speaks in very similar terms: “Hybridity is a powerfully transgressive property and it has an ability to destabilise genres. Challenging critical boundaries it seems to me is the very crux of writing as a vocation” (115). In this sense, the multilingual person provokes a critical exploration of the self, promoting a multiplicity of identities and views, and questioning the notion of nation-state, monolingualism, and nationalism. “Other cultures and languages reinforce and enrich us by powerfully affecting and destabilizing our familial tongue. We gain by losing ourselves” (153).

* 

DER AUTOR, DER sein Heimatland und seine Muttersprache verlässt, verlässt auch die Unvollkommenheit, das innenwohnend Fragmentarische dieser Heimat und Muttersprache. Denn keine Heimat, keine Sprache ist vollkommen, und somit reist der migrierende Autor
von einer Unvollkommenheit in eine andere, denn jeder Sprache wohnt die Unfähigkeit inne, Erfahrung getreu widerzugeben.

This is how we could summarise Walter Benjamin’s theory of language on which he based his well-known essay *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*. Benjamin creates the term ‘Reine Sprache’, to define the totality of the ‘intentions’ underlying all languages; intentions that are always superior to what is actually written and said. ‘Reine Sprache’ can never be realized. Even though writers search to reproduce experience faithfully, they will never succeed, due to the inability of all languages to do so.

In this inability, however, lies the challenge and possibility for every transnational author, and for every translator. It is in this inability, in fact, where transnational authors and translators meet – where their tasks become one. The transnational author’s dealings and struggles with language and culture are a matter of translation; the transnational author becomes a translator, translating from one cultural identity into another, back and forth. Ouyang Yu conveys this very well in his poem “Translating Myself”:

translating myself is a problem
I mean how can I turn myself into another language
without surrendering myself
without betraying myself
without forgetting myself
without forgiving myself
without even losing myself in a different con/text
...
or is this body of mine really two bodies
one English
the other Chinese
translating myself is but re/creating
myself with languages or bodies
a discourse between two knowing halves
or wholes
each the interpreter of the other
...
I translate myself
from Chinese into English
disappear into appearance of
another existence looking back across
the barrier of tied tongues
at the concealed image of the other body

(Moon Over Melbourne 82-83)

As Yu’s poem shows, translation for a transnational writer does not start and end with language, but penetrates every aspect of new versus old, familiar versus unfamiliar. Translation for the transnational writer is a matter of comparison. Comparison, as we said earlier quoting Paul Carter, helps us to see the familiar in the unfamiliar, and vice versa.

Zara, in Soulträume, is constantly mesmerised by the contrast between the landscapes of her home country and of Central Australia. When images of landscapes from Switzerland and Australia blend in Zara’s mind, she witnesses the interplay of two visual vocabularies, and she becomes, in the strict sense of the word, a translator of those vocabularies.

Edward Said termed such an awareness of simultaneous dimensions ‘contrapuntal’:
“For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur
against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally’ (qtd. in Seyhan 14). The same could be said for a translator.

* 

TRANSLATION OFTEN STARTS with a dissection of language, as is illustrated in Ouyang Yu’s *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*, in which the narrator dismantles the English language by way of comparing it to Chinese, which is a language of characters where symbols are joined to form a second meaning:

As he would do with Chinese characters which, by a process of dismantling, could easily fragment into meaningful denominations, he found he could do the same with English words. When he came across the word “skilled”, he would see “killed”. When he read “paint”, he would see “pain”. When he read “smother”, he would see “mother”. At first, things like that puzzled him. How did the English form their words? He wondered. Why did they put so much violence into their language by stringing the violent with the harmless, sometimes good things? Was it true that a highly-skilled person was also a person who kills in whatever he is skilled in, that a painter was someone who does his work with pain and that mother was someone who smothers? (132)

There are numerous examples of dissection by the narrator throughout the whole book, each cleverly thought through, each shedding a light of black humour onto the English language: “I could not help but think that English language did have a black sense of humour” (16). 6

6 *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* with its interest in language would fit easily into the category of language learning memoirs that Pavlenko analyses in her study. Even though not categorised as a memoir, we can
In my own novel, Zara takes the English language to pieces in a similar way, exploring the meaning of the word ‘hammock’, an object she is drawn to at her friend’s house, symbolising home and refuge for her. ‘Mocking ham’, ‘ham that mocks’ – she is unable to figure out why these two words thrust together should embrace what she would have simply called a ‘hanging mat’, a literal translation of the German ‘Hängematte’. ‘Hanging mat’ would be much closer to a flying carpet, a tool of magic she always dreamt of as a child.

* 


Eine solche Erkenntnis ist ein Schock, aber sie vermittelt auch Gewissheit über Bestehendes, über eine Vergangenheit; die Gewissheit, dass ich bereits existierte, bevor ich hierher kam. Dass da eine Geschichte ist, die man erzählen kann und will; eine Geschichte, die einen geformt und geprägt hat; eine Geschichte, die mir einen Geburtsort verleiht, sowie all die anderen Eckdaten einer Identität; wie rudimentär

---

assume that *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* is fictional autobiography disguised as a novel, as the narrator (who may be defined as the author’s alter ego) seems to imply that “life itself is fiction and does not require any fiction making. The ability to put it down in words on paper is sufficient.... My ability to factionalise is actually my inability to factionalise. Whatever is being written is as real as the act of writing itself. There is no reality beyond writing. At the end of this novel you will know that this is true and that this truth will eventually fade with your memory.” (21)
diese auch immer sein mag, wie wacklig sie auch immer dahekommen mag, sie ist das Raster einer Existenz.

