

Barbecued sunrise: Translation and transnationalism in Australian poetry

Stephanie Guest
University of Melbourne

Since the 1940s, the study of Australian literature has been a project of cultural nationalism and is still focused on work written in English and set in Australia or, as stipulated by the Miles Franklin award, presenting 'Australian life in any of its phases.' When I proposed literary translation as an Honours thesis topic within the Australian Literature program at the University of Sydney in 2013, I was advised to go to Comparative Literature because Australian Literature was not equipped to deal with languages other than English. In the end, though, I was allowed to embark on the project on the condition that it focused on works from other languages being translated into English by Australian translators and not the other way around.

While considerable attention has been given to translation as a mode of literary circulation and as a metaphor for an ethics of cross-cultural exchange and understanding, there has been little work done by proponents of World Literature on the linguistic problem of what happens *in* translation. For example, Pascale Casanova writes about translation as essential to literary *modernisation*, but does not problematise the act of translation itself (1999, trans. M.B. DeBevoise 2004). Casanova's argument assumes perfect linguistic transfer in translation, as if it allowed texts to transcend their linguistic (and social and historical) situation to enter a time-space of universally acclaimed genius. In other studies, there is a tendency to use translation as a metaphor for circulation and cultural exchange without paying much attention to specific linguistic transformations. Thus, in *The Translation Zone* (2006), Emily Apter conceives of global *translatio*, which is an abstract ethical practice 'of being-in-translation—of being aware of our own translation through encounters with other languages, other people, other cultures' (Dixon 2012 (1) 13). Apter's studies are oriented around the ethics of translation rather than its linguistic play. Franco Moretti's model of 'distant reading' studies translation as a mode of circulation but performs no close analysis of what it means *to translate*.

An exception to the general inattention towards translation as such in the field of World Literature is David Damrosch's characterisation of the site of translation as a site of literary enrichment. He states that to understand what is lost or gained across the sphere of World Literature, we must analyse:

the transformations a work undergoes in particular circumstances.... To understand the workings of world literature, we need more a phenomenology than an ontology of the work of art: a literary work *manifests* differently abroad than it does at home.' (Damrosch 6)

Damrosch argues for a reading practice that evaluates the text's success in the translating language rather than one that aims to know the foreign text's local particularity.¹ He proposes that to read multiple translations of the one 'original,' tracing the 'intertwined shifts of language' (34), allows for a greater understanding of what happens to the text *in* translation and as a piece of World Literature (25).

Another exception might be Apter's *Against World Literature* (2013) in which she expresses unease with the way the 'broad ambition' of World Literature can 'fall prey inevitably to the tendency to zoom over the speed bumps of untranslatability in the rush to cover ground' (2013 3). Apter deploys the idea of 'untranslatability' 'as a deflationary gesture toward the expansionism and gargantuan scale of world-literary endeavors' (2013 3).² Untranslatability can manifest as 'non-translation, mistranslation, [and] incomparability' (Apter 2013 4). Despite this, untranslatability can still be considered a mode of transnationalism in that it calls the writer-translator-reader-critic's attention to the boundaries dividing languages and nations when they are put into conversation with another.

In the Australian context, Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney propose a shift from thinking of World Literature in terms of where the writer is writing (as in Casanova's argument) to thinking of World Literature in terms of where and what the reader is reading: *scenes of reading*. I want to suggest another shift, from investigating 'scenes of reading' to exploring scenes of reading works originally written in languages other than English, what might be called *scenes of translation*.

In their reinvigoration of the provincial, Dixon and Rooney outline what they call the 'double bind' of the national and the transnational in world literature (6,8). Hence a transnational approach defamiliarises both the national *and* the transnational by putting them into deconstructive play with each other. Dixon and Rooney use the anecdote of Nettie Palmer reading Proust in Caloundra to illustrate the overwhelming 'immediacy of local community and the sense of place' and the illusory nature of the battle between the 'national' and the 'transnational' (13).

A turn towards the transnational—the interplay of the provincial and the international, and the movement between and dissolution of linguistic barriers—is highly significant in the Australian literary context. From cultural nationalism, to postcolonialism, Australian literary studies have generally turned towards the transnational. Yet Michael Jacklin proposes that for Australian literature to truly embrace a transnational mode will require a more thorough critical appreciation of multicultural literatures in Australia. He outlines the failure of Australian literary critics to recognise culturally and linguistically diverse writing. This is echoed by Simon West, who ascribes it to monolingualism (58). West suggests that there needs to be more systematic attention paid to translation and multilingual poetry for the continued vitality of Australian poetry. Jacklin and West point to a gap that has been identified by a number of Australian literary critics.³ However, very little work has been conducted beyond this. I argue that the transnational turn in Australian literature requires an expanded and experimental approach to translation as a way of breaking down national and linguistic borders.

