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We are relocating

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Abstract

Editorial: For many years, the politics and promises of "globalization," and its threats, have been bandied about. For so long, indeed, that forests must have fallen to create all the books devoted to nuanced discussions of what "globalization" is. A decade and more ago, when American commentators wrote of globalization, they mainly meant transnational competition, dominated by the United States. "Globalization," Thomas Friedman asserted, "is us" (Friedman 1997). But a lot can change in ten years, including who dominates, who can read what about "us," and the means by which "they" read it.

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We Are Relocating

ALISON BROINOWSKI, GUEST EDITOR

For many years, the politics and promises of “globalization,” and its threats, have been bandied about. For so long, indeed, that forests must have fallen to create all the books devoted to nuanced discussions of what “globalization” is. A decade and more ago, when American commentators wrote of globalization, they mainly meant transnational competition, dominated by the United States. “Globalization,” Thomas Friedman asserted, “is us” (Friedman 1997). But a lot can change in ten years, including who dominates, who can read what about “us,” and the means by which “they” read it.

Scholars in the United States, Australia and elsewhere are now defining literary globalization as the *repositioning of writing*, in a world they variously welcome as international, transnational, postnational, transcultural, cosmopolitan, ex-centric or borderless. It is a world whose technology and demography banishes the exotic and also brings it, in James Clifford’s view, “uncannily close” (Clifford in Khoo 2007: 9). A three-year research project nearing completion at the University of Wollongong, “Globalizing Australian Literature,” finds that this repositioning of writing destabilizes not only the accepted cultural and national categories, but the received notions of globalization as well. The work locates Asian Australian writing inside Australian literature and simultaneously relocates it in several broader contexts of interpretation. In the process it questions Australian notions, advanced only a few years ago, that our vision is turned myopically “inward” (Muecke 2007) and that Australian writers have never been so confined, so “agoraphobic” (Ng 2007).

On the contrary, evidence collected by the project suggests the “turn to Asia,” which has been variously manifest in Australian fiction for over forty years, is a “transnational turn” that significantly expands and reinvigorates how we now think about Australian literature (Broinowski 1979; Jacklin 2007). We are particularly urged by young scholars to recognize that a major subset of the literature, Chinese fiction of Australia, is produced both inside and outside the mainland, in two languages, and has its own views about the world and about Chineseness, one of which is that the periphery and the center, the middle kingdom and the provinces, no longer adequately describe its various locations (Khoo 2007: 14).

This journal, which has for three decades linked literary studies in the antipodes to those in the “podes,” exemplifies

globalization in its positive senses. We members of the Wollongong project are particularly grateful for the opportunity to present in this issue of *Antipodes* a bundle of essays resulting from our research, together with papers contributed by our associates in China, India and Japan.

A mapping of contemporary Asian Australian literature was our first task. Maps usually imply margins, but the boundaries of “Asia” are negotiable or imagined. Our group proceeded from the assumption that Asian Australian writing (like its North American counterpart) merits mainstream attention, not marginalization. For help in mapping our fields, we surveyed the views of Australian writers of Asian backgrounds, who typically live, publish and are read in a borderless or virtual world.

The researchers’ second task was to investigate what “literature of Australia”—narratives involving Australia, whether by writers of Asian background or not—is published, accessed, read, and discussed in the Asian region, how and by whom. We interviewed academics, publishers and writers about the reception of literature of Australia in a field we had, of necessity, to confine to China, Japan, India and Singapore, though we are aware that much more is “out there” in other countries in the region that deserves attention.

Third came the assessment of our findings. The results are important for at least four reasons. Australian writers, translators, editors, publishers, printers and booksellers could earn much more than they currently do, if they could expand the publication and promotion of Australian work in this populous region. Australian literature deserves to be better known and more widely studied there, just as the literatures of Asian countries should be more familiar to Australians. Literature of Australia, written by whomever, has the potential to become part of a new “national narrative” that nudges aside outdated preconceptions of Australia (Carter 2004). And looking beyond the commercial and the national, it’s possible that both Asian Australian literature and literature of Australia in Asia have the capacity to make what an Australian Muslim calls the “leap of empathy,” in contrast to the step backward and the recoil from diversity that currently prevail in many societies (Hamid 2007).