*

EVERY BILINGUAL WRITER is a translator. McGuire, in his previously mentioned essay, discusses the relationship between translators and bilingual authors as follows:

The fundamental dilemma of the translator resembles that of the bilingual author. In both cases, the task to be performed is essentially treacherous. Just as bilingual writers betray one language in their choice of the other, so the translator misrepresents or is unfaithful to the original. Any translator can empathize with the loss suffered by the bilingual writer in travelling from one language to another. In any act of translation, there is a residue of infidelity towards language, a trace of the intention to subvert and dislocate it, within the translator's awareness of his or her inability to reproduce the original, to 'carry it over' intact. (110-11)

While McGuire defines the task of translating in quite negative terms, as a task of betraying one language in favour of another, following the traditional concept of 'tradire/traditore', the act of translation can also be seen in a more positive light, as for instance Carmen Rodriguez, a Chilean-Canadian writer, does. She uses the metaphor of renovating a house to explain how she understands the act of translating:

While the act of writing per se involves encoding a set of meanings, the act of translating entails 'reincarnating' the soul of a piece (set of a meanings) in a body made of different codes. It attempts to recreate the world that lies within those words and in between them; it endeavours to flesh out what has been said and that which is invisible: the sounds as well as the silences. In that sense, the act of translating is an act of reconstruction and restoration; the frame remains
intact (meaning), but new windows and doors are cut in and a fresh coat of paint is put on, so that the reader can understand both, the words and the world(s) contained in those words. (8)

Translation seen as flirtation perhaps, as “a curious investment in scepticism but not in virtue”? (Castro 238).

Translation opens up the limits of literal reproduction and of faithfulness to a certain text and language, and understood as flirtation, translation sits somewhere in-between what Papastergiadis defines as two opposing views:

On the one hand, there is the view that the deepest secrets and most intimate expressions in one language can never be communicated in another. On the other, there is the assumption of the existence of universal ideas, which implies that there are corresponding meanings between different languages, and that equivalent transferrals [sic] from one to another are possible. (129)

These two opposing views are the basis of the two most common translation theories, one oriented towards the reader, the other towards the producer (author) of the text: autonomous/relevant translation versus accurate/faithful translation. The theory of autonomous translation goes back to Cicero, who translated the sense and meaning of a text instead of words, in order to be understood by his audience. The theory of faithful translation goes back to romantics like Schleiermacher, who questioned autonomous/relevant translation as it was based on assimilation and erasure of the foreignness of a foreign text.

Poststructuralist critic Jacques Derrida similarly questions relevance in a lecture entitled ‘What is a ‘relevant’ translation?’, translated and analysed by translation theorist
Lawrence Venuti. Venuti compares Derrida’s poststructuralist approach to relevance with Schleiermacher’s. Venuti argues that whereas Schleiermacher stresses absolute irrelevance, to keep the foreignness of a foreign text intact, intending to construct a homogenous cultural identity at home, Derrida goes one step further by claiming that “every translation participates in an ‘economy of in-betweenness, positioned somewhere between absolute relevance and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance” (qtd. in Venuti “Introduction” 171).

As a translation strategy, the notion of the foreignness of a text was important to a German Romantic like Schleiermacher because it kept the nation and its language pure, by setting the translation of a foreign text clearly apart from the purity of the German language. In the twentieth century, however, the same translation strategy of keeping the foreignness of a foreign text intact came to be seen in ethical terms “as a discursive gesture of respect for the foreign that introduces a difference into the translating language and culture” (Venuti 172). Derrida’s understanding of an economy of in-betweenness combined with an ethical view of respecting difference and the foreign shapes the cultural-political strategy of translation most welcomed by postcolonial theorists and critics, and bilingual writers.

A successful translation, which is one seen as flirtation between complete untranslatability and full translatability, “resists the idea of closure or conviction” (Castro 251), muss sich aber “durch die fremde sprache [sic] gewaltig bewegen lassen” (Benjamin 61). Benjamin’s claim that a translation had to be faithful to the foreign text and to the context the foreign text was produced in, was much more extreme than Schleiermacher’s: “Kein Gedicht gilt dem Leser, kein Bild dem Beschauer, keine Symphonie der
Hörerschaft” (50). The purpose of a translation was to participate in the ‘Fortleben’ of the original text.

So, let me then participate in the ‘Fortleben’ of a foreign text, by returning to the introductory German piece of this essay. What follows is my attempt at an English translation, for those readers who have ventured this far.

*

IN THIS DAY AND AGE, filled with noise and shrillness, only few people are willing to pause and listen to stories. Yet, where are they supposed to turn, and who to turn to? I wish to tell a story, just as Moulin Rouge does every day, or a story like Ilja Trojanow’s Die Welt is gross und Rettung lauert überall. Yet how large is this world, as large as before? It has become small, promising only a little salvation. But who needs to be saved? Perhaps you, me – all of us who wander around aimlessly, waiting for one day to finish and another day to begin?

Technology has become the meaning of our lives. The Internet has taken on the role of the mother to which all children belong; a mother who holds knowledge and wisdom; a mother who tells a thousand stories.

We still believe in an old dream, a dream about passion. Perhaps we should pack our bags once more and migrate – migrate into the dream world of Moulin Rouge. Like the migrants in Trojanow’s novel, who migrate into a film: “The whole room dreamt of migrating into the movie” (23). This is well said.

Don’t we all dream of song words, awakening us like warm rain and making us bloom? Don’t we all, on our aimless quest for meaning, wish to be sprinkled by such raindrops? At the speed we migrate from one place to another we soon have circled the world.

Moulin Rouge stands for noise that promises oblivion and faith; it wants to be magic, the icing on the cake of reluctance, which has gone mouldy and has dried up.
Only warm rain is capable of dissolving and penetrating the sugar, of nourishing the mould underneath until a flower grows. A flower we call passion. But only a few will stand still and watch the flower grow, so they can learn to sing stories themselves. Only a few believe that mould can become fertile soil for the deep desire for song words – and be more than just a flirted dance.

