

Australian Literature Inside and Out **Barry Andrews Memorial Address**

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In 1982, following a meeting in Venice with Bernard Hickey of blessed memory, I wrote a bemused article for the *Age Monthly Review* about the spread of OzLit in Europe. Brian Kiernan, then president of ASAL, replied by telegram:

Last month (May 9-15 1982), the Association for the Study of Australian Literature held its annual conference in Adelaide. Over a hundred teachers and researchers of Australian Literature in universities and colleges throughout Australia attended At the general meeting disappointment and not a little irritation were expressed at the fatuous way in which serious interest in Australian literature abroad had been presented in the press. As current president of the Association, I was instructed to write to the *Age Monthly Review* in the hope of correcting the impression that there is something vaguely questionable, even a little ludicrous, in the notion that Australian literature could excite informed interest abroad, especially in cultured and sophisticated Europe. (2)

ASAL was then at a high tide of missionary enthusiasm, though not without the sense of parody that has always been its forte. As a callow twenty-something who had been to Italy, I was treading on toes, going where angels know better. I replied:

We needn't be prevented from recognizing in this amiable extension of Australian [literary] studies a cultural phenomenon in its own right, which, if it deserves encouragement, also arouses curiosity and invites speculation. ... It may even be that bemusement is as useful as piety when it comes to learning something from the ways in which we can be misconstrued, and the ways in which we sometimes cooperate in those misconstructions. (2)

Thus have I found myself an Australianist by accident, out of sheer love of the material, and because it came with the territory when I was overseas. As an undergraduate at ANU in the 1970s, I envied my friends who took Dorothy Green's Australian Literature course, but it was not recommended for serious English students like me. It was forbidden fruit. In 1984 I was asked to give a paper at the *Daedalus* conference on Australia in Melbourne. I called my piece 'Cultural Identity: "I Think I'm Something Else"', quoting Frank Moorhouse. Then in 1986 I went to China, where I taught my first courses in Australian literature to bright groups of students at Beijing Foreign Studies University and East China Normal University, Shanghai, where Professors Hu Wenzhong and Huang Yuansheng respectively had set up China's first Australian Studies Centres. Profs Hu and Huang were members of the Gang of Nine who were introduced to Australian Literature at Sydney University when their chance came to study abroad after the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. 1986 was also the year

that Foreign Affairs hired Barry Andrews to advise on support for Australian Studies overseas, which was proliferating in every direction. His well-informed, always joking enthusiasm epitomized the OzLit push around Canberra in those days, as Barry dealt deftly with diplomats and accas and travelling writers, and saw that publications such as *Meanjin* and *Australian Book Review* were sent regularly to Australian embassies. In *Notes & Furphies* April/May 1987, close on Barry's untimely death that year, Allen Deacon, director of Cultural Relations at Foreign Affairs, wrote:

Barry Andrews was the first academic to work in the Cultural Relations Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs. In 1985/86 Foreign Affairs reviewed its cultural relations policies leading, inter alia, to a greater concentration of resources being devoted to programmes in Asia. Increased support for Australian Studies in the Asian region became an element in the Department's new policy. [This was the Hawke/Keating era.] ...Barry characteristically was quick to perceive the particular context in which the department set its cultural relations activities. He was direct and succinct in his advice and with every issue and problem was unfailingly constructive and practical. (3)

Barry is shown on the cover of that issue of *Notes & Furphies* looking relaxed in his cricket whites, bat in one hand, glass in the other. In some ways, as a kind of court jester, he paved the way for my own appointment as Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy in Beijing in 1987, with a brief from then Education Minister Susan Ryan and then Ambassador Ross Garnaut to develop Australian Studies in China.

The first Chinese Australian Studies conference took place in Beijing in 1988, opened by Donald Horne as Chair of the Australia Council. Donald's eyes twinkled when the Chinese interpreter called him Professor Horny. The 20th anniversary conference returned to Beijing Foreign Studies University in 2008, Beijing's Olympic year. The links and networks that grew in the early years persist to this day, some ramifying, some worn thin. A great deal has changed over the intervening two decades, nowhere more so than in parts of Asia, especially China.