Friedrich Schleiermacher's 1813 essay 'On the Different Methods of Translating'⁴ (trans. Susan Bernofsky) presents an early argument for translation as a site for transnationalism—that which breaks down linguistic and national boundaries—and, unlike its successors, theorises about what happens in the act. Schleiermacher outlines two possibilities for the literary translator: 'Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him' (49). Schleiermacher's description of the first method of literary translation is instructive for developing a mode of reading the transnational. By moving the reader towards the foreign author, the translator foreignises the translating language, bringing it closer to the language of the 'original'. Schleiermacher writes:

... in the first case the translator is endeavouring, in his work, to compensate for the reader's inability to understand the original language. He seeks to impart to the reader the same image, the same impression that he himself received thanks to his knowledge of the original language of the work as it was written, thus moving the reader to his own position, one in fact foreign to him. (49)

...[T]he more precisely the translation adheres to the turns and figures of the original, the more foreign it will seem to its reader. (53)

Schleiermacher explains that this method requires 'a disposition of the language that not only departs from the quotidian but lets one perceive that it was not left to develop freely but rather was bent to a foreign likeness' (53). This 'foreign likeness' refers not only to the translator's ability with the language of the 'original' but can also describe the act of 'foreignising' the translating language. For Schleiermacher, to foreignise a language is to combine linguistic deviations and innovations 'to produce a new characteristic mode of expression' (54). The reader of such a translation should

be given an inkling, if only a distant one, of the original language and what the work owes to it, and thus some of what he loses for not understanding the original tongue is here compensated: he is not only to have a vague sense that what he is reading does not sound unquestionably native to his own tongue; rather, it should sound foreign in quite a specific way. (54)

Schleiermacher does not analyse any translations to show how his theory might affect the reading of translations. He leaves for others the task of 'compar[ing] and judg[ing] the most admirable efforts that have been made according to both views, and by these means elucidate the matter even further' (50). In my investigation of translation and its relationship to transnationalism, I take up part of Schleiermacher's unfinished agenda.

Schleiermacher's bifurcating approaches need to be supplemented by a theory of what language *does* in translation. To this end I draw on Walter Benjamin's essays 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' (1916, trans. Edmund Jephcott 1978) and 'The Task of the Translator' (1923, trans. Harry Zohn 1968) for their metaphorical value in this respect.

Two Australian translations of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard' (1897) exemplify Schleiermacher's method of moving the reader towards the foreign author. In this case, though, the movement is taken to carnivalesque extremes. The translators' language departs from the quotidian, and is bent to a foreign likeness: they make the English translation literally *sound like* the French of Mallarmé, albeit often in a parody of Australian pronunciation of the French language. The act of foreignising the translating language fits in with Walter Benjamin's conception of translation as an extended flowering or afterlife of the 'original' text via a 'continua of transformation' through the interstices of language (72). These moments of dissolution and transformation of linguistic boundaries, which create a kind of in-between-language, illustrate the productivity of translation as a site for transnationalism in Australian poetry.

In this paper I will first look at the specific challenges regarding the translation of 'Un coup de dés...' and then suggest parody and the carnival as theoretical modes for reading both Christopher Brennan's and Chris Edwards's translations. I will analyse each translation in turn for the way it foreignises both Mallarmé's French and Australian English to produce a site of highly playful transnationalism.

How (not to) translate Mallarmé

Mallarmé's work presents a number of puzzles for its translator. I outline three of them here. First, Mallarmé's linguistic and formal innovations are intricately woven in the French language and are difficult to convey in other languages. He plays with homonymic correspondences and ambiguities, defamiliarising and elevating the French language.

