

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Literary Transculturations and Modernity: Some Reflections

Anne Holden Rønning

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe;
every man is a peece of the Continent,
a part of the maine.

John Donne
Devotions XVII

In an increasingly global world literary and cultural critics are constantly searching for ways in which to analyse and debate texts and artefacts. Postcolonial theories and studies have provided useful tools for analyzing, among others, New Literatures in English and other languages, as well as throwing new light on an understanding of older texts. But today, with the increase in diaspora studies in literature and cultural studies, new ways of looking at texts are paramount, given the complexity of contemporary literature. There is, as Bill Ashcroft writes, a ‘strange contrapuntal relationship between identity, history, and nation that needs to be unravelled.’¹ With references to Australian literature, this article will present some reflections on transculturation and modernities, the themes of the Nordic Network of Transcultural Literary Studies, which considers transculturation not as a theory but, ‘a matrix through which a set of critical tools and vocabularies can be refined for the study of texts from a localized world, but institutionalised globally’ and where ‘the engagement of multiple sites and their routes with the progression of “one modernity” in some way or other inform the aesthetics of transcultural literature’.²

Modernities and transculturation

‘Modernities’ and the rewriting of genres, as well as literary transculturation, is a dominant feature of, for example, Australian literature. ‘Modernities’ is a complex term, but we should ask whether modernities are new, or is it a term used to denote a process that has gone on throughout time? After all, the term is used to express a variety of ideas: the avant-garde; the experimental; modern history from 1498; the contemporary or a modern way of thinking; and that the present modernity is not just postcolonial, but also transcultural. Modernity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, although often thought of as decentring and leading to individuation, in fact means that people and cultures are intertwined even more closely than they have been historically, as is also evident in written expression.

Arif Dirlik has argued that ‘[M]odernity may no longer be approached as a dialogue internal to Europe or EuroAmerica, but is a global discourse in which many participate, producing different formulations of the modern as lived and envisaged within their local social environments.’³ This view is shared by, among others, Arjun

¹ See Bill Ashcroft, ‘Beyond the Nation: Post-Colonial Hope’, *Journal of the European Association of Studies of Australia* 1 (2009)17, eds. Anne Holden Rønning and Martin Leer. Published in conjunction with *Coolabah*. <http://www.ub.edu/dpfilsa/jeasamainpage.html>.

² <https://www.uib.no/rg/nnlts>

³ Arif Dirlik, ‘Modernity as History: Post-Revolutionary China, Globalization and the Question of Modernity’, *Social History* 27.1 (Jan. 2002) 17.

Anne Holden Rønning. Literary Transculturations and Modernity: Some Reflections. *Transnational Literature* Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011. <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Appardurai who uses the term 'alternative modernities' to describe the heretogeneity of discourse in non-Western countries. In a plenary lecture, 'The Multiplicity of Modernity: Globalization and the Post-Colonial' given at the Barcelona conference 'Food for Thought' in February 2010, Bill Ashcroft said such modernities are neither peripheral nor subsidiary but hold memory as an anticipation of future change and empower through the use of language using the cultural values of English literature – a recycling of local modernities thus augments production. But we also need to look at the effects of contemporary communications media, and publishing practices, on the formation of these 'alternative modernities'. The power is no longer so much the author's message, but what capitalising forces consider relevant for contemporary expression.

Sara Lennox has raised the question as to whether globalisation in contemporary society *is* synonymous with 'modernity' 'to characterize the new material and culture practices that have conquered the world, [and...] a revised understanding of the relationship of the European to the non-European world.'⁴ She rightly posits transcultural influences as at the centre of this discussion, and postulates the need to 'reconceptualize the nature of the modernity conceived to emanate from Europe',⁵ that is to remove it from being essentially Western. Her argument is based on the fact that, despite the intertextual nature of culture *per se*,

literature is also the purview of the particular and singular, perhaps even beginning to explore how the aesthetic moment itself can operate as a form of resistance to homogenizing forces, an argument that was broached by the Frankfurt school among other German thinkers.⁶

The debate on globalised modernity is thus linked to the critical interrogation of the paradigm of transculturality, in that the investigation of border-crossings and cultural identities counteracts homogenisation by opening up the Third Space. Lennox's article, though her starting point is basically globalisation and feminism, demonstrates the need in all literary criticism to move away from the binaries of Eurocentrism and investigate the wider scope of mutual influence(s), the border crossings of ideas, genres, culture and heritage. Our interpretations as readers and critics are always in some way determined by our own cultural and historical specificity, one that changes with time and circumstances.