I could now begin to tell many stories, stories that are all not longer than one breath, one German sentence. You could call it poetry because to write poetry is to tell a story with only one breath in and one breath out. Yet I am not a poet, nor a storyteller, I am in fact a mere listener and interpreter with a heart that is looking for warm rain.

The clock in this university library shows 5.25 pm and it is getting dark outside. The blue sky wants to go to sleep, the streets are waking the leaves to their dance, and around the corner a singing poet is drifting towards an Italian coffee shop. But before he is able to cross the threshold, order a latte and warm his hands on it, two dark brown eyes catch his; eyes that have been looking for warm rain as long as it takes to travel around our small world; eyes full of exhaustion that have looked around in this coffee shop, believing that the dream of warm rain, like every illusion, will die in the end.

The hour-hand has moved to 5.35 pm, and a few other lonely wanderers, people reading, writing, searching for knowledge, have joined me in this silent study area; an area that doesn’t belong to me, doesn’t belong to anyone, not even to the noise which, in the form of mobile phones, has to stay outside. The blue sky has gone and only black darkness remains, which allows this room to expand. And suddenly there is a second one of each of us lonely ones out there, mirrored on a layer of glass – glass that won’t tremble until warm rain turns the outside into a momentary impression.

5.50 pm no longer allows for translations of ideas, wishes, desires, all as light as a feather, crisscrossing inside my heart and weaving a web of passionate signals – signs of restlessness and impatience.
Now the clock shows 6 pm, and I could begin telling stories. Yet, here I am: waiting, like Alex in Trojanow’s novel; waiting for Bai Dan’s tandem to take me far away. Here I am, sitting and trying to create something with the hissing of the air-conditioning as a backdrop, something that promises meaning, that recreates Moulin Rouge, and something that brings salvation.

It is said that in the act of waiting secrets are hidden, that in the act of waiting the dreams of all wanderers and travellers meet – the dreams of those who listen, with wide open eyes and a clear nose, for the warm rain to arrive. But will I recognise him when he arrives, Bai Dan on his tandem?

* 

HOW SUCCESSFUL is the above translation, how autonomous or how faithful to the original text? How much flirting with the original language was done? These are difficult questions to answer. There is more than one possible translation, as many versions as there are translators. Every translator creates a different new text; every translator flirts differently. And this is equally true for every bilingual author writing in a foreign language.

For a bilingual author the main question of interest is whether a foreign language is capable of translating “in an entirely satisfactory manner an imagination that has its roots in an alien culture (Gyasi 76). “How can a single language articulate the secret functionings of a bilingual body?” (McGuire). How can I, as a bilingual speaker and writer, translate a German text successfully into English? How can I render in English the meanderings of my German imagination?

By way of re-appropriating and defamiliarising the dominant language, bilingual authors challenge and deconstruct traditional/colonial/nationalistic theories of identity. Zabus’s linguistic study on African texts explores the indigenisation of French in several
texts across the African continent, and Gyasi and McGuire analyse African writers and their dealings with bilingualism in their French or English texts. Re-appropriating and defamiliarising the European language allows African writers to render African words, concepts, thoughts and ideas in French or English.

Gyasi gives examples of two African writers who indigenise French and English to express an African reality. Nazi Boni, a West African francophone novelist, has a protagonists in one of his novels say: "'La vieille n’avait-elle pas fait son soleil?’ ‘Hasn’t the old woman passed her sun?’" (qtd. in Gyasi 77). ‘Sun’ in some African languages can mean ‘time, era, or period’, but rather than using the French word for ‘time, era, or period’, the writer opts for the African word. Gabriel Okara, an Anglophone African novelist, uses literal translation to shape the European language in order to produce an African reality: “Shuffling feet turned Okolo’s head to the door. He saw three men standing silent, opening not their mouths. ‘Who are you people be?’” (qtd. in Gyasi 79).

In my above translation, there are two instances where I Germanised the English language, not so much because I could not have translated particular phrases in a more English fashion, but because I felt I wanted to stay true to the poetic voice and meaning that the German words convey. Take the sentence “Don’t we all dream of ‘song words’, awakening us like warm rain and making us bloom?” Not ‘singing words’, but ‘song words’, the most appropriate equivalent I could find for the German ‘gesungene Worte’. I was tempted to use ‘singing words’, which would have been a distortion of meaning as it is not words that are singing, but words that were sung. Now, I could have simply translated the phrase as that, ‘words that were sung’, a relative clause, but I wanted to eliminate the clumsiness of the relative clause, as that would have destroyed the poetic and dream-like meaning of the phrase ‘gesungene Worte’, which doesn’t ask for an agent, for the person
who sang the words. ‘Gesungene Worte’ stands alone, as words coming from different directions towards the person dreaming of them. And this is what is expressed by ‘song words’, echoing the raindrops that sprinkle the person in a later sentence. “Don’t we all, on our aimless quest for meaning, wish to be sprinkled by such ‘rain drops’?”

Those song words appear again in the paragraph after: “Only a few believe that mould can become fertile soil for the deep desire for song words – and be more than just a ‘flirted dance’.” A flirtation in dance, through dance, yes, but not a ‘danced flirtation’ or ‘a dancing flirt’, because they have a lingering quality to them, a dance and a flirtation that continue in time, whereas I wanted to express the sharpness and the swiftness of the German phrase. The flirtation and the dance are intense, they are quick, and they don’t last, hence a ‘flirted dance’.