A second puzzle is Mallarmé's dissembling directions for reading 'Un coup de dés....' In his preface, he claims to be reluctant to give any clues; he values 'any skillful Reader's own penetration' (trans. Mary Ann Caws 105) and is wary of authorial attempts to determine the meaning of the work. Mallarmé begins with a reassurance to the reader that he does not 'transgress against the system' of conventional line breaks and the space around them in poetry, 'but simply disperse[s] it' (105). Mallarmé states that the purpose of the large white spaces that separate words or groups of words in 'Un coup de dés....' is to pace reading (*ibid.*). The writer is then like a conductor, controlling the tempo of the poem. The 'simultaneous vision of the Page...taken as a unit' is held in the 'surrounding silence' of the 'blanks.' Through this oscillation between fragment (individual parts in the orchestra) and whole (the total sound of all parts played together), the poem becomes 'a musical score' (Mallarmé 105). The spatial arrangement of the poem takes on sonoral significance (like the careful acoustics of a concert-hall): 'the disposition of the characters: in the middle, on the top, or the bottom of the page, indicates the rise and fall in intonation' (105).

Finally, some critics regard 'Un coup de dés....' as containing a secret meaning.⁵ A number of phrases in the poem—the invocation of 'l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre' ('the unique Number which cannot be another'), 'le Septentrion aussi Nord / UNE CONSTELLATION' ('Septentrion also North / A CONSTELLATION')—leave open the possibility that the poem encodes a 'unique number' as a key, which would be near impossible to translate.

These puzzles in Mallarmé's poetics lead to tricky questions of translatability. How can one translate the already foreignised language, the musical correspondences, and the 'code' of the poem, all at once?

Christopher Brennan's *Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope*

Christopher Brennan's jocular translation of Mallarmé's 'Un coup de dés....,' written in 1897, the same year that Mallarmé's poem was published, has received no critical attention as a 'translation.' Brennan called the manuscript 'an exposition in English of the new Mallarméan poetical-musical form' (quoted in Axel Clark 5). Brennan's manuscript was the first English-language poem inspired by 'Un coup de dés....' and so I believe that it's necessary to consider Brennan's text as a translation as well as a parody or 'graphoscope', as explored below.

Michael Farrell describes the anti-canonical nature of the *Musicopoematographoscope* in Brennan studies, which privileges his 'serious' work:

... Unlike the hoax poetry of James McAuley and Harold Stewart's Ern Malley, it seems that the creator of the *Musicopoematographoscope* has been taken at his word: because Brennan appears not to take it seriously, neither have its critics. Even now, when pastiche is a more respectable practice, Brennan studies ... are dominated by his correct verse, his version of Symbolism. (176)

Clark explains that the *Musicopoematographoscope* was ‘Brennan’s good-humoured but defiant response to the public, to the critics, and to Dowell O’Reilly’ (5), who had all criticised Brennan’s *XXI Poems: MDCCCXCIII-MDCCCXCVII Towards the Source* (1897). John Tranter suggests that ‘the main burden of its complaint can be traced by following through the poem the words in large capitals: “I don’t give a tinker’s damn for the public and they return the compliment”’ (Tranter n.p.). Tranter links Brennan’s ‘angry cry’ with the ‘largely dismissive’ reviews Brennan received for *XXI Poems*. While Tranter has dismissed the work for its retaliatory rage, the *Musicopoematographoscope*’s exclamations can be considered as invoking laughter and communal dissolution rather than outright violence.

Farrell sidesteps the consideration of the *Musicopoematographoscope* in terms of its relation to Mallarmé’s ‘Un coup de dés....’ He writes: ‘[t]hrough a precursor exists in Mallarmé in terms of the pastiche text, there is no clear influence on the work as a whole: of its assemblage character and use of collage and its anti-reflective reflexivity’ (177). Instead, Farrell treats Brennan’s text in terms of its visual materiality, and the text’s performativity and camp/drag aspect (177). Farrell also suggests the carnivalesque as a mode of reading the *Musicopoematographoscope*: the title poster is read as an ‘advertising poster... [which] recalls the carnivalesque field of tents offering different marvels’ (Farrell 188).

The *Musicopoematographoscope* has been analysed for its ‘graphic echo of the formal antecedent for his new manuscript—Mallarmé’s ‘Un Coup De Dés’’ (Kate Fagan 1), but not as a translation. Katherine Barnes emphasises typographical aspects of the *Musicopoematographoscope* in her 2007 essay. She proposes reading the work as a ‘graphoscope:’ ‘an instrument for viewing a magnified version of a small picture, postcard or photograph, and versions of it were still being produced in 1900’ (Barnes 45). Barnes goes on to decipher Brennan’s auto-insertion into a Mallarméan lineage and raises questions of poetic inheritance.

