

# Indigenous Australian Literature in German Some Considerations on Reception, Publication and Translation

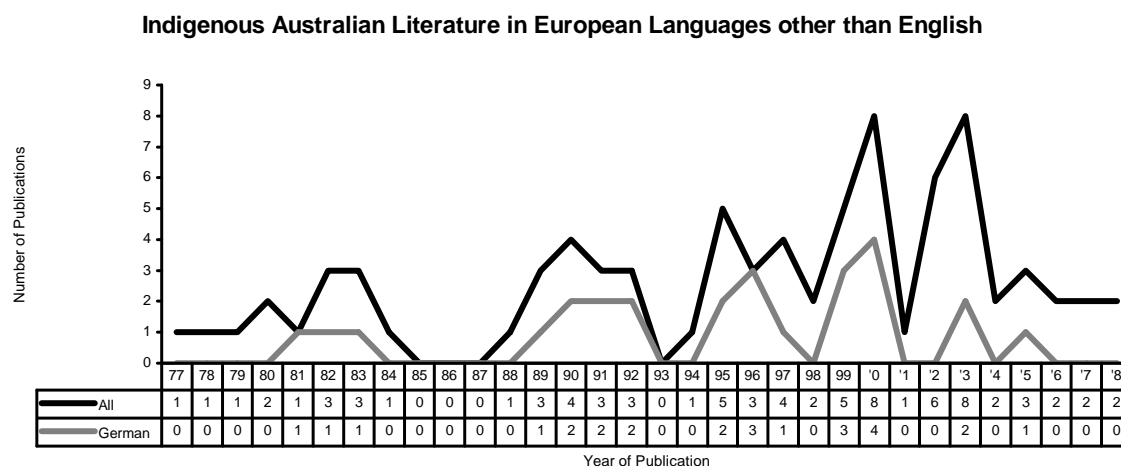
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Indigenous Australian literature has attracted increasing international interest over the last three decades. In this paper, I trace the emergence of this literature in the German-speaking market, appraise the context of its reception, and identify some problems related to its translation. Given the paucity of scholarly material on this subject,<sup>1</sup> I am primarily concerned with placing the German translations into a wider context and with engaging in a comparative analysis by employing a statistical approach to the publication of Indigenous literature in Europe. The primary objective of the present article is the creation of a comprehensive bibliography of translated Indigenous literature, thus providing a factual basis for subsequent analyses of the European reception of Indigenous literature. This study is a first step towards a broader understanding of European interest in Indigenous literature.

## Publication

This article presents a list of Indigenous literature published in European languages other than English. The statistical survey is based on that list.<sup>2</sup> All data are taken from the bibliography (see Table 1). Two clarifications are important in this context: first, according to the definitions set by Anita Heiss, Indigenous literature refers to books that are either (co)authored by an Indigenous person or—in the case of anthologies—that acknowledge original (Indigenous) authors (2003 26).<sup>3</sup> Second, the statistical profile includes the following variables: ‘Year of First Publication’, ‘Language’, ‘Publisher’, ‘Gender’, and ‘Genre’. The genre categories employed follow those used by Heiss (220-234).<sup>4</sup> Based on the publishing program, I differentiate between general and special publishers. Special publishers are those with a narrow readership or with a special target subject—for example, companies that publish only ‘Third World Literature.’ General presses are understood to be companies that publish a variety of genres and themes, and these include mainstream presses. The statistical analysis gives the following results:

**1) Timeline of translated Indigenous literature:** The history of translated Indigenous literature spans three decades. The reasons for this are certainly complex, ranging from an increasing awareness of Indigenous cultures in Europe to the changes in funding policies. Overall, between 1977 and 2008, 81 books were published in European languages other than English. The first translated book was Kath Walker’s *Stradbroke Dreamtime* in 1977; it was published by a Polish press. The 1980s saw a couple of publications, particularly in Scandinavian languages; German publications, however, did not play any significant role in the 80s. A perceptible increase in translations commenced in the 90s. Applying to both the general European pattern and the German publications, the year 2000 was the most prolific (see Figure 1). So far, no Torres Strait Islander literature has been translated.