Back in the 1980s a priority was to fund Chinese scholars to attend ASAL. Zhu Jiongqiang, the translator of Patrick White's *The Eye of the Storm*, and Chen Zhengfa, longtime editor of *Oceanic Literature* at Anhui University, attended ASAL at Monash University in 1989, that year of rupture for China.¹ Yang Guobin, a postgrad from Beijing who edited the Australian component of a Chinese *Companion to Masterpieces in World Poetry* (Peking University Press, 1990), came to ASAL at Griffith in 1990. In his paper he identified the famous Chinese author Mao Dun's selection of four Australian poems for a magazine in 1921 as 'perhaps the first time that Australian literature was introduced to China'. Mao Dun had observed that 'here in these poems [by Mary Gilmore, Hugh McCrae and Roderic Quinn] there is neither arrogance nor humility, neither tiredness nor nervousness, neither indulgence in nihilism nor exaggerated beauty, nor any alarm or bewilderment at the ugliness and difficulties of

the material environment' (9). A contrast with China is implied in those lines, where Mao Dun may have felt that the energies of writers and intellectuals were too often misdirected or inconsequentially diffused. He reads the Australian poems from a Chinese perspective, putting them to Chinese use in the manner of the Chinese phrase *xiti zhongyong* [tr.: 'Western substance, Chinese application']. In this case the Australian example is a call to arms.

Then there's Ouyang Yu, writer and scholar, whose fate brought him from China to Australia in those heady years, to ASAL and some determined questioning of Australian literature. Ouyang has repaid any assisted passage tenfold with his original and polymathic contributions to China-Australia literary interaction. He has translated important Australian novels, including *The Man Who Loved Children* by Christina Stead, *Tirra Lirra by the River* by Jessica Anderson and *The Ancestor Game* by Alex Miller. He has published, in both English and Chinese, scholarly studies of the representation of Chinese in Australian fiction. In his own poetry and fiction he has developed a lively personal aesthetic, combining elegance and rawness, observation and emotion, that enables him to move surprisingly between Australian attitudes and Chinese perspectives.² In an essay called 'Book-digging to China, to a Kind of Origin', for instance, Ouyang notes that Yu Dafu, another writer of Mao Dun's generation, recorded in his diary for 18 August 1927: 'After breakfast in a Japanese restaurant in Hongkou [Shanghai], I went to an old bookshop in the French concession and bought two books, one being Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* and the other being *Poems* by Adam Lindsay Gordon'. Yu Dafu was admired for his erotically charged, self-tormented autobiographical fiction. He fled south to Sumatra after the fall of Singapore in 1942 and was executed there by Japanese military police in 1945. He was nothing if not eclectic in his tastes. Perhaps he felt a passionate comradesly affinity with the doomed Gordon as a man of action, a noble outsider: an exemplary Australian. Ouyang's discovery provides another thread in the largely unwritten history of Sino-Australian reading and adds dimension to the influence of the brilliant and shocking Yu Dafu on Ouyang's own brilliant and shocking Australian writing.

Different cultural contexts generate different textual readings that are valuable for just that reason. In China from the 1950s, for example, the canon of Australian literature was socialist realist, with its origins partly in Australian socialist and nationalist traditions and partly in China's own socialist construction of culture.³ Since the 1990s, however, postmodernist and postcolonial approaches, often influenced by Edward Said's analysis of orientalism, have been avidly taken up and now, reflecting greater confidence and self-concern, the Chinese presence in Australian writing has become a topic of interest.