Today the globalisation of culture and texts, through increased linguistic skills among peoples, and not least the power of the media, whether film, text or electronic means, results in no one being able to avoid the influence of other cultures. In an age of increasing migration in the twentieth and twenty-first century, whether fleeing dictatorial regimes, political or religious oppression, or in search of a better life, an increasing number of people find themselves in a transcultural position. The search for a suitable term to express this age has evoked various responses from transculturation, cultural translation, transliteracy, to transnation. All provide tools for analysis, not just of literature, but also of cultural and social aspects of contemporary

⁴ Sara Lennox, 'Globalization, Post-Eurocentrism, and the Future of Feminist Literary Studies', 2, 3 (17 April 2010) <http://daadcenter.wise.edu/publications/Lennox-globalization.pdf>

⁵ Lennox 4.

⁶ Lennox 9.

life, and common to all is the feature of border-crossings, back and forth, a constant mediation.

Different contemporary ways of interpreting transculturation

As we have seen above, definitions of transculturation are many, from the political and economic, which see this as a struggle between two forces, as a losing and absorbing of culture through force, to scholars who

trace flows of people, objects and ideas within the colonial structures created by European powers to link different colonies ... : explore Latin American and Latino mediated imaginaries; [or] the ways in which art, popular media and digital cultures are used to articulate forms of belonging and resistance and to create new spaces and places, new synergies and new possibilities for cultural, political and social diversity.⁷

Fernando Ortiz coined the term transculturation in the 1940s to avoid the binaries of acculturation and deculturation, that is the loss or uprooting of a previous culture: 'The word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another,' and as expressed in literature is more than simply acquiring another culture. Acquisition is always a selective process as Ortiz stated in a speech at Club Atenas in Havana in 1942 where he outlined the five phases of transculturation from opposition to compromise, adjustment, self-assertion and finally integration.⁸ Ortiz's view is more problematic today since the process of transition is not seen as a move from one to another, but constant two-way interventions, non-static, as also are the phases he mentions. It is not a process of binary oppositions, and the creation of a hybrid society where the consequent result is something new, but rather a constant back and forth of impulses, according to contemporary social and political needs.

One of the critics most frequently cited when we speak of transculturation in literature is Mary Louise Pratt. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) she sees transculturation as 'a phenomenon of the "contact zones"' which are social spaces where 'disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination.'⁹ I agree with Pratt that in these 'contact zones' cultures meet, but not necessarily in relationships which are binary based, since the very core of transculturation is the ability to move freely from one cultural stance to another and back again. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin rely heavily on Mary Louise Pratt for their definition: 'The term refers to the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in

⁷ Technologies of Transculturation is one of the key areas focused on by the Transforming Cultures Centre, University of Technology, Sydney. 20 Nov. 2010

<http://www.transforming.cultures.uts.edu.au/researchareas/area-transculturation-tech.html>

⁸ Fernando Ortiz, 'On the Phases of Transculturation', Club Atenas, Havana, 12 Dec. 1942. 4 Jan. 2011 <http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/race/Ortiz-2.htm>

⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London & NY: Routledge, 1992) 4.

colonies and metropolises, and is thus a phenomenon on the “contact zone” as Mary Louise Pratt puts it.¹⁰

It is a view typical of postcolonial criticism at the time, but it forgets the process of constant change that is an integral part of transculturation. It must be stated that recent lectures and publications by Ashcroft have moved away from this binary approach.¹¹ However, the binary view is still present in some scholarly circles.

Several postcolonial critics have discussed the need to find other terminology to debate contemporary literature. In an illuminating article, ‘Direction in Postcolonial Studies’, Benita Parry has critiqued the move in postcolonial studies from the late-nineteenth century concern with the imperial project in all its aspects, and the primary critical forms in the late twentieth century on issues of ‘authenticity’, the ‘colonial’ and the ‘postcolonial’ novel. She rightly queries the value of reading nineteenth century texts such as *Jane Eyre* for their colonial context, rather than focussing on how ‘an imperial imaginary does emerge where the transcoding between historical moment and literary practice is located in form and stylistics’.