**Figure 1**

**2) Languages:** Indigenous books have been translated into 17 European languages other than English. The most frequent of this is German (32%), followed by French (19%), Dutch (nine percent), Italian (seven percent), Swedish and Spanish (five percent each). As far as the number of publications is concerned, German-speakers comprise the largest market for this literature within continental Europe. This is not surprising, considering the fact that German is the most frequently spoken first language in the EU, followed by English, Italian and French (Directorate General and Press Communication 7).

**3) Publishers:** The lion's share of translated Indigenous literature is published by general presses, including mainstream companies. General presses make up 75%. Publishers with a special focus are less represented. This is quite similar to the German-speaking market. There is yet another interesting feature among the German presses: 42% of the publishers that issued Indigenous literature are presses that tend to publish manuscripts of high literary standard. The presence of such 'high quality' publishers, however, is not unusual for Germany. Most of the top German publishing houses have an international profile. For example, Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag and Rowohlt have released more translations than German books (Conradi 28). Furthermore, eight percent of German companies are feminist publishers and 15% specialise in audio books. Most of the audio books are published by a small Austrian press, Bilby-Hörbücher, which focuses on Indigenous Australian literature. In some instances, the number of Indigenous books produced by German publishers is remarkable: 14,000 printed copies of *Australien erzählt* (Wolf 4) and 42,000 printed copies of *Märchen der australischen Ureinwohner* (Boltz 4). *Australien erzählt* (Engl. *Australia narrates*) is a collection of short stories, and *Märchen der australischen Ureinwohner* (Engl. *Tales of the Australian Aboriginal people*) is an anthology of Dreaming stories.

**4) Gender:** The European patterns show some similarities to those in Australia, where there are more female than male Indigenous authors, though male authors predominated in the period before the 1988 Bicentenary (Cooper, Molnar, Morris, and Colbert 3, 12, 42; Watson 115). As Figure 2 shows, this situation corresponds to that in Europe; whereas men predominate in the 70s/80s, there are more female authors in the 90s and

2000s. Yet, in the German-speaking context, these profiles are different. In the 2000s, there are slightly more male than female authors being translated into German. Interestingly, this is despite the fact that in Germany, feminist publishers evidence a stronger commitment to publishing Indigenous women's writings than in any other European country. Both presses, *Frauenoffensive* in Munich and *Orlanda Frauenverlag* in Berlin, publish women's literature.