* 

Discussing Abdelkebir Khatibi, who writes both in Arabic and in French, McGuire refers to Khatibi’s position towards the French language and bilingualism, saying that “truly loving the Other comes only with the possibility of erasing ‘le français de la France’ in order to mix the codes of French and Arabic and to rearticulate them in an expression of the bilingual body and its desires” (McGuire 108). The dominant language (French) is shaped by the writer’s mother tongue (Arabic), so that the geo-political realms of words in the dominant language are erased. The dominant language is made to lose its nationality, so to speak.

This is, of course, much more true for writers who were colonised than for writers who migrated to another country. If the language of the coloniser threatens to destroy a writer’s mother tongue, the writer’s urge and need to reshape the coloniser’s language is
crucial for their self-esteem and self-respect. Rushdie is as clear as McGuire about the aspect of freedom entailed in the postcolonial writer’s restructuring of a dominant foreign language:

Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language [English] to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we can’t simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.

(Imaginary Homelands 17)

In an Australian context, Murri writer Lionel Fogarty is one of the most experimental postcolonial writers reappropriating the English language. Like many other Indigenous Australians, Fogarty has lost his native language apart from a certain amount of idiom and phrase that survived. Yet, the underlying structures of Fogarty’s mother’s father’s tongue, Yoogum Yoogum, still echo through his poems, producing one of the many varieties of Aboriginal English:

When I’m taking you, it magic magic happy
As we drove across the waters
I said ‘good fishing there’
Nah nothing there, they buggered
these waters up, brother.
Yea I can’t relive this spirit
Knowing I’ll be there … THERE.
To summarise, let me refer to Seyhan’s view of bilingual texts: “Although written in a language not the writer’s own, the texts ... resonate with the memory of their first language, “the mother tongue” (157). This leads us to ask if a bilingual writer is always a haunted writer, one struggling with the ghost of his first language; or whether the second language is always haunted by the first language; and therefore, whether a translation is always haunted by its original, the original being the ghost of its translation?

Our second language(s), I believe, is (are) always haunted in some ways by our mother tongue(s), and so is every translation haunted by its original, just as the present is haunted by the past and by memory. “Memory marks a loss. It is always a re-presentation, making present that which once was and no longer is” (Seyhan 16). This notion of memory connects back to Benjamin’s notion of the ‘Fortleben’ of a text, so that, to paraphrase Seyhan, we could say that ‘translation marks a loss. It is always a re-presentation, making present the original which once was and no longer is’.

And because a translation marks a loss, a gap, something unbridgeable, untranslatable, it carries with it not only the translatability of a particular text, but just as much its untranslatability.
The issue of untranslatability is touched on in Oyang Yu’s *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*. At some stage, the narrator tries to translate a particular Chinese poem into English and finds a particular Chinese word formation, ‘feng-liu’, untranslatable:

Separated each character means, respectively, ‘wind’ and ‘flow’. Clearly, when put together, this is not what it suggests in the line.... What does this wind-flow stand for? The supreme beauty of high literature ... Or simply what it means: wind-flow, wind that flows or something that flows like wind? How can you translate the imagery while retaining the original flavour? Or as a famed Chinese translator suggests, you can’t expect to find an equivalent in your own language. But there is no such equivalence, only approximation. In English, the wind does not flow; it blows. (112-13)

The devices of defamiliarisation, re-appropriation, and/or approximation do not only allow the writer to indigenise a foreign language to express an indigenous reality, but also to bridge untranslatability and draw attention to the gaps that exist between two languages, emphasising them, making them visible like blazing fires in the darkness of a moonless night.

Untranslatability, however, does not only occur between languages, but also between cultural reference points and symbolic concepts. The importance of the moon for Chinese people, for instance, is particularly highlighted throughout Yu’s first collection of poetry, *Moon over Melbourne*. In “A Night Walk”, the narrator laments that he is “walking under an Australian / moon / without much reference” (13). The cultural symbolism of a Chinese moon remains untranslatable into English. Looking at the Australian moon is for the poet like trying to read a foreign alphabet. The moon, even though the same from wherever one
looks at it, remains an entity not readily translatable from one cultural understanding to another.

Bilingual writers find themselves constantly caught in an act of translation, seduction, and flirtation, in short: in a continuous series of flirt dances, in einer nie endende Reihe von getanzten Flirts.

* * * 

WHEN I TRANSLATE into English, I go back and forth between the German and the English text, between two ways of thinking and seeing the world, and I make changes not only in the English translation, but also in the German original, until I lose myself in this going back and forth, no longer certain of the original, no longer certain of the translation, playing the flirting game with myself, my own imagination, seducing myself until I can no longer see the boundaries – until the two languages begin to flow into one another. Then I realise, dass nur im Zusammenkommen beider Sprachen, in der Vermischung, das Selbst erfasst werden kann.

* * *

BILINGUAL LITERATURE, in which two or more languages appear in one and the same book, is hardly represented within the canon of Australian literature. One book that stands out is the bilingual edition of Alexia: A Tale for Advanced Children by Romanian-Greek-Australian writer Antigone Kefala. Alexia is a very short book that juxtaposes the original story written in Greek, the story of a Greek girl, Alexia, who migrated to Australia with her family, with its English translation. The Greek text occupies the uneven pages and the English translation the even pages, so that Greek text and English text sit next to each other on the pages – a very stimulating reading experience for every reader interested in both
Greek and English, and a non-intrusive, considerate approach with respect to those readers who only speak and read one of the two languages.

Looking across to another continent, Canada in particular, we find writers such as Yann Martel, whose novel *Self* is a much less timid, a much more daring example of bilingual writing. *Self* blurs the boundaries not only between female and male, fiction and autobiography, tragedy and comedy, but also between different languages.