No doubt the Chinese case is specific, with 'Chinese characteristics', like the People's Republic's version of socialism. But equally it joins with readings of Australian literature from other cultural contexts—Indian, Italian, American, British and so on—to counter, qualify and ultimately expand understandings of the field. The same is true of

how Australian literature itself moves forward, which, if I may briefly digress, relates to a more general question of how the new displaces or finds accommodation with what is already there. In the making of modern Australia, including literature, how does the present relate to a past that we might prefer simply to forget, bloody and blind as it often was? What is the cost of such forgetting? If we are willing to go there, is it in a spirit of recovery, custodianship or reinvention? The anxiety about Australian literature that has surfaced in public debate in recent years comes with uncertainty about the value and meaning of the past for the present and future. There's a fear of loss of the capacity to transmit to those who come after the books, the stories, the records of ourselves, and of what would happen then. It is not entirely irrational, but can be disproportionate, as it is deeply ingrained, like the fear of snakes. As Flora Eldershaw put it, the 'past is all we can know of the future with any certainty. The past indicates the future'(4). To the extent that Australian literature is a work in progress, an unstable do-it-yourself phenomenon, the wariness about its survival can become acute. Henry Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife' imagines that condition: the watchfulness that comes with a snake in the house. But once the dog kills the snake, there is no story.

In a year that has seen new works by Murray Bail, Peter Carey, J.M. Coetzee, Michelle de Kretser, Helen Garner, Gail Jones, Joan London, David Malouf and Tim Winton (among others), internationally published, favourably reviewed and featuring on prize lists, as well as a long appreciation of Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* in the *London Review of Books*, and James Bradley's *The Resurrectionist* (2006) chosen by Richard and Judy, the powerful UK book show—to mention a few highlights—it could be argued that the long-awaited golden moment has come, at least for Australian fiction. Surely more people are reading Australian literature than ever before. Years of Australian taxpayer support, priming the pump of these successes, might finally have paid off. Yet this contemporary flourishing of Australian writing can also seem disconnected from an Australian literary past that hides in secondhand bookshops and the corners of archives. On winning the 2008 Miles Franklin Award for *The Time We Have Taken* (2007), Steven Carroll said that it 'comes with the gravitas of a whole literary tradition...you actually feel that weight almost instantly.' As if it were a dead hand. I discussed Australian literature with a group of honours students who said they found it 'depressing'. That turned out to be because they found Australia's past 'depressing' too.

Perhaps 'writing' becomes 'literature' as it is consumed more than once, by more than one person, and, like the magic pudding, digested, discussed, regurgitated, reconstituted. And then taken as read. Writers of all sorts who circulate the writing of the past through its transformation in their own work are agents in that process, as of course are readers. Included here importantly are those who write about writing—critics, scholars, teachers. The literature of the past lives indirectly in the reading and writing of the present, its traces on us not always visible. Frank Moorhouse has described how, identifying himself as an Australian writer, he engaged with his predecessors: how in sixth class he rolled about laughing at Lawson's 'The Loaded Dog' and later wept over *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and valued Marjorie Barnard and Patrick White. Readers of Moorhouse will discern points of connection, a

line of descent, if you like, from Lawson, Richardson, Barnard and White to Moorhouse himself. In seeking to define this as a literary tradition, while keeping it open, various and always changing, Moorhouse speaks of the ‘bonafide, continuous, affined readership’ that makes it possible and holds it together (9). I like that phrase and endorse that concept of a continuum. As a younger writer who came along with Moorhouse’s example, say in *The Americans, Baby*, before me, I acknowledge a connection with Moorhouse in my own work. Tradition need not be restrictive or monumental; it can be enabling and in flux. It can also be resisted, broken or defied. It is possible to start again, to make a new tradition, where the larger continuity may only become apparent in retrospect. I suspect that some of the resistance to Australian literature, even as contemporary Australian texts are passionately debated, comes with resistance to the political moment we have been living through. Australian literature as an institution risked being co-opted to a coercive agenda, leaving rupture as the solution: a clean break with a shameful past that was being recycled in the present as iconic of a ‘cohesive’—narrowed, racialised and triumphalist—and therefore *very* ‘depressing’—Australian story. The marker of that breach became, then, the unAustralian, the cosmopolitan, the more complexly Australian, the generically hybrid, the challenge to literary decorum.