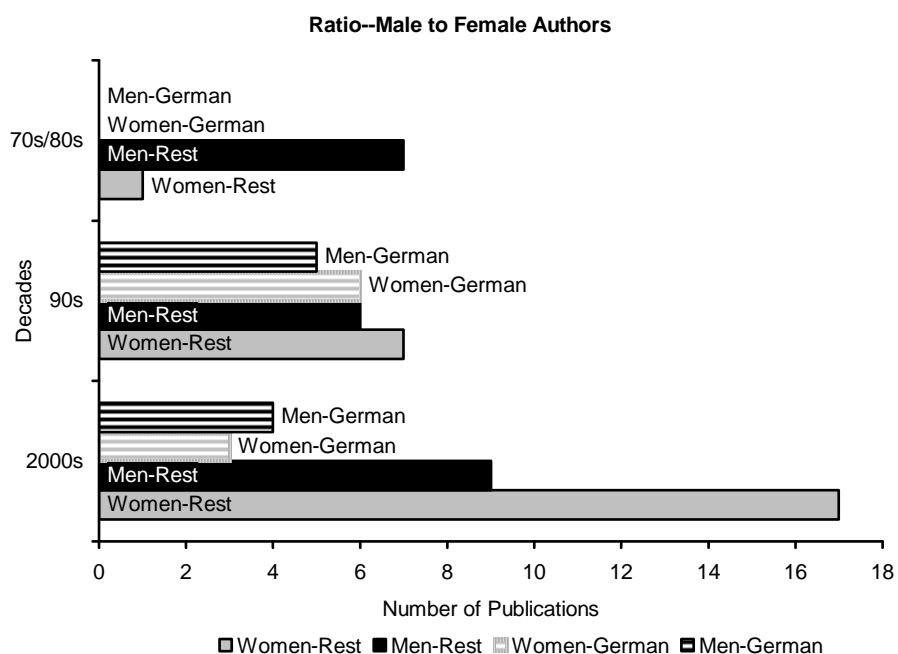


Figure 2

**5) Genres:** What genres of Indigenous literature are published by European presses? The simple answer to this is, almost any genre. Upon closer examination, however, four genres are being published frequently and there are discernable differences between the general European and the German-speaking markets. In Europe, the most frequent genres are fiction, autobiography, anthology and juvenile literature (see Figure 3).

**Proportion of Genres of Indigenous Literature (all European languages other than English)**

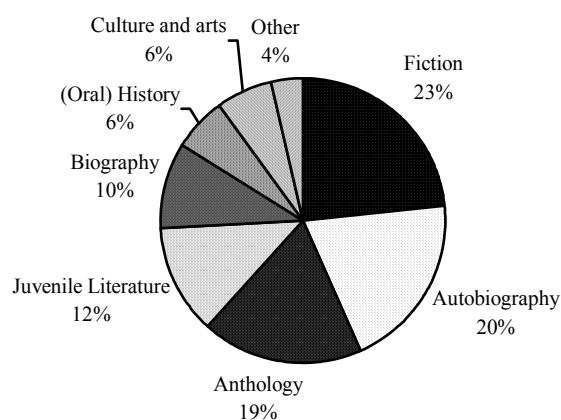


Figure 3

In Germany, the most prevalent genre is the anthology followed by (oral) history and fiction (see Figure 4). Autobiography and juvenile literature are less popular in the German-speaking market. Also, there are no translations of academic texts authored by Indigenous persons.

**Proportion of Genres of Indigenous Literature (German)**

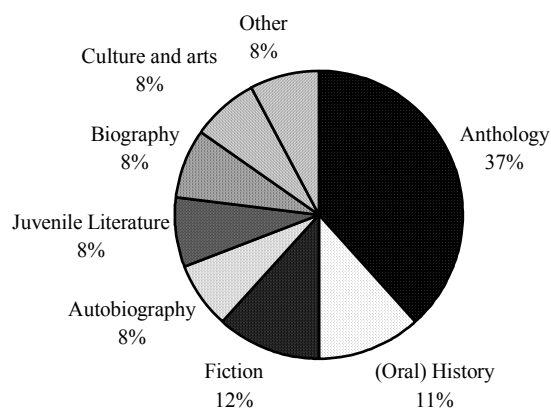


Figure 4

As this study shows, the publication of Indigenous Australian literature in German extends over nearly three decades. Compared to the body of non-Indigenous Australian literature published in Germany—879 publications between 1845 and 1979 (Wolf 21)—the emergence of Indigenous literature in German translation is a relatively recent phenomenon, yet it is also a rapidly developing phenomenon as there has been a huge growth in the number of translations. There are also similarities and differences

between the non-German and German publications of Indigenous literature: while there are similar patterns of increase and decrease in the annual number of publications, there are differences in the translated genres and the ratio between male and female authors.

## TRANSLATION

There are translations of both classic texts by first generation writers like Oodgeroo Noonuccal and contemporary texts by second generation writers like Melissa Lucashenko. Hence, there is a variety of translated texts. In the German publications I reviewed, I observed three types of translations: (1) bilingual editions; (2) audio books, which are produced either as tapes or as CDs; and (3) monolingual translations. Furthermore, a large proportion of top quality publishers (42%) affects the general quality of the German publications. Most books are written in a very readable German style and edited by highly skilled translators with a sound knowledge of Australian cultures and history. Despite the translations' excellent quality, however, there are some challenges in rendering Indigenous texts into German. The major difficulty lies in the lack of awareness of the processes of cross-cultural editing. While in Australia there are detailed discussions on the implications of editorial practices and research (e.g., Heiss 66-82; McDonell; AIATSIS), this is not the case in Germany. At present, no German article or thesis has expounded this topic. In addition to this difficulty, I identify three broad challenges in translating Indigenous texts:

**The preservation of orality:** Translating the original text into a readable German style leads to serious changes of the original structure (Gerber). To a certain extent this complication is inevitable, because the translation of any text alters the original. However, in the case of Indigenous literature the challenge is twofold; on the one hand, there exists the need to preserve the oral characteristics of the original text—like direct speech or short and straightforward sentences—and, on the other hand, to translate it into good German style, which is basically not a spoken German. German is less direct than English, with a penchant for long sentences, passive constructions and double negations. The translation of an English text into German expands the length by up to 15% (Conradi 32). Thus, one issue is that the shorter sentence style of the Indigenous original is converted into much longer wordy sentences. Indigenous stories thus lose their oral flavour. In some cases, one sentence in the German translation took the place of two or more sentences in the original. In other instances, sentences interspersed with words that are poetic and not part of everyday conversation stretch over more than five lines (e.g., Huggins 146-7; Boltz *Märchen* 106, 110; Lucashenko 6).

**The maintenance of colloquial modes of expression:** Some translators have made an effort to preserve the texts' orality, but this is a difficult task. The major complication is which German dialect best represents the orality of the original. For instance, Sally Morgan's *My Place* is written in a Northern German dialect, just as Paddy Roe's *Gularabulu* is rendered in a strong Viennese dialect, which is, I hasten to add, often considered lower-class and difficult to understand for most German speakers. There are, however, more successful examples. Oodgeroo's *Märchen und Mythen* is spoken by a professionally trained speaker, the stories are characterised by good intonation, the translation is fluent, and the language itself is beautiful and sophisticated.

**The different connotations of particular terms:** In addition to the linguistic challenges involved in translating Indigenous literature, there are also obstacles of a socio-historical nature. For example, sometimes the word 'race' is given as '*Rasse*'

(e.g., Zimmermann 42-3), but this term's significance is limited because it is biological.<sup>5</sup> Since this word is historically burdened, partly because Jews and Romany peoples were invented, classed and murdered as races of lower rank, *Rasse* is no longer used in modern German, and often is replaced by 'ethnicity' (*Ethnizität*). In Australia, however, there is a clear difference between 'ethnicity' and 'race' (Keeffe 72-3). The terms should be differentiated from each other. Thus, translating 'race' poses a challenge. The same applies to the German equivalents of 'tribe' and 'native' which, too, have become obsolete.

This has two consequences: first, ideally any translator should be acquainted with the specific socio-historical situation in Australia, including the history of race relations. Translators need to know the differences between race and ethnicity, for example. Second, it seems central to consult Indigenous authors, particularly in cases where certain words—like race—should not be used. In my view, it is important to involve the authors in the process of translation.

## RECEPTION

As in Australia itself, readers should not be homogenised. Two opposing discourses, however, bear on the general reception of Indigenous literature in German. One is *the romantic or exotic discourse*, the other is what I call *the politicised discourse*. Both tell us more about Germans than about Indigenous authors. The economic dimension and appropriation of Indigenous cultural heritage is yet another factor exerting an influence on reception.

**The romantic or exotic discourse:** This discourse imagines Indigenous cultures as unchanging and tends to see Indigenous peoples as being in harmony with nature while living a sheltered life outside so-called civilisation (Erckenbrecht 37). It generates a naïve view of Indigenous cultures and panders to New Age interests. Though not entirely negative, New Age discourses tend to appropriate and distort Indigenous cultural heritage (Neuenfeldt 74, 92). Furthermore, they elide negative social relations, such as racism and socio-economic disadvantages (Gray 38). Though no German esoteric press has yet released an Indigenous story, romanticising images, an epiphenomenon of New Age, have a bearing on many publishers.

Most book covers reflect this discourse. This is