Brennan transfigures Mallarmé’s form and thereby foreignises Australian poetry, bringing the reader towards the distorted French of Mallarmé. In my analysis of the *Musicopoematographoscope* as translation I will build on Fagan’s identification of the ‘spaces-between’ in Brennan’s work as a site for ‘silence and comedy.’ Although the *Musicopoematographoscope* may have had the original intention of retaliation, I focus on the way it foreignises Australian English, combines linguistic deviations and innovations ‘to produce a new characteristic mode of expression’ (Schleiermacher 54). By identifying moments of the break-down and transformation of linguistic boundaries, I argue that Brennan’s ‘spray’ is a very early site for parodic and carnivalesque transnationalism in Australian poetry.

Brennan’s 1897 manuscript was first published in 1981: it is a large facsimile edition that also includes Brennan’s smaller ‘Pocket Musicopoematographoscope’. The entire text is handwritten; my transliterations are approximations of Brennan’s visual effect.

The title poster page is rife with linguistic play and deviation. Brennan declares:

THE RAGE OF THE PRESENT!!

THE
PERFECTION
OF

MAISONG DE PAREE

THE
ART
OF

THE
PAST!

LATEST
NOVELTY

THE
FUTURE!!!

...direct from Paree, Invented by the well-known Hieratico-byzantaegyptic-Obscurantist

MALAHRRMAY, With many improvements, freer use of counterpoint &c. &c. &c. &c.

Here ‘*maison*’ both hints at the French *maison*, as if the novelty has come from a Parisian home or salon, but also could read as ‘*mai song*’, in imitation of the broad Australian pronunciation of *my song*. Brennan puns on Mallarmé’s invocation to read ‘*Un coup de dés...*’ as a ‘musical score’ (Mallarmé ‘*Preface*’ 105). ‘*Paree*’ and ‘*Malahrrmay*’ seem to mock the faux sophistication of Australian interaction with French literary culture. Kate Fagan suggests that this creates ‘a kind of satirical distance from anxious Anglo-colonial readings that might relegate Australian literature to a second rung after transplanted European models’ (3).

Brennan’s seemingly flippant remark that his version of Mallarmé is an improvement on the ‘original,’ with ‘freer use of counterpoint,’ could refer to a parodic approach to ‘the musical score.’ Brennan does not address the reader in any explicit preface, as Mallarmé does, but liberates itself from resonance or judgement by rebuffing her altogether:

Full Score

for eight Voices

one Bass

one Tenor

one Soprano

four Baritones

one Alto

& no Audience

(10)

‘Counterpoint,’ from the medieval Latin *contrapunctum* ((song) pricked or marked over against (the original melody)’ (OED)), includes both the sense of a melody played in conjunction with another according to fixed rules (the score outlined by both Mallarmé and Brennan) and also the sound made between two translations, which are set against, pricking, each other in the history of the text. To prick implies making a small hole with a sharp point but also implies marking something out, making a point, with connotations of fineness and alertness.

While Brennan's text often swings off in a different semantic direction to Mallarmé's, and is somewhat longer, the ...*Musicopoematographoscope* both illuminates and obscures the 'code' of poetic creation. For example, Brennan's fourth page reads:

THIS

discrown'd

but that were little

degenerate
unabash'd

descendant
of them that ruled of old my Danaan isle

Thule of mist
& dreams

by them
honour'd
the singer

Ollamh

among the greybeards set the law
holding

in silence' lucid gaze
the viewless code

clear-written or conceal'd

upon the sunset-smoke

within the mighty deeps
...

(14)

Brennan translates Mallarmé's invocation of 'l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre' or the 'unique Number which cannot be another' (trans. Brian Coffey) into the Irish context as the 'viewless code / clear written or concealed,' which is held in 'silence' lucid gaze' by Ollamh (a high-ranking teacher in Ancient Ireland). However, the code, despite being 'viewless' here, is not altogether unknown and contingent upon a throw of the dice as in 'Un coup de dés...'. Brennan effects a kind of pastiche-translation with his transposing of the 'beard' in Mallarmé's 'one invades the head / flows as beard subdued below' (Mallarmé trans. Coffey) or 'one invades the head / flows in the submissive beard' (Mallarmé trans. Weinfield) to the group of 'greybeards' that Ollamh is amongst. Mallarmé's 'coule en barbe soumise' ('flows as beard subdued below,' trans. Caws 113) is already surreal; Brennan's multiplication of the beard into a whole group is both surreal and comical. Brennan flips the 'subdued' or 'submissive' beard into a metonymy for one who sets the law and holds 'the code,' turning Mallarmé's meaning inside out.