What a postcolonial criticism has shown is that far from being imitations of Western modes, fictions written within other cultural contexts or from the margins of the metropolitan centers are complex transformations and transgressions of existing conventions, whether realist or avant-garde.¹²

She emphasises the need to widen the field of postcolonial studies to other than Anglophone literature, and a concentration on issues of exile and migration, and look at what she calls the ‘unsettled diasporas’.¹³ She critiques Stuart Hall’s view that we need ‘to reread the binaries [i.e. anticolonial struggles] as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, destined to trouble the here/there cultural binaries forever’.¹⁴ The term transculturation is, in her opinion, inappropriate in a colonial context because the colonisers did not acknowledge the ‘other’¹⁵ and posits that reciprocity is ‘a necessary condition of transculturation, [...] a situation where each party recognizes the other as an architect of cognitive and intellectual traditions’. Although in political and social contexts Parry’s view may be relevant, can we apply the word reciprocity to a literary text, and, if so, between whom? Looking at history and recordings of life in the colonies it would seem that Parry’s view is not always applicable. Although the colonisers may not have acknowledged the colonised, readers of literature are often aware of significant influences and crossings, borrowings, albeit at times

¹⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998) 233.

¹¹ See Ashcroft, ‘Beyond the Nation’.

¹² Benita Parry, ‘Directions and Dead Ends in Postcolonial Studies’, *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 71.

¹³ Parry 72. Parry says it is time to consider studies of the ‘experiences spoken by scattered, impoverished, and despised populations stranded in temporary and exploited employment’ since the use of the term “diaspora” as a synonym for a new kind of cosmopolitanism that is certainly relevant to writers, artists, academics, intellectuals, and professionals can entail forgetfulness about that other, economically enforced dispersal of the poor’ from other countries.

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, ‘When was “The Post-Colonial”? Thinking at the Limits’, *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London & NY: Routledge, 1996) 247.

¹⁵ Parry 77.

unintentional, between the different cultures. However, if we are to look at the 'unsettled diasporas' we will inevitably be faced with the complexity of the forms of cultural translation to which Hall refers. I would suggest that no one can live in another country or culture, or read extensively about other cultures, without being influenced and affected by it.

Elliott Young, in a review of a book by Silvia Spitta, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*, voices views similar to those of Benita Parry. He states the need to narrow the definition of transculturation, and warns against the tendency for it to become a bag into which anything can be put, in much the same manner as postcolonialism was used.¹⁶ He sees it as a process of adjustment and re-creation, also at the personal level, hence he talks of the transcultural person, and the need for specificity in the literature of a country. Abril Trigo, too, comments on the devaluation of the term due to the loss of the utopian paradigm on which it was built, so it becomes 'an ideological manifestation of peripheric modernity.'¹⁷

However, transcultural literature is a key element in cultural interaction, and other critics have devised alternative terms to explain the transcultural process. In their introduction to *Translation of Cultures* (2009) Rüdiger and Gross use the term 'translation' to cover what I would suggest we mean by transculturation, that is, 'the interaction of cultures, the transfer of cultural experience, the concern with cultural borders, the articulation of liminal experience, and intercultural understanding'.¹⁸ In this volume various scholars discuss the potentialities of cultural translation, but also its limitations, such as writing against the 'adopted' culture in settler literature. The bicultural or multicultural writer becomes both insider and outsider, what they describe as 'an intimate insider and a determined outsider'.¹⁹ This is expressive of border-crossings but is not unproblematic – who then becomes the 'other'? Is it oneself in one's country of origin – or does it indicate a certain inability to step across cultures looking at the inside from outside, or vice versa, leading to cultural separatism? The process of translation is an apt description, since a translation is often a new work, adapted to the culture of the target reader. As Oloruntoba-Oju says in his essay 'Translation, Adaptation, and Intertextuality in African Drama' translation is 'not just a translingual vector of meaning, but also uniquely a vector of cultural specificity.'²⁰

Another alternative to 'transculturation' is the term 'transliteracy' since meaning may be encoded in various forms. Simon Biggs has described 'culture as a

¹⁶ Elliott Young, rev. of *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America* by Silvia Spitta, H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews, Sept. 1996. 17 April 2010 <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=618>

¹⁷ Abril Trigo, 'Shifting Paradigms: From Transculturation to Hybridity: A Theoretical Critique', *Unforseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, eds. Rita de Grandis and Zilá Bernd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 85.

¹⁸ Petra Rüdiger and Konrad Gross, eds., *Translation of Cultures*, ASNEL papers 13 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) ix.

¹⁹ Rüdiger and Gross xi.