I asked the students who found Australian literature depressing how a piece of writing might be labeled as Australian and considered worthy of inclusion in an anthology of significant Australian texts. It was agreed that unprettified versions of Australia should appear alongside past achievements that could be regarded as formative and ‘classic’: there was room for ‘The Man From Snowy River’ and Patrick White alongside stolen-generation narratives. I circulated a set of poems all called ‘Australia’, by Bernard O’Dowd (1903), A.D. Hope (1943), Ania Walwicz (1981), Peter Goldsworthy (2004) and Ali Alizadeh (2006), each expressing a degree of ambivalence towards the Australia that each imagines fantastically. O’Dowd’s ‘last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space’ that has the prospect of ‘millennial Eden’ lurking beneath its face (116) becomes Hope’s ‘last of lands ... a vast parasite robber state’ and yet a desert of the mind from which ‘savagely and scarlet’ prophesy might spring (13). For Ania Walwicz, mimicking a stigmatized wog language, ‘You big ugly. You too empty. You desert with your nothing nothing nothing’ becomes the ‘Idiot centre of your own self’. (305-6) Peter Goldsworthy conceives Australia from an aerial perspective as a kind of pie, ‘our baked and gritty/ crust, lightly watered, sifter dusted, / and sarcastic with odd hints of eucalypt ... tastes too salty’ (45). Ali Alizadeh constructs Australia in terms of a history that casts a grotesque psycho-social shadow across the present—once rejected and repulsed, Australians seek revenge by visiting the same fate on others:

Asian and Muslim
 asylum seekers must reimburse

 the insults your forefathers suffered
 on the convict ships. The Aborigines

 shall be wiped off their land since

you were exiled from yours.... (44)

Alizadeh's un-Australian 'Australia' poem got many votes for inclusion. The poem performs a double task of reckoning with the past in order to intervene in the present, at once disrupting and revalorizing the act of writing on a national theme. Alizadeh was born in Iran in 1976 and migrated to Australia when he was 15. He lives and writes in Melbourne. A new writer such as Alizadeh has an opportunistic and interventionist rather than custodial relationship with Australian traditions. He is the latest 'black swan of trespass'—to quote Ern Malley—in waters that are for him at once alien and habitus.

Let me mention two more recent black swans, this time works of fiction: *Dreams of Speaking* (2006) by Gail Jones and *Carpentaria* (2006) by Alexis Wright. *Dreams of Speaking* is set in Paris, Japan and Western Australia. It is about a person's being, mind and body, attached or not attached, in contemporary time and space: a dance between cultural research and corporeal quest. It is transgressive in what it allows an Australian novel to do and where it asks the reader to go. But at the same time it is continuous not only with Jones's earlier fictions, but with Western Australian literary traditions that fuse poetry and politics in passionate narrative, notably the work of Katharine Susannah Prichard and Dorothy Hewett. Without confining Jones's work we can also show how it loops back on where it comes from in enriching ways.⁴ Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* boldly lifts the name of a place, in a manner that recalls the naming of Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, for a novel that floods earlier tellings of northern Australia with a set of Aboriginal stories from past and present. Her new, larger narrative is disruptive mythically, politically and in literary terms, as it is continually disrupted as it goes along, carried by a newly created and creating voice that also lets in the voices of other and older storytellers, overlapping as they are heard. Wright says hers is a form of 'contemporary Indigenous storytelling that ... is a consequence of our racial diaspora in Australia. The helix of divided strands is forever moving, entwining all stories together, just like a lyrebird which is capable of singing several tunes at once.' ('On writing *Carpentaria*', 84) Alexis Wright's novel shifts Australian fiction sideways. *Her serpent can't be killed. It's everywhere, there and not there, 'they say its being is porous; it permeates everything. It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like skin' (Carpentaria, 2). No dog can get it.*

At a workshop on Asian/Australian Values: New Directions in Australian Literature at the University of Wollongong in November 2007 there was discussion of ways of thinking about change and transformation in Australian writing. One image was the wave, representing successive influxes of different cultures, voices, languages, literary forms, arriving on the shore, crashing against the breakwater then flooding in and adding to the whole. Another image was the tree, branching and ramifying outwards and upwards from one trunk, forming one ever greater whole. My own image would be of the black swan, the trespass, the transgression—referring to Humphrey McQueen's

and Don Anderson's ideas, but also in the Derridean sense of the arriving stranger who both defines and transcends the limits of what the host can offer and accept. In relation to Australian literature, those strangers are all of us who keep it from settling, keep it in progress, open, disruptive, conditional. To articulate that calls for a kind of literary history we probably don't have yet: a literary history that, among other things at present, can encompass the energizing inscription of Asian/Australian writing within Australian literary culture, strategically inside and outside.