Brennan foreignises Mallarmé's text and Australian English by referencing Irish bardic culture and mythological geography (e.g. Danaan isle; Thule of mist). He parodies the Celtic twilight that enchanted some of his contemporaries (such as W. B. Yeats), and pokes fun at the sole intended reader of the *Musicopoematographoscope*, O'Reilly, for his Irish heritage. The abbreviations of the words 'discrown'd,' 'unabash'd,' 'honour'd,' and 'conceal'd' introduce a ridiculed Shakespearean tone, which is fitting for the ironic self-aggrandising of the speaker on this page.

Brennan's text is ambivalent towards 'the code' that the greybeards hold and provides two diagonal possibilities: it will either be clear-written upon the sunset-smoke, or conceal'd within the mighty deeps. However, both situations provide only ephemeral canvases for 'the code', which, in any case, cannot be seen. So Brennan mocks the authority of the 'greybeards,' or anyone for that matter, to hold any 'viewless code.'

In the final section, Brennan translates Mallarmé's invocation of 'UNE CONSTELLATION' as 'THE / COMPLIMENT' (25). Here there are obvious echoes of the 'original' word. However, Brennan diminishes Mallarmé's gesture towards some mystical realm of Chance into a gesture towards ingratiating and reputation-establishing language—language of literary criticism. Read in another light, 'the compliment' is only one letter away from 'the complement,' which resonates with Brennan's 'freer use of counterpoint', and a distortion of Mallarmé's correspondences. Mallarmé's final line, which stands alone as a kind of 'moral' (Meillassoux 49), reads: 'All Thought utters Dice Thrown' (trans. Coffey 127) or 'All Thought emits a Throw of the Dice' (trans. Weinfield 144). Brennan's equivalent is

does
— The Poet {has no business among them
(25)

Mallarmé's line acknowledges the contingency of the poet's task; Brennan removes the poet altogether. The subscript 'does' reads as a muttered, under-the-breath, exclamation of resentment, and creates a literal 'between-language.'

There are many ways of reading Brennan's *Musicopoematographoscope*. I have chosen translation as a mode of identifying the foreignising, transnational, movement between French and English in the text; the way Brennan illuminates, cannibalises, and carnivalises Mallarmé's 'original' to produce a 'new mode of expression.' The *Musicopoematographoscope* 'catches fire on the eternal life' of Mallarmé's ever elusive text, and thereby participates in its 'ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering' (Benjamin 72). At the same time, Brennan debases Mallarmé's text; perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the *Musicopoematographoscope* participates in the most abundant de-flowering of 'Un coup de dés....' Indeed, Brennan's text has spawned further renewals: a French translation of the *Musicopoematographoscope* by François Boisivon, *Poème-Affiche Al-gébricosymbolique Crible Musicorimé Graphoscopique*, was published in 2000 (Barnes 55).

Chris Edwards's 'A Fluke, A Mistranslation of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Un Coup De Dés...', with parallel French pretext'

Since Brennan, a number of contemporary (male) Australian poets have grappled with Mallarmé's legacy: Robert Adamson, John Tranter, David Brooks, Toby Fitch, and Chris Edwards. Tranter himself has 'translated' 'Un coup de dés...' as 'Desmond's Coupé' (2006).

This is a partly homophonic and absurdist translation of Mallarmé's text. Tranter states: 'For the original, see Chris Edwards' version, *A Fluke*' (np). Published in 2005, Edwards's 'mistranslation' of 'Un Coup De Dés...' exemplifies playful foreignising of Australian English. I take all examples from the first edition of *A Fluke*, published by Monogene. *A Fluke* has been reprinted in the Vagabond edition of Edwards's work, *People of Earth* (2011), but does not include the 'parallel French pretext,' which is an important element in my analysis of the between-language articulated between the two texts.

Like Brennan's title-poster, Edwards's title is explicit in its infidelity to any 'original.' Edwards sets the tone for his translation with an epigraph from Georges Bataille's *The Solar Anus* (trans Allan Stoekl): 'It is clear that the world is purely parodic—in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form (Edwards's italics).' This statement is a topsy-turvy version of Symbolism's 'law of correspondence:' rather than things resonating in correspondence with some transcendental ideal, they resonate in a mocking and deceptive downwards spiral.

In place of Mallarmé's fixation on stars for their mystical and correspondent value, Bataille sees the cosmos as operating in violent sexual rhythms. While *A Fluke* does not participate in the same sexual squalor and terror as Bataille's text, Bataille's undercutting of Symbolic correspondences assists a reading of Edwards's mistranslation of Mallarmé's 'Un coup de dés....'