The narrator, “très canadien”, (Martel’s alter ego) is fluent in three languages: English, French and Spanish. A child of diplomats, who both die in a plane crash when he is only sixteen, he takes the reader through all the stages of his growing up, from earliest childhood through to adulthood; from turning into a woman at the age of eighteen, back to a man after the experience of rape; all the while travelling from one country and from one Canadian town to another, exiling himself constantly. At the beginning of the book, he tells us about his trilingual first few years of his childhood in Costa Rica, where he attended a kindergarten operating in English:

So it was that, by a mere whim of geography, I went to school in English, played outside in Spanish and told all about it at home in French. Each tongue came naturally to me and each had its natural interlocutors. I no more thought of addressing my parents in English than I did of doing arithmetic in my head in French. English became the language of my exact expression, but it expressed thoughts that somehow have always remained Latin. (18-19)

Adding further dimension to his linguistic play, the narrator introduces the reader to yet another two languages, German and Hungarian, both foreign to himself.

The structure of the interlingual parts is such that the reader is faced with the non-English language passage occupying the left half and its English translation the right half of
the page so that original and translation are juxtaposed with each other on one and the same page.

Three of the interlingual passages in *Self* represent conversations between the narrator and his mother (written in French); another passage is about two mothers saying goodnight to their eight-year old children, the Canadian narrator and a Czech girl (presented in French and Czech); a fifth passage represents a conversation between the narrator and the Czech girl (in Spanish and German); two further passages capture dreams/nightmares the narrator has (in French); and the last is a conversation that the narrator (by then a woman) listens to, not understanding a word of what is spoken (in Hungarian). This last passage is interesting as the parallel English translation is not a translation of the actual Hungarian conversation; which is obvious, even to readers like myself who don’t speak Hungarian, as the Hungarian text is written in dialogue form, whereas the English translation is a narrative passage. The translation details the narrator's descriptions of the people involved in the Hungarian dialogue as well as her descriptions of the surroundings and the feelings that the Hungarian atmosphere evokes within her.

Even though there are only six or seven interlingual passages throughout the book, readers are able to experience speaking and living with(in) three different languages and cultures, and finding themselves amidst a foreign culture.

* 

RATHER THAN BILINGUAL literature that juxtaposes passages or texts in different languages, it is bilingual works in which two or more languages flow into each other that I am particularly interested in. Bilingual code switching and code mixing are a common mode of communication among bilingual and multilingual speakers, who use these modes
frequently to express a range of nuance and inflection in their speech. Applied to literature, the appropriate terms are literary code switching and code mixing.

Both Zabus in *The African Palimpsest* and Seyhan in *Writing Outside the Nation* discuss literary code switching. Whereas Zabus’ is a sociolinguistic study of indigenisation of language and the use of code-switching in several postcolonial West African novels of French and English expression, written between 1960 and 1990, Seyhan’s is a comparative literary study of Mexican-American and Turkish-German novels, written by writers who moved to America and Germany respectively under the banner of labour migration. Seyhan explores the writers’ stylistic and structural dealings with themes of exile and alienation.

Of particular interest for me is Seyhan’s discussion on the use of two languages in the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa (Mexican-American) and Emine Sevgi Özdamar (Turkish-German) and their code-mixing and code-switching techniques. Seyhan defines the two concepts as follows: “Code switching happens when a speaker switches languages midstream” (109). Code mixing, on the other hand, “happens when speakers change languages (codes) while not changing the topic or theme of their conversation. When some lexical items are more appropriate for the concepts that the speaker wants to express, these words are blended into the grammatical structure of the other language” (109).

Anzaldúa mainly uses code switching as her preferred mode of linguistic juxtaposition or bilingual enunciation, and she marks the transitions from English to Spanish by italicising the Spanish text: “I have so internalised the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy*” (85).

Özdamar, according to Seyhan, prefers code mixing and does not use italics, allowing Turkish and German to flow into one another (Seyhan 109). However, my understanding is
that in the first two stories in *Mutterzunge* Özdamar makes use of code switching rather than code mixing, and in both stories she uses italics to set the Turkish phrases off from the German text: “Mein Grossvater hatte mal gesagt: “Rüzgara tüküren Yüzüne Tükürür.” ... Er hatte auch gesagt: “Dedesi koruk yer, torunun disi kamasir” (Özdamar 45). Only in one story, “Karagöz in Almania”, Özdamar uses code mixing and no italics. I would therefore argue that like Anzaldúa, Özdamar’s preferred mode is code switching, with the use of italics to mark the transitions from one language to the other.

* 

Seyhan’s study shows that literary code switching and code mixing are a much more common stylistic device in the transnational novel written and published in America and Germany than within Australia.

In Australian literature we occasionally find code switching and/or code mixing in novels, such as for instance Katarina Cosgrove’s *The Glass Heart*, in which the author intersperses the mainly English text with only a few Greek words and phrases. This is however done, I believe, not so much to take a political stance, emphasising the relationship between power and language, but rather to add authenticity to the foreignness of the story, which is also shown by the fact that the Greek phrases and words are always translated, if not immediately afterwards then a few lines later:

Yiali swivelled around to Mikos, surprised to see that he had been standing close behind her all the while. Watching her movements. She tried to compose herself and shook his hand, muttering the traditional condolences.

>Zoi se mas. Zoi se mas.<br />

Felt herself far too effusive. He repeated her words, like a prayer.
Life to us. Life to us, Yiali.

His tone was significant.

(58)

Most often though, literary code switching and code mixing appear in poetry, such as in the prose poems of Polish-Australia writer Ania Walwicz. “t translate”, for example, represents a Polish-English mixed monologue unfolding in the mind of the narrator, trying to learn English. The transitions from one language to the other are not marked by italics, and the whole poem is a running-on text without any punctuation, which renders the bilingual confusion in the character’s head even more dramatic.