Let me recall Adrienne Clarkson, author, journalist and, from 1999 to 2005, Governor-General of Canada where her memoir, *Heart Matters*, became a best-seller in 2006. Clarkson came to Canada from Hong Kong as a child. Her father had come to Hong Kong from Australia where her grandfather had migrated from southern China in the 19th century. 'My father,' Clarkson writes:

learned to ride bareback when he was growing up in a small village called Chiltern.... My grandfather had arrived in Australia for the gold rush only to discover that it was over. ... There were hardly any Chinese in the area, but they knew of each other. My grandmother, who lived to be ninety-eight, was sixteen when she married my grandfather, and she always told my father and his brothers and sisters that she remembered her father being given ten gold dollars for her. She was the daughter of a Chinese man and an Irish woman who is listed on her birth certificate as Mary Jones. As soon as Mary Jones had had two children, one of whom was my grandmother, she disappeared, never to be heard from again.

In the great Australian novel about a colonial figure, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, Chinese gold diggers are alerted by an Irishwoman 'clad in a skimpy green petticoat, with a scarlet shawl held about her shoulders, wisps of frowsy red hair standing out round her head ... spinning her arms like the vane of a windmill, and crying at the top of her voice: 'Joe, boys!—Joe, Joe, Joey!'

'Only the group of Chinamen washing tail-heaps remain unmoved. One of them, to whom the warning woman belonged, raises his head and calls a Chinese word at her; she obeys it instantly, vanishing into thin air.'

When I read that page, I had an electrifying flash thinking that this could have been my great-grandmother. (41-42)

Later Clarkson's father, William Poy, aged eleven, was sent to relatives in Sydney to work in the family business. He 'never had any formal education', but 'he went to Melbourne after he was sixteen [and] took secretarial courses'. He also 'went to elocution lessons, which he said cost him a half a week's salary once a month. This meant that he lost his Australian twang.... All his life he spoke English with an English accent. He, of course, had never learned any Chinese, because his mother didn't speak any. He had a longing to write in English....' His relatives were part of Melbourne's racing fraternity. At nineteen he decided to return to the ancestral village in China that he had never seen, and from there he went on to Hong Kong where he became a

successful jockey and a civil servant, working with Canadians, and then the war came and afterwards a second emigration (43-44).

Clarkson's partly Australian story traverses dilemmas of belonging, identity, accent and language that are widely shared. Remarkably she finds part of herself through one of the landmarks of Australian literature. Henry Handel Richardson lived in Chiltern, Victoria too, where Clarkson's Chinese family lived. Ouyang Yu notes the prevailing 'image of the Chinese' at the time 'as the very antithesis of Australians' (1993, 21). Yet Clarkson re-reads the literary text as a way of recovering an image of an Irish great-grandmother who formed a partnership with a Chinese man on the goldfields. She foregrounds these peripheral characters and gives them a story-generating capacity they barely had a hundred years ago. The completion of that circle is a measure of transformation.

To claim Adrienne Clarkson for Asian/Australian writing requires the 'slash' that recognizes movement through diasporic histories and geographies and implies a continual questioning of categories, a constant self-questioning. Introducing *Locating Asian Australian Cultures*, Tseen Khoo writes:

The porosity of humanities and social sciences disciplines is an expected feature of contemporary academic environments; what is more interesting here, perhaps, is the breaching and muddying of area boundaries. ... Asian Australian studies' constant features will include deliberations over its own definition, boundaries and purpose. It is useful to bear in mind that Australian studies, with over thirty years of institutional presence, still faces repeated crises in funding and profile..., with cyclic negotiations about whether the field should concentrate or diffuse. (1-2)

Khoo focuses on the work of artists of Asian descent in Australia who 'among other things ... interrogate existing canonical representations and challenge the relative invisibility of Asian Australian interventions into the Australian cultural sphere.' She reminds us that not only do those interventions occur within Australian culture, they also simultaneously have frames, contexts and connections outside Australian culture. In Khoo's words: 'While much work remains to be done in terms of layered cultural and political critique and historical recovery work, Asian Australian studies cannot help but benefit from the infusions of diasporic Asian dialogue that are the hallmark of astute contemporary research in these areas.' The strategic essentialism deployed needs to be nimble and politicized as focus shifts from one space, one shape to another, never final (6-7).