Our findings for each country vary widely. We identified some 50 works of fiction published in English by Australian

writers of Asian background since 2000, and about the same number between then and the late 1960s. These are in addition to short stories, poetry, essays, drama, film scripts and fiction for children. Chinese authors' share of the English-language fiction of Australia since 2000 is way ahead, by volume, of any other national group, as it is also in the literature of Australia published in Mandarin, and in Chinese scholarly publications about it. Diasporic writing in both languages accounts for some of this production, a process whose contents and consequences Wenche Ommundsen examines here, suggesting that writers, readers and curators/critics are now transcending the diasporic and developing the "more truly transnational" imagination that Ien Ang anticipated (Ang 2001). Ommundsen also draws attention to Chinese scholars' alternative readings of Australian literature and their unconventional preferences.

In his essay, Wang Guanglin, who has for many years encouraged Chinese scholarly interest in Australian literature, traces its development through several phases, each one reflecting a change in China's response to the world. Visiting Shanghai, Ouyang Yu asks three interlocutors about the reception in China of literature of Australia and Asian Australian literature: Australian Chinese writer Zhao Chuan, Australian literature specialist Huang Yuanshen, and publisher Wei Xinghong. All three agree that the profile of Australian literature in China is relatively low, and that its promotion, compared to other countries, could be better coordinated. In his own essay, Ouyang Yu disputes this, finding an "unprecedented flourishing" of Australian literature in China and rapidly growing interest in Australian writers, some of whom attract more attention from Chinese scholars, and for different reasons, than they do from researchers in Australia.

India, like China, has a large and growing diaspora around the world, yet Australia and other foreign countries still preserve some of the enticement of novelty for Indian writers and readers. Two-way dealings of many kinds with Australia are multiplying; literature of Australia is increasingly being published, translated, reviewed and "festivalled"; and Australian Studies courses are taught in several universities. Here, Paul Sharrad considers how that interest has developed as critical practice, and how Australian and Indian texts are juxtaposed to produce unconventional readings. For writing by Australians to attract booksellers' attention, he finds that the presence of India in the text is virtually a prerequisite. Otherwise, it is Aboriginal writers and Indigenous themes that distinguish Australian literature for contemporary Indians (Sharrad 2009). Beyond that, Australia merely contributes an exotic setting, as it does to Bollywood movies.

Santosh Sareen and Ipsita Sengupta intriguingly compare similar moments in Australian and Indian history, and two men: the Victorian politician Alfred Deakin, planning for federation of the Australian colonies and simultaneously trying to absorb Hindu spirituality, and Salman Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, in *Midnight's Children*, facing comparable dilemmas. Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay draws our attention to gaps

between aspiration and realization that have confronted those promoting Australian literature at the Kolkata Book Fair. He suggests that after more than a century of interchange, or even because of it, both societies have yet to meet in the middle.

As Indian and Chinese influence in the world has expanded, Japan's globalization appears to have entered a phase of relative decline. The gloss seems to have gone off Japan's internationalization (*kokusaika*) project. Among young Japanese, interest in other countries—with the possible exception of China—and writing or reading fiction about them, studying their literature and culture, or even visiting them, has declined since the 1990s. Economically and strategically, Australia and Japan are still important to each other, but not in exciting new ways. Academic interest in the literature of Australia is sustained by dedicated individual scholars, but it is not expanding at the pace that we observe in China, and Australia could do more to encourage it. In two of these articles, Yasue Arimitsu and Alison Broinowski approach the literatures of Australia and Japan, seeking to explain what is happening to their reception, and what it implies for the future.

The language barrier anachronistically persists. Chinese official selection process for translating foreign fiction has thrown up strange results (Pugsley 2004), which Professor Huang mentions in his interview with Ouyang Yu, and some of which Ouyang disputes in his essay. In Australia, Ouyang indefatigably publishes literature in Chinese and English and in translation, and Mabel Lee is famous as the translator of a Nobel prize winner. Translations of Japanese literature in Australia (by Royall Tyler, Meredith McKinney and others) is highly regarded. Following Michio Ochi's pioneering work, a small group of Kansai scholars selects and translates Australian fiction, while a lone professor at Waseda University publishes his English versions of Australian drama. But the range of translation is still limited in both directions. In India, translation of Australian literature into Hindi, Urdu or other languages has scarcely begun.

For Australian literature to make a mark in Singapore that is commensurate with the island state's capacities and regional influence, a more concerted promotional effort will be required of Australia than is evident at present. Singapore's self-positioning as the region's "cultural hub" challenges Australia to be more proactive, a challenge to which, in literature, we are only slowly beginning to respond. Although several writers of Singapore background are successfully writing and publishing in Australia, the same cannot be said for the presence of literature of Australia in Singapore. There, as in Japan, China and India, Australian fiction competes with the world in bookselling and publishing and for academic attention, but with scant success. Australia still has much to do if we seek to make ourselves interesting, relevant and useful in Singapore and in other Asian countries, too.

Current economic conditions in our four selected countries certainly do not account for the whole region, nor do they sufficiently explain the wide variation between the four as regards the reception and study of Australian literature.

Australia is affected by global forces that complicate the task of comparison with other countries, even while they invite further research and speculation. As Australian publishers' and booksellers' profits from literature decline, it is impossible to calculate how many manuscripts (as we still quaintly call them) by Asian Australians, or by Australians of other backgrounds writing of Asia, are now being rejected by risk-averse gatekeepers. Certainly, their titles no longer appear in the annual prize lists, writers' festival programs, and newspaper review pages—which are themselves shrinking—in the numbers they used to in the 1980s and early 1990s. Is this because books about the Middle East have displaced Asia? Has diaspora fiction glutted the market? Has Asia become normal for “Ordinary” Australian readers? Do Australian readers fail to appreciate the traditions that inform Chinese fiction, one of which Nick Jose has described as “coded autobiography,” writing that traces an individual's emotional and intellectual journey “through harsh and turbulent times”? (Jose 2008) Perhaps. But look again at *My Brilliant Career*, *Flaws in the Glass*, *A Fortunate Life*, and then at *The Happiest Refugee* (Anh Do 2010): we may have failed to notice how much Australian and Chinese autobiographers have in common.

The age of mechanical reproduction that Walter Benjamin welcomed has indeed delivered many global benefits. Advanced communications technologies have decisively changed the way people think about their place in the world, as well as the way they write and read about it, and access its literature. Yet London and New York still predominantly decide which books of fiction in English are published in Asian capitals in significant quantities, and Australia seems powerless to challenge them. In spite of globalization, or perhaps because of it, much Australian writing, even fiction that is Asian Australian, is still pre-segregated by these publishers into a non-Asia market category. Moreover, global technologies for reading and publishing are in flux and no certainty exists about their future in a world of Googled libraries, iBookstores, iPads, Tablets, Kobos and Kindles, the “endless gadgets and guises” by which the Internet tries to replicate books (Alberto Manguel 2008). But Manguel's complaints will not reverse the technological tide, and earning an income from a laptop may soon be as archaic an indulgence as scratching a living from a quill pen. Swords and pens no longer contend for mightiness now that, as one wit has put it, “all the world's a screen, and all the men and women merely keystroke combinations” (Maushart). Readers will carry their pads and tablets everywhere and may even use them to contribute to a new interactive literature. Certainly cyberspace, as the Editor has observed, is no Utopia (Birns).

For all these reasons, we invite readers to enjoy our bundle of surprises. □

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