There is little explanatory material by Edwards or others on the methodology of his 'mistranslation.' In an interview with Pam Brown on his translations of Rilke, Edwards alludes to his use of homophony in parts of *A Fluke* as being influenced by the approach of Celia and Louis Zukofsky to Catullus in 1969. In the brief 'Translators' Preface,' the Zukofskys write:

This translation of Catullus follows
the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his
Latin – tries, as is said, to breathe
the 'literal' meaning with him (np).

In fact, the Zukofskys' translation, while often clunky and strange, makes the reader aware of the foreignness of Catullus's poetry, and in that way at least brings the reader to the Latin, even if the meaning is distorted. Like the Zukofskys' translations of Catullus, Edwards's approach is only sometimes homophonic; at other times it is a play of word associations and at others it is more literal, especially where common knowledge of the French language allows for a non-expert literal translation, and sometimes it transcribes the French directly. Edwards provides Mallarmé's French as a parallel 'pretext' to his translation,⁶ which allows the reader to check where the two texts meet or diverge.⁷ Edwards is often inconsistent in following the word order of the 'original' and seems to skip around the text as he chooses—bringing a word or two up from another line where it suits his purposes. However, he never deviates very far, usually no more than a few lines, retaining the sense of the mould of the 'original' text.

The movement between the parallel French 'pretext' and Edwards's 'mistranslation' allows us to read the text's parodic transnationalism. While Edwards's *A Fluke* presents a very different scenario to that of 'Un coup de dés...'—it is partly set in a disastrous 'Bistro,' hosted by the 'Maitre D' Sergio, rather than on ship in the middle of a storm—it comments on and parodies the questions central to Mallarmé's text, and on Mallarmé's text itself. Edwards's translation,

while claiming to be a ‘mis-translation’, in fact engages intimately with Mallarmé’s literal sense and comments on, undercuts, and illuminates it.

The tone of Edwards’s translation of Mallarmé’s ‘Préface’ is exasperated and loutish: ‘I wish I knew what lunatic pasted this Note here—*park it elsewhere, I say*—these maimed, oblivious and hellish apprehensions remind me of Hannibal Lecter’ (np). The more temperate disclaimer of Mallarmé’s ‘J’aimerais qu’on ne lût pas cette Note ou que parcourue, même on l’oublîât; elle apprend, au Lecteur habile’ (np) is turned into a forceful demand, and the Reader is translated into an imposing Note paster, a cannibal. Here Edwards breaks down the distinction between the writer of the Note and its reader in a lunny frenzy. Edwards transforms Mallarmé’s apparent (though perhaps dissembling) irritation towards the necessity of explaining his work into a fully blown rant. Where Edwards translates the opening ‘J’aimerais’ quite literally, albeit with a slightly more rash tone as ‘I wish’, the rest of the phrase is translated in loose homophony: ‘ou que parcourue, meme...’ becomes ‘*park it elsewhere, I say* – these maimed....’ Perhaps the ‘ou que’ becomes ‘*elsewhere*’ or ‘*I say*’, but it is hardly exact.

On a number of occasions Edwards offers multiple translations for a particular sequence of words. For example, he translates ‘Le papier intervient chaque fois qu’une image, d’elle-même, cesse ou rentre’ as ‘the paper invents a shadowy fold, false image of itself, at its centre, then rents, rends or renders itself’ (np). Here the single verb ‘rentre’ (returns / withdraws / retires etc.) multiplies—‘rents, rends or renders’—as if Edwards is not sure which one to choose. At the same time, the multiplication of these words achieves the ‘false image’ of shadowy folds in Edwards’s text. This creates possible space for a translation that does not ‘subdivide’ the text, but rather touches the original lightly and only at the ‘infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux’ (Benjamin 80). In this case, however, Edwards touches the original at the point of sounds and somehow also collides with, swaddles, the sense.