This is reflected in inventive, unsettled terminology: Austral/Asian; Australasian; Asian-Australia; Asia Australia; Alter/Asians; the 4As (Asian Australian Artists Association), and so on; and equally the bland or uncomfortable language of officialdom: New Australian, ethnic, multicultural, citizen, unAustralian. If there are boundary disputes about the term 'Australian', so are there about 'Asian'. Asian writing, for example, is a new marketing category, generally understood to be Asian

writing *in English*, either directly or by translation. It is sometimes transnational or diasporic and sometimes not. The term ‘Asian’ begins, ironically, as a label applied from outside, from Western usage, adopted inside for an often uneasy solidarity. Asians do not always identify with a label that flattens even related cultures such as China, Korea and Japan, let alone such diverse countries as India and Indonesia.

Internationally, Asian writing—moving now from the margins to the centre of the bookshop in such celebrated cases as Aravind Adiga’s Booker-prize winning *The White Tiger* (2008)—encompasses a diverse group of writers across different generations—those translated, those writing in English, mobile, global, local, stay-at-home. This new Asian writing comes out of particular constituencies and histories, often marked by political turbulence, and is expressive of change and movement, delineating relations between human beings, between humanity and nature, humanity and God, in complex patterns. A moment of creative opportunity has empowered a new generation of writers and of receptive readers. The same is true where Asian writing maps onto Australian writing.

Yet the language we use to conceptualise such new cultural formations remains clumsy. The various labels and their unstated assumptions deserve teasing out, not least because of the shiftingness—or sometimes shiftiness—they share. The language of Australia in or out of Asia, for example, part of or separate from the region, Asianised or otherwise, is framed by geopolitical constructions that Australia has been keen to promote. Writing in the *Griffith Review’s In the Neighbourhood* issue, Michael Wesley makes the point that ‘by the 1980s, a hybrid formula, “Asia-Pacific” emerged that allowed Australia to reconcile its bifurcating loyalties’. He means not only the pull between Asian trading relationships and American foreign policy arrangements, but the shadow of vaguer older binaries of geography and history, East and West. ‘The tension between the lure of pan-Asianism and Australia’s Pacific commitments has nagged at Australian foreign policy for over half a century’, Wesley writes. It has also, peripherally, nagged at Australian cultural practice. Wesley notes Australia’s enthusiasm for regional groupings, reflecting the desire to belong of a so-called middle power aiming to punch above its weight, to use that somewhat alarming phrase. ‘Anxieties about belonging have driven an obsessive clubbishness in Australian foreign policy,’ Wesley writes, adding that in Asia:

the heightening of ... competitive regionalism will see Australia’s ability to reconcile its institutional commitments stretched to breaking point – the tight-rope walk of being everyone’s best friend, a middle power that can achieve its own goals without having to take sides as the great powers jostle between themselves.... (22, 43)

Asia is inscribed, positively or negatively, in Australia’s definition of itself, past, present and becoming. Asia is constitutive of the Australian imaginary as a (historically) racialised society. It is a third term, in often invisible ways, in argument between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.⁵ And to speak of race, in relation to writing, raises the question of how the writer’s racial or ethnic position is established

and manifest. Is it a question of face or voice, skin or accent? What if it is *not* manifest? These are complex issues. Literature, however, is of its nature fluid, as we discover when we look at what's in the box labeled Asia Australia. It's after all a double label, which may be the label for what doesn't fit under either unstable descriptor, Asia or Australia. In writing, at least, the overlap of two imaginaries—two possibilities of becoming—becomes a new creative space. Here we find the work of Adib Khan, Brian Castro, Ouyang Yu, Beth Yahp, Adam Aitken, Michelle de Kretser, Kim Cheng Boey, Merlinda Bobis, Tony Ayres, Chi Vu, Tom Cho, Hoa Pham, Nam Le, Michelle Cahill, Alice Pung and others, some of whom are gathered in the collection edited by Pung, *Growing Up Asian in Australia* (2008). In their work we find the doubling, the mirroring, the visibility and effacement, the anger and coolness, the translation and retranslation of culture, self and others that constitute a renewed set of strategies and a new sensibility in Australian writing.⁶