Another poem, by Australian-borne Lebanese writer Alissar Chidiac and titled “A.F.L. Arabic as a Foreign Language”, highlights just as well the use of code switching. While working in Palestine and speaking only broken Arabic, the narrator questions her identity and tries to determine where she belongs in relation to her parents’ native Lebanon and Australia, her place of birth:

our family is in australia from long ago, min zamaan
there are arabs in australia from long ago, from more than one hundred years
no, australia is not a young country
the original people are there from more than 40,000 years
aktar min’arbeen alf sinneh
there were people in australia long before the English, al’l al-ingleeze
it’s like here in Palestine, ihtilaal al-ingleeze, ou hal’la ghair’un

yes, i’d like to go to Lebanon, we’re neighbours, nuhna jiraan
Palestine is on the road there, at-tareeq’
en'sh'allah, next year i’ll go, en'sh'allah

yes, funny isn’t it

Palestinians are in Lebanon but Lebanese are not in Palestine

yes, and everyone wants to go to australia

and i’m here

ghareeb

(in Abood, Gamba, and Kotevski 45)

In Indigenous Australian writing, mixing of phrases from Indigenous languages with English has been common practice for a long time, yet always in connection with a glossary at the end of the book, explaining the Aboriginal words and phrases. Examples are the life stories Unna You Fullas by Glenyse Ward and Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence by Nugi Garimara, the play Kullark: The Dreamers by Jack Davis, the novel The Day of the Dog and story collection Going Home by Archie Weller, as well as most poetry collections by Lionel Fogarty.

*

What I would like to propose in this essay, is a path away from the glossary character of bilingual writing, away from bilingual editions, and away from literary code switching and code mixing used in dialogue or speech only – a path instead towards the use of literary code switching and code mixing as narrative devices, as employed by writers such as Özdamar in Germany or Anzaldúa in America.

As a multicultural nation, it seems to me, Australia has not yet fully embraced the implications of multiculturalism in its literature. Castro, I believe, is right in saying “that the attacks on multiculturalism in recent times are attacks on its writing, whereas painting
and music have less discriminatory attitudes applied to them.... The nationalist preserve
fails to notice that the most consistent thing about language is its change” (163). Such
change undoubtedly has to embrace bilingualism, which means the influence of foreign
languages on English and vice versa. “A society which imposes monolingualism and
recognizes only one national language is one which fails to acknowledge that desire is
plural, for there are as many languages as there are desires” (Danielle Marx-Scouras, qtd. in
McGuire 110).

Literary code switching and code mixing create something new, conveying an aspect
of identity, of self. Blending two languages on the page, for instance German and English
in my own work, creates a new voice, a new layer or world of meaning, in which the
cultures of two individual languages begin to merge, reconcile, and bring about change –
cutting through any nationalist claims attached to each language. This merging of two
languages creates a new space within Australia – a space like Seyhan’s ‘third geography’,
which she defines as “the space of memory, of language, of translation” (15).

This space may be given other names, too. It may be defined as ‘third space’, to use
Papastergiadis’ term, “a zone that exists between the familiar and the foreign. In this ‘third
space’, movement is multidirectional…. The ‘third space’ comes between the proliferation
of minor differences and the domination of the centralizing unity” (98). Or thee is Stuart
Hall’s ‘third scenario’, which Bromley in his study about diasporic cultural fictions defines
as “a performative location, readily disarticulated and rearticulated, constitutive and
positioning, not enclosing and excluding” (6). And last but not least, why not call this
space the ‘Here-Place’, Argentine writer Luisa Venezuela’s term for what she calls home:
“I have been a traveller all my life ... When I’m away I’m absolutely there. I’m energized
by unpredictability, things coming apart both in my writing and my life. It’s uncomfortable,
but it makes me go. The moment I feel secure, I get out of the situation” (qtd. in Bach). A space, therefore, where the magic word is not security, but much rather something quite the opposite. A space also where words are in flight, as Seyhan defines literary code switching and code mixing; words that “are often linked to themes of flight from the real to the fantastic, from one realm of experience and its expression to another” (110).

We may well be talking of a symbolic and poetic space here, one that opens up healing, by inviting a coming together of nations, and thus an overcoming of nations. A space that invokes a journey from the real to the fantastic and back to the real; one that poetically transcends national boundaries, like the postcolonial collage that Paul Carter proposes.

Carter's idea of a collage of sounds as a possible reaction to the overwhelming feeling of being dominated by a foreign language is very valuable in relation to transnational literature and the transnational writer's need for self-expression, as it dramatizes “the gap between hearing and reading [and refuses] to rationalize sounds, recognizing their cubist potential to signify many meanings at once” (194). In a sense, literary code switching and code mixing may produce, like a Carterian collage, something new, something that creates

an atmosphere, the beginnings of an air we can breathe, in which sounds may begin to map a speaking-place simply by virtue of their internal orchestration, their pattern of echoes – echoes which are never simply echoes but, because of the distance they cross, always something else, a clearing of space, a basis of dialogue. (196)

Code switching and code mixing arise out of a criss-crossing of languages and produce sounds, feelings – noise in short – that open up a platform allowing intercultural dialogue.
As Carter states, his phonically based collage seems to him “liberatory if only because it acknowledges what is usually suppressed, that ours is a culture of coincidence, where meanings emerge out of misunderstanding rather than understanding” (196). As an Australian and native English speaker, Carter is very well aware of “the fragmentation of discourse, the clinging to words amid the shipwreck of grammar on a sea that offers no contextual landmarks” even among those “who claim English as their first language” and speak “reluctantly, faltering, as if speech were foreign to them and did not prophesy their personal fate”, showing that “words no longer represent meanings, but are a smokescreen concealing the dissolution of reference” (193).