Edwards appears to hesitate in his translation of ‘près ou loin du fil conducteur latent:’⁸ ‘they press their loins (or longing perhaps, or filaments of feeling) to the latent conductor’ (Edwards np). Edwards translates Mallarmé’s ‘loin’ (far) as both ‘loins’ and ‘longing.’ The first possibility is a transliteration of Mallarmé’s word that imbues the text with sexual intent; the second, too, is a rough adaptation of the letters Mallarmé uses, but also extends the French meaning of ‘loin’ (far; far away; distant) into an expression of a less sexual desire for the latent conductor’s ‘unreasoning verisimilitude’ that he ‘imposes on the text’ (Edwards np). Whereas ‘conducteur’ in Mallarmé’s text qualifies the noun ‘fil,’ Edwards makes ‘conducteur’ the object of his sentence. In this way the ‘latent conductor’ can both be some guiding thread within the text, the text itself, but also the dissembling Mallarmé, who pretends not to direct the reader’s approach.

Another example of diverging translation springs from Mallarmé’s ‘Le genre, que c’en devienne un comme la symphonie,’⁹ for which Edwards writes: ‘But the genre in question diverges—*commie symphony, sympathy concert*—’ (‘Preface’ np). The skewed symmetry of the parenthetical phrase suggests the malleability and apparently random nature of Edwards’s translation. The translation of ‘comme’ as ‘concert’ picks up on Mallarmé’s earlier ‘celle de la Musique entendue au concert,’¹⁰ despite Edwards having translated that phrase as ‘seldom has Music so indented a concert’ (‘Preface’ np). The humorous insinuation that Mallarmé’s text is communist or a work that engenders sympathy in the reader seems to comment on the activities of literary academics, and the way their pluralised readings of a text can lead them astray so much so as to cost them, ‘the disenchanting personnel, loosed intact upon the antique verse,

Spanish word could be part of this parody. Finally, the translation of ‘enfouie’ as ‘*phooey*’ trivialises the significance of the word (‘buried’) in Mallarmé’s text and introduces a faux-French onomatopoeia. Here the homophone parodies Mallarmé’s ideal of Wagnerian music and reduces it to the cheap muzak of a downmarket diner.

Edwards assumes a mock compassion towards Mallarmé’s ‘l’unique Nombre qui ne peut pas // être un autre,’ which he translates as ‘lo, solitary Number who pouts not // at the *neither either / nor or*’ (np). Edwards’s approach oscillates between homophonic and literal translation here: the opening sound of ‘l’u...’ is converted into an exclamation of pity; ‘peut’ becomes onomatopoeically and homophonically related to pouting. The Number is personified and petulant regarding its isolation. Edwards continues to invert any Symbolic correspondences of Mallarmé’s text: the mystical invocation of ‘au nom des flots’ (‘the name of the waves,’ trans. Coffey 112) is converted into the floating debris of a shipwreck—‘your name is flotsam’ (Edwards np). Here the very ‘name’ is wrecked and discarded as worthless.

Mallarmé’s submissive beard (‘barbe soumise’) is radically foreignised into a ‘barbecued sunrise.’ This image might remind the reader of one of the most clichéd references in Australian poetry—Dorothea Mackellar’s sunburnt ‘My Country’ (1908). The Australian vernacular infuses Edwards’s text: ‘son ombre puerile / caressée et polie et rendue et lavée’ (‘his puerile shade / caressed and polished and rendered and washed,’ trans Coffey 114) is rendered as ‘oh puerile shadow / who caresses the police let your rendezvous in lavs...’ (Edwards np). Although the translation retains the ‘original’ sense of washing with its reference to toilets, the line is corrupted by the suspicious sexual ‘rendezvous.’ The euphemistic French word and ‘lav’ veil the scene in an Australian lower middle-class politesse.

As in Brennan’s translation, Edwards demeans Mallarmé’s mystical invocation of ‘le Septentrion aussi Nord / UNE CONSTELLATION’, which he translates as ‘*less petrol oh Signor / UNCONSTITUTIONAL*’ (np). Finally, Edwards reduces Mallarmé’s dice, imbued with such significance throughout the poem, to a vomit inducing whorehouse trip: ‘veillant / doutant / roulant / brillant et méditant / avant de s’arrêter / à quelque point dernier qui le sacre’ transmutes into ‘veiled / doubting / roly-poly / brilliantined emetic / I want to see Rita / of the collapsible derrière oh sacred’ (np). Here one French word—dernier (latest)—becomes another, semi-homophonic, French word that is used euphemistically in Australian English—derrière (behind / buttocks). The poem ends with a jab at the reader who may have wanted Edwards’s translation to reveal something about Mallarmé’s text or Edwards’s own method: ‘toupéed one my little mate I guess you’ll want the code word eh?’ (np). The shimmer of Chance and Thought in Mallarmé’s text is reduced to images of hair-grooming, perhaps referring back to the earlier subdued beard. Weinfield suggests that homophones transcend linguistic and semantic barriers (2008: 21): Edwards mines this field of potential for anti-correspondences—his homophonic moments bridge the division between *A Fluke* and ‘Un coup de dés...’ while retaining a dramatic sense of their difference.