²⁰ Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju, 'Translation, Adaptation, and Intertextuality in African Drama: Wole Soyinka, Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi', Rüdiger and Gross 4.

network of constantly regenerating relations.’²¹ Dealing with language and its historical components, including modern day computers, Biggs asks whether the use of the term ‘transliteracy’ as defined by Sue Thomas as ‘the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from singing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks’ offers the ‘possibility of reconciling cultural and linguistic differences’.²² Biggs debates this with examples from history, orality, philosophy, literature, and ethnography. In literary studies this could be a useful term and more precise than transculturation. The link between cultural production and transculturation is a continuation of the debate in postcolonialism on the power of the media and the reception of literatures in languages other than English – for example, the whole African debate led by Ngugi and Achebe about writing in African languages. Transcultural literature embraces a wider range of texts than the term postcolonial (with or without the hyphen). One might be tempted to say that the globalised world is itself transcultural with the globalisation of culture through the media and migration. The reception of literary works of a transcultural nature will be dependent in many cases on the reader’s own background which also changes with time and circumstances. Thus a writer such as Yvonne du Fresne, a New Zealander of Danish-Huguenot descent, who includes many Danish words and phrases in her texts, may have other significance to a Scandinavian reader or one acquainted with Scandinavian customs and culture, as well as other immigrants from Europe, than for the reader who knows nothing of the historical or cultural background to her texts.²³

Transculturation and discourse

Although much criticism of transcultural texts is focused on the cultural history of the present, that present is dependent on a prolongation of the past. We tend to think of transculturation as a contemporary phenomenon, but in fact it has a political history prior to the nineteenth century going back to the Ancient Egyptian civilisation which combined Arab and African influences, the time of the Roman Empire, the Habsburg Empire, and of course French dominance at the time of the Norman conquest in the Middle Ages. All these shared cultures with the countries they ruled over. Transcultural literature today has taken this tradition and rewritten it to suit a different era. Literature is often thought of as an embodied experience, but is also a socialising force – a process of cultural fusion and appropriation, and then selective use. Politically, transculturation can thus be used to describe processes of negotiation in contemporary society that lead to social awareness and solidarity, as well as ensuring the continuity of societies, as they have done throughout time. Polyglotism was the rule, whereas monolingualism is a more recent phenomenon, not least a result of increasing nationalism in the nineteenth century and the growth of the British Empire.

²¹ Simon Biggs, ‘Transculturation, transliteracy and generative art’, University of Edinburgh, 2008. 17 Apr. 2010 <http://www.slideshare.net/ixdasp/transculturation-transliteracy-and-generative-poetics>

²² Cited in Biggs. Sue Thomas, Chris Joseph, Jess Laccetti, Mason Bruce, Simon Mills, Simon Perril, and Kate Pullinger, ‘Transliteracy: Crossing Divides’, *First Monday* 12.12 (Dec. 2007). 17 Apr. 2010 <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2060/1908>

²³ See Anne Holden Rønning, ‘*For Was I Not Born Here?*’ *Identity and Culture in the Work of Yvonne du Fresne* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2010).

Many questions arise in the debate as to determining what we might call the 'boundaries' of what constitutes transcultural literary forms and texts – is it language, content or a combination of the two? Or is the bicultural or multicultural background of the author, and the same elements as a dominant feature in the text, that which makes it transcultural? Does transculturation deal with issues of belonging and identity, or an analysis of contemporary society from a multifocal point of view? Transculturation in literature does not necessarily evolve from colonial dominance of another language, but rather from literary processes and genres adapted to a new landscape and way of life. After all we define ourselves through language and the creation of sub-cultural fields. And, when we do so, does the interference of the very form of the text affect our view? Given the interconnectedness of cultures, and the normal processes of borrowing, the conventional expression of the Western modern imaginary as the cultural history of the present is too narrow. As Les Murray points out:

It will be a tragedy if the normal processes of artistic borrowing and influence, by which any culture makes part of its contribution to the conversation of mankind, are frozen in the Aboriginal case by what are really the manoeuvrings of a battle for political power within the white society of our country, or by tactical use of Third World rhetoric by jealous artists trying to damage each other professionally.²⁴

Murray is in some ways reiterating ideas voiced by T.S. Eliot. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Eliot writes of the influence of the past on the present which includes 'the historical sense ... [which] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.²⁵ No writer of any genre is a land unto him/herself, but is influenced by the literature they have inherited, adjusting it to express their own meanings. As Eliot writes, 'the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.'

Borrowing and border-crossing has from time immemorial been a central feature of the arts. One contemporary example which springs to mind is the manner in which Aboriginal artists have palimpsested national romantic paintings by Australian artists by painting barbed wire, Aboriginal figures, symbols, etc. on copies of the original Victorian period pictures.²⁶ In music, variations on a theme are often transcultural, taking well-known music and giving it a twist to create something new. Interaction between literary texts, or intertextuality, is frequently transcultural, drawing on aspects of literary genres, themes that are recognisable for some readers, but not necessarily essential to an understanding of the text. However, they expose the reader to other ways of expression, in a web woven of diverse cultural strands. Literary criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century has laid great emphasis on this literary borrowing, but there has been relatively little debate as to the transcultural nature of it.

²⁴ Les A. Murray, 'The Human-Hair Thread', *Persistence in Folly* (Sirius, 1984) 4.

²⁵ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1953) 14.

²⁶ Bill Ashcroft gave an interesting paper on this at the European Association for Studies of Australia (EASA) conference 'Reconciliation: 100 Years of Australian Federation' in Lecce in 2001.

Another central theme in postcolonialism and transculturation is the quest for belonging and identity, what Huggan has aptly called 'the pull between land and language'.²⁷ This is especially evident in settler literatures where difficulties often arise as to how to express a landscape for which the original mother tongue has no adequate expression, but also the social need to retain one's mother tongue as being one of many identities. This implies that one chooses which aspects of culture one will retain or lose, though that choice may not be conscious – linking it to belonging, adopting certain characteristic features of a culture to feel at home in it, whereas other aspects of the original culture are felt to be too valuable and personal to reject.

For example in Australian literature, does the adaptation and inclusion of Aboriginal ideas, myths and sociolect make a text transcultural? Is David Ireland's *Burn*, because of its content, transcultural, despite its extensive use of stream of consciousness technique to portray the mental state of the protagonist Gunner, of Aboriginal descent, in contrast to the style used for the narrative portraying the life of Gunner's family, which is of mixed origin, since both forms are still Western discourse? Other examples of writers who have tried to cross the transcultural divide at various levels in Australia are Xavier Herbert in *Capricornia*, and David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, as well as Les Murray's poetry. They have all written about aspects of Aboriginal life and culture in fictional or verse form, raising valid cultural issues, but the one culture still dominates, and the style and genre is still Western.

Language is one of the determinants of discourse and of the most obvious elements of transculturation. In many European countries there is considerable concern as to the number of English words in daily use in what is otherwise a native language, and of the problems ensuing from attempts to impose native language equivalents. One example of this transcultural phenomenon of our globalised world is the teenage linguistic mix, common among second and third generation young of immigrant parents or grandparents. They are born into a transcultural space and the formation of their own language, a mix of two or more languages, as several studies have shown, is one way of showing how the borders within which they live can be crossed and re-crossed, and incomprehensible to those outside the group. Likewise the very term New Literatures in English indicates a form of transculturation, the English language as used by those not really English by birth. As Eliot pointed out,

It is easier to think in a foreign language than it is to feel in it. ... A thought expressed in a different language may be practically the same thought, but a feeling or emotion expressed in a different language is not the same feeling or emotion.²⁸

Literature is often the emotional expression not only of identities, but also of how those identities came to be formed, and as such it has an emancipatory function. Some literature of transculturation illustrates this as the personal struggle, usually fictional, of an individual torn between cultures, trying to find the self, and is especially

²⁷ Gillian Whitlock, rev. of *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* by Graham Huggan, *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (JASAL)* 8 (2008) 193-7. 17 Apr. 2010 <http://www.oup.com/uk/catalogue/?ci=9780199274628>

²⁸ T.S. Eliot, 'The Social Function of Poetry', *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957) 19.

apparent in settler literature. One example is Les Murray's search for what it means to be an Australian and what *is* Australian literature, and Australian language.

Settler literature

Settler literature raises a wealth of issues closely related to transculturation, especially memory, place and space. It is a useful example of transculturation, since the migration of many peoples to a country results in a mixing of heritages and cultures. As Ashcroft writes, 'The concept of the border is disrupted in many ways in postcolonial literatures, but most powerfully in the relationship between memory and place: memory rather than nostalgia and place rather than nation.'²⁹ Memory and mythmaking are central issues of contemporary debate. The boundaries between history and memory are often blurred and fluid in fiction. Much critical work has been done on the fallibility of memory. Hayden White has suggested there is a tension between what he defines as the two aspects of memory, the 'traditionalised memory' which is 'information about, and accounts of the past that are latently stored in its corpus of traditional lore' and 'rationalised memory' which is about 'the community's past' – written and accessible.³⁰ Both of these we find in Australian literature, which often uses memory of the past in a rewriting of history or to fill in the gaps in previous historical fiction. Two obvious examples are Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* and *Jack Maggs* as well as some of Mudrooroo's texts, for example, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*.³¹

In settler countries the border crossing has a finality, especially in earlier times, of moving from one to the other with the chance of return slight, whereas literature opens up the possibility of crossing and re-crossing those boundaries – it gives fluidity to the topic/theme. How are these views on transculturation applicable to Australian and New Zealand literatures, countries with indigenous populations, invaded by immigrants, some forced, and originally mainly from one culture? In Australia immigrants were often far from a homogenous group socially and culturally. Many were of the lower classes bringing with them their own regional and local subcultures and languages. Late twentieth century immigrants arriving from Europe and Asia are all reflected in the wealth of multicultural writing and the attempt to express what it means to be an Australian. This diversity (some would say multiculturalism) gives to Australian literature an element of the transcultural, writers expressing their heritage, their relation to Australia, not always with authenticity. From the 1970s the search for the Australian voice has continued. Was it the ballad form of the bush poets such as Lawson, or the storytelling of the Aborigine as Les Murray suggested, or a refined European form? Les Murray's project, for example, was to show and illustrate in his poetry how the narrative of the Western modern imaginary cannot express the 'true' Australian voice as it ignores the ancestral poetry of the country. Transcultural literature in settler countries is often marked by texts

²⁹ Ashcroft, 'Beyond the Nation'.

³⁰ Hayden White, 'Catastrophe, Communal Memory and Mythic Discourse: The Uses of Myth in the Reconstruction of Society', *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Society*, ed. Bo Stråth (Frankfurt & NY: Peter Lang, 2000) 49.

³¹ Peter Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000); *Jack Maggs* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1997); Mudrooroo, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (Sydney, Auckland, & NY: Angus and Robertson, 1991).

taking the past and applying it to the present, or through an investigating of the past coming to an understanding of present issues and situations by examining the 'routes' that have led from 'roots'.

Many of the writers who spring to mind are bicultural or have multicultural backgrounds. In Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* (1983), the protagonist finds an old journal written by a Chinese ancestor (the Chinese were employed as miners in the late nineteenth century in both Australia and New Zealand) and sees it a kind of reflection and parallel to the story of his own life in Australia as a blue-eyed Chinaman, as he describes himself. In a short article, 'Writing Asia', Castro tells of his ancestry:

My father had come from a long line of Portuguese, Spanish and English merchants who settled in Shanghai at the turn of the century ... my grandmother was from Liverpool ... married a Chinese farmer from a little village. My Liverpoolian grandmother spoke fluent Cantonese, and I was brought up in a household which used a mixture of English, Cantonese and Portuguese.³²

Is Castro's writing transcultural or multicultural? Central to such settler texts is the question of belonging and identity – the search for the personal with emotional overtones. Texts such as Beverly Farmer's *The Seal Woman* (1992), about a Danish woman, Dagmar, who goes to Australia to seek relief from grief after her Norwegian husband, an Antarctic scientist, is lost at sea. She experiences a clash of cultures illustrated by the link to the mythic stories of the Selchie, and the symbolic reality of seal invasions on the Norwegian coast at the time.³³ This same emotional issue is the focus of Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune*, as Fredy in his travels around the world throughout the twentieth century is in a constant search for where home really is. Fredy is an observer of cultures, comparing them with his own, which is transcultural, German, rural and Australian. However, we can ask today how far Australian literature has come in rejecting colonial generic forms and creating its own transcultural Australianess, and does this reflect in the use of genre. Many works still share much with colonial generic forms, as seen in the work of David Ireland, Peter Carey and David Malouf, to mention some.

In this article I have presented some of the ways in which we can look at the term 'transculturation' and its link to modernity or modernities. Like identities it is a pluralistic phenomenon. Both open up for a variety of approaches, some complementary, others narrower. A further examination of this concept will perhaps provide us as readers and citizens of the world some pegs on which to hang our interpretations, and our lives.

³² Brian Castro, 'Writing Asia', *Australian Humanities Review* 1 (Apr. 1996) 17 Apr. 2010 <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-April-1996/Castro.html>

³³ See Anne Holden Rønning, 'Myth, Language and Identity in *The Seal Woman*', *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 1.2 (2002) 289-98.