Carter’s postcolonial collage is therefore not only helpful for an understanding of the bilingual mind – the untranslatable, the gaps, the silences, the borders. It also helps the monolingual speaker to understand their own limitations, borders, inadequacies, gaps. Third geography, third space, third scenario, Here-Place – they are all one and the same space and place, marked by a Carterian collage character through their unwillingness to conform to a fixed set of meanings and their openness towards fragmentation, and towards dramatization of the silences, gaps and the untranslatable. This is where meaning is to be found in the end, where an atmosphere is being created that allows for an acknowledgment of each other’s differences.

* 

When Zara in Soulträume enters the Here-Place, the reader is invited not only into a space that is characterised by a synthesis of linguistic elements – of two languages criss-crossing – but of a synthesis of both linguistic and visual elements. Landscape becomes essential in mapping this space. Landscape, for the foreigner, is like language – a property
without historical, cultural meaning, without familiar signs. Landscape therefore is equally fragmented, distorted, arbitrary. By superimposing the two languages that flow into each other with photos of Australian landscapes, which are digitally distorted, I am showing not only the silences and gaps that exist between reading and hearing language, but also those between reading and viewing landscape. My Carterian collage, structurally speaking, turns into what I would call a langscape.

As this langscape is a symbolic space, which transcends, it comes close to the realm of dreams. This can best be described in Jungian terms by defining dreams as consisting of conscious and unconscious, known and unknown elements. For me the Jungian unconscious (as opposed to the Freudian) does not only function as a vessel for suppressed material, but also embraces universal, inherited elements common to all mankind – hence Jung’s division between the personal and collective unconscious.

The protagonist Zara, epitomising the bilingual author, lets her unconscious enter her consciousness. At one moment German is lingering in her unconscious and English occupies her conscious mind, then again the opposite is the case. The languages fluctuate, and once the unconscious spills into her conscious mind, they begin to speak simultaneously. The fluctuation between conscious and unconscious language is marked by the fact that the bilingual passages one time begin in German, then another time in English. The language the passage starts with is Zara’s conscious language, the other one spills in from the unconscious.

There is no fixed positioning, which is accentuated all the more by the fact that I don’t use italics to mark the transitions from one language to the other. Unconscious and conscious languages fluctuate until they find their harmony in a coming together, in the interlingual expression, which defines the authentic expression of the bilingual self. And
somewhere, connected to the depths of the unconscious, personal as well as collective, and influencing our conscious and thus our self, there is the soul, functioning perhaps as some kind of ‘glue’ between conscious and unconscious.

From a psychological viewpoint therefore, the bilingual passages in my novel represent Zara’s Soulträume, hence the title for the book. They are the dreams of her soul; dreams because they express the interaction between her conscious and unconscious; soul because they are held together by gaps, the untranslatable, the silences.

Collected together, these Soulträume form a universal story of belonging that runs parallel to the main narrative of the novel. I call this parallel story Zara’s spiritual journey, the soul-aspect of her physical journey. The aspect that makes her personality whole, without which we only gain partial access to the processes involved in her search for identity and individuation.

The fact that the bilingual passages collected together form a story of their own, not interfering with the main narrative, still makes it possible for the novel to be read and experienced without fully comprehending the bilingual passages. The monolingual reader may easily skip them, leaving a reading experience that is still rewarding. Yet, I, as the author, would of course like every reader to take on the challenge the interlingual provokes, simply because anything else would be an easy way out of the encounter with the foreign, a denial of the foreign, a suppression of the foreign, the foreign also that resides within ourselves.

At an early stage I was faced with the challenge of how to make my bilingual passages work structurally. How was I going to seduce the reader into my bilingual tango? How could I make this interlingual play more interesting for the reader? The answer was in the end simple: I would use transparencies.
The use of transparencies allows me to make the dance for monolingual readers more enjoyable, more attractive, and more inviting. It was a matter of encouraging readers to enter the dance, without them feeling compelled to do so. A matter of showing the layering; the layering of Zara's personality; the rhythm created by her moving between the conscious and unconscious; the layering of the duality, the schizophrenic tendency of every multilingual person's identity; the pulling and pushing forces that characterise every interaction, every dance.

The layering had to be made transparent, to show how the two languages interacted with each other, informed each other - how one language could give depth to another, how the two languages danced the tango together. A language dance emphasised visually by the imagery of landscape, which would round off my Carterian collage and turn it into a langscape - playfield of Zara's (or perhaps her alter-ego's, the writer's) Soulträume.

Once readers have taken part in the dance, in the pulling and pushing, they will realise that the rhythm, which a Carterian collage based on literary code switching and code mixing creates, defies the need for immediate translation. The rhythm *is* the translation; in the sense that a dance with language is a translation is a dance. Or, put simply, bilingual passages like the ones in *Soulträume* represent a somersaulting of translation as they simultaneously embrace and transcend translation while moving from one language to another.

If transported onto a political platform, this means that literary code switching and code mixing defy nationalism and emphasise multiculturalism. Translation, in its traditional sense, provokes the erasure of foreignness and promotes the purity of a single language. As soon as a work is translated, readers no longer need to familiarize themselves with a foreign language. When two languages however flow into each other and in
combination create a collage of silences and sounds, representing the multiplicity of reality, the claim for purity dissolves into absurdity.

Of course, this does not mean that criticism of an interlingual collage is not possible. Huggan, for instance, who opposes Carter’s idea of a postcolonial collage, would most likely also dismiss my interlingual collage. Huggan claims that “it could be argued against Carter that his aestheticised theory of migrant meaning traps migrants themselves in a semantic loop, propelling them into situations where their adaptive genius, their capacity to improvise and create new meanings, merely reconfirms their disempowerment at the hands of the cultural orthodoxy – and of state authority” (124).