Français muzak

The two translations studied here parody the high Symbolism of Mallarmé’s poem into a sometimes-bject Australian vernacular. In doing so, these translations invert the imagined community of Mallarmé worship—they transform its recondite ‘universality’ into a carnivalised ‘proximity.’ Perhaps Edwards’s translation responds to this saturation of, and a boredom with, Mallarmé’s ubiquity, and ‘unburdens [himself and the reader] with laughter’ (Margaret Rose 46). The false equivalences (‘false manner / of the tooted sweet.../ key imposter’ Edwards np) of both the *Musicopoematographoscope* and *A Fluke* with ‘Un coup de

dés...’ leave the reader with nothing stable to hold onto (‘disappearing overboard,’ Edwards np) while simultaneously insisting on their equivalence. Fagan calls this a ‘drama of progenitorship’ (3).

Schleiermacher is sceptical of the appeal of a foreignising approach to translation:

[w]ho would gladly consent to be considered ungainly for striving to adhere so closely to the foreign tongue as his own language allows, and to being criticized, like parents who entrust their children to tumblers for their education, for having failed to exercise his mother tongue in the sorts of gymnastics native to it, instead of accustoming it to alien, unnatural contortions! (53-4)

However, I argue that the ‘tumbling’ of Mallarmé’s text—a roly-poly acrobatics of symbolic debasements—is a productive way of re-reading ‘Un coup de dés...’. The Franglais muzak of the two translations achieves a hilarious—alien, unnatural—transnationalism in Australian poetry while also illuminating an unfamiliar side of Mallarmé’s poem.

Conclusion

Translation is a dynamic site for reading transnationalism in Australian poetry. It contests the historical monolingualism and cultural nationalism of the Australian literary field and lexicon. Julian Mostafa asks, ‘What kind of Australia is represented by an almost purely English-language literary culture?’ (np). Australia’s history of Aboriginal linguistic dispossession and multicultural immigration requires a critical re-evaluation of the movement between languages in Australian literature. Rather than using the World Literature paradigm as a way to assert Australian cultural identity on the world stage—(World Literature as ‘a national competition: the literary equivalent of the World Cup’)—Mostafa argues that the challenge for Australian literature is how to

pluralise itself, to recognise and foster Australian literatures of many languages, the literatures of its indigenous as well as its settler population; it is to create the conditions in which ‘Australian English Literature’ is not a tautologous phrase of hand-wringing political correctness, but a meaningful descriptor for one literature among many. (np)

My reading of Christopher Brennan’s and Chris Edwards’s translations of Stéphane Mallarmé’s ‘Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hazard’ offer one way to achieve this.

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¹ He writes that '[a]ll works cease to be the exclusive products of their original culture once they are translated; all become works that only "began" in their original language' (22, Damrosch's emphasis).

² Untranslatability, for Apter, has to do with the boundaries between language and ideas, especially metaphysical claims and transcendental signifieds, between language and temporal displacement, between language and sovereignty or place specificity, between language and intellectual property, and what she calls 'the poetics of translational difference' (2013: 4).

³ David Carter (1999); Brian Castro (2005); Robert Dixon (2007); Philip Mead (2009); David Brooks (2010); Bill Ashcroft (2011).

⁴ Presented as a lecture to the Berlin Academy of Sciences in 1813 (Lawrence Venuti 2004: 19).

⁵ See Quentin Meillassoux's *The Number and the Siren* (2011).

⁶ Fagan asks: 'what is a "mistranslation" of a "pretext," a text that already bears lying resemblance to an ancestor? And why should the results of such a *coup* be called a fluke?' (2).

⁷ I don't read French, but Edwards's translation does not presuppose a knowledge of French, indeed the reader is not sure whether Edwards himself can read (understand) French.

⁸ 'near or far from the latent guiding thread' (Mallarmé trans. Caws 105).

⁹ 'Let the genre become one like the symphony' (*ibid.*, 106).

¹⁰ 'that of Music as it is heard at a concert' (Mallarmé trans. Caws 106).

¹¹ 'preferably, as it follows naturally' (*ibid.*).

¹² 'CIRCUMSTANCES OF ETERNITY' (Mallarmé trans. Coffey 109).