For example, when his girlfriend says his nose has started growing, the narrator of Tom Cho's story 'Pinocchio' runs to the bathroom:

to look at myself in the mirror.... I stare sadly at myself. For a few moments, I cannot speak. I just look at myself.... It seems that I have become like Pinocchio – a not-so-real boy who is full of falsehoods and fallibilities. I turn back to the mirror once more. (82)

And Ouyang Yu writes in his poem, 'Seeing Double':

you can't help but
translate everything back and forth so many times
... doubled tripled multiplied double. (36)

And in her novel *The Hamilton Case*, Michelle de Kretser has as ambivalent hero a man who 'gave no sign of understanding that his life had been a series of substitutions' (181). Of the conversions that language can make, De Kretser writes:

There is an old instinct, at work in bordellos and the relations of East and West, to convert the unbearable into the picturesque. It enables a sordid existence to be endured, on one side, and witnessed, on the other, with something like equanimity. (187)

These writers are lyrebirds too, like Alexis Wright, singing several tunes at once.

Asia/Australia is inscribed everywhere. To give a different kind of example, let me invoke Australia's most famous horse. It was named by a Chinese medical student who used to hang out at Randwick racetrack. His father had emigrated from southern China in the 19th century, perhaps from Guangxi, and knew some of the local language. He suggested the Zhuang word for 'lightning', Phar Lap, for this exceptional horse.

Thinking of Phar Lap recalls Barry Andrews again, this time for his parodic biography of the racing champion:

LAP, PHAR (1926-32), sporting personality, business associate of modest speculators and national hero.... Early in 1930 Lap journeyed to North America to strengthen his interests there; [his business partners] Telford, who disliked traveling, and Pike who had weighty problems to contend with, stayed behind. Tall and rangy, known affectionately as ‘Bobby’, ‘The Red Terror’ and occasionally as ‘you mongrel’, Lap died in mysterious circumstances in Atherton, California, on 5 April, 1932, and was buried in California, Melbourne, Canberra and Wellington. A linguist as well as a businessman, he popularized the phrase ‘get stuffed’, although owing to an unfortunate accident in his youth he left no children.

Thank you, Barry.

NOTES

¹ Zhu Jiongqiang’s translation of *The Eye of the Storm* (*Fengbao Yan*, Guilin: Lijiang Publishing House 1986) for a prestigious series of works by Nobel Prize winners was highly regarded at the time of publication, especially for its innovative use of language.

² Ouyang Yu, *Biaoxian tazhe: Aodaliya xiaoshuo zhong de Zhongguoren* (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House 2000); published in English as *Chinese in Australian Fiction (1888-1988)*, Amherst, New York: Cambria 2008. For a full bibliography of work by Ouyang Yu: <http://www.ouyangyu.com.au/> See also Nicholas Jose, review of *New and Selected Poems* by Ouyang Yu, *Life Writing*, Vol 2 No 1 2005, pp. 147-54.

³ For a more detailed discussion, see Peter C. Pugsley, ‘Manufacturing the Canon: Australia in the Chinese Literary Imagination’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 83, 2004.

⁴ A related argument is put by Robert Dixon, ‘Ghosts in the Machine: Modernity and the Unmodern in Gail Jones’s *Dreams of Speaking*’, *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, vol. 8 2000, where he writes about ‘the persistence of the unmodern’ in the novel’s protagonist’s ‘project on modernity’. (121, 134)

⁵ See, for example, Edwards & Shen, 10; Ganter, vi.

⁷ Deborah L. Madsen discusses some of these writers and many others in her groundbreaking critical survey of Asian-Australian literature.

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