Such criticism ties in with the general question of whether literary code switching and code mixing reflect the transnationals writers’ escape from reality, their unwillingness to assimilate to their host society, therefore representing a hanging in limbo. One could easily argue that bilingual/multilingual expression creates more alienation and less assimilation, by promoting a world, a safe haven, into which to escape when faced with conflict and struggle.

My argument, however, is that literary code switching and code mixing as creative narrative devices can be very empowering and liberating for a transnational writer’s literary self. From a transnational writer’s point of view, only by refusing to suppress one’s past and the language and culture attached to it, can one feel truly whole and able to fully identify with the present. Every multilingual person, by not suppressing the multiplicity of the self, draws attention to and opens up the complexity of the human psyche. Instead of being suspicious and hostile towards such reality, one should celebrate and embrace it. As Castro reminds us: “After all, the truest view of a society comes from the immigrant’s double vision. In essence, an encounter with language” (165).
Too often, criticism stems from fear of losing one's power, fear of the overwhelmingly foreign, the outsider, l'étranger, il straniero. Der Begriff des Aussenseiters, des Fremden causes fear. Kristeva in her well-known study Strangers to Ourselves explores in detail the fate of the foreigner, who she locates within our own selves. The concept of the foreigner frightens us because it is part of our own self, the unfamiliar in the familiar. The foreign thus challenges us in the sense that it shows us our dark, suppressed side; it touches us where we don't want to be touched.

The majority of a society is usually held together by such fear, which may quintessentially lead foreigners themselves to suppress the multiplicity or duality residing within them, so that they fully assimilate to the mentality of the majority. In terms of the bilingual writer, this leads to questions of readership.

*

READERSHIP IS AN IMPORTANT aspect to take into consideration as a writer, a transnational writer in particular. When the question of a target readership arises, transnational writers may feel vulnerable, realising that their innovative and experimental writing enterprise challenges the mainstream.

Publishers most often reflect the stance of a national dictum or a political agenda, even if only indirectly through sales figures. They make or break the market, by gauging what readers want. Australian publishers have their budgets and their readers to consider, so taking risks for them becomes difficult. And so transnational writers, would like to experiment with different languages to make a political statement, tend to assimilate to the status quo of the majority, and write only in English, aware also that only a few readers are as stubborn and curious to take on the journey of ‘not quite knowing, of not understanding’
as Calvino’s reader in *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*. Aware that their multicultural experiment would be doomed to fail, unless they self-publish. Bilingual literature almost always challenges a certain status quo, be this literary, social, historical, or political, or all at once.

And so the question remains if transnational writers in Australia who use literary code switching and/or code mixing as narrative devices, perform an act of masochism, causing themselves the misery of eternal rejection, or much rather an act of sadism, resulting in the final rejection of their books.

Like any writer, transnational writers are faced with the conflict between being true to themselves and selling their books. It seems to me that most transnational writers opt for a compromise: throw in some foreign words here and there, just enough to make the work attractive to, but not upsetting the reader. Flirt with the reader within the reader’s own territory, in appropriate attire. They allow their books to dance a foxtrot with their readers, yet never a tango. This is what characterises a bilingual novel on Australian bookshelves these days – a few foreign words evenly scattered across the pages of a work mainly written in English.

Much rather than bowing to the fear surrounding me, I would like to challenge it, propagating a ‘migration in reverse’, following Indigenous Australian poet Lionel Fogarty’s example, who, by indigenising and subverting the English language and turning it back onto a non-indigenous readership, causes a ‘colonisation in reverse’. As Fogarty says in his introduction to *New and Selected Poems*, published in 1995: “I see words beyond any acceptable meaning, this is how I express my dreaming” (ix). The problem with such an approach is summarised by Emily Apter in her introductory essay to *Translation in a Global Market*: “Fogarty fails to cross over because his writing remains
too exotic for mainstream taste” (2). Yet despite such reaction, despite the potential danger of losing readers, I would still always opt for the challenge and be true to myself.

* 

LAST BUT NOT LEAST, let me imagine a scenario where the transnational writer has taken on the challenge and manages to gain a wide readership, a scenario where the dream of bilingual expression, an experiment like the one I attempt in Soulträume, finds fertile ground. A scenario where the dream of Moulin Rouge turns into reality and where my experiment manages to cross over. What happens then, to those bilingual passages?

How would a German-English novel be translated into Chinese, for instance? Which language would replace the German? Perhaps a language that has close roots with Chinese, similar to the roots German and English share? Would it be Japanese? What about the psychological differences between the two languages? Is Chinese an introverted language like English, and Japanese an extroverted language like German? Would in the end our whole theory developed within this essay, our dream of Moulin Rouge, not collapse like a house of cards touched by a breath of wind through an open window?

I shall leave this for another language-dancer to explore …
WORKS CITED


University of Adelaide Library, Adelaide. 7 July 2003


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bromley, Roger, ed. *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions.*


Brooks, David, Shawn Dobson, and Institute for Aboriginal Development (Alice Springs).


Brophy, Kevin. *Creativity: Psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Creative Writing.* Carlton:


ERRATA

Vol 1 Der Traum vom Moulin Rouge

- p. 32, line 5:
  ... dealing with migration thematically, but also stylistically, "sodass Gehalt und Form wichtig werden".
- p. 32, line 7:
  ... and philological borders, "indem sie das hierarchische Verhältnis zwischen nationalen und sprachlichen Gruppen thematisiert" (Rösch).
- p. 54, line 4:
  ... in einer nie endenden Reihe von getanzten Flirts.
- p. 61, line 18:
  Or there is Stuart ...

Vol 2 Soulträume

- Second set of transparencies, second last line:
  first word: drought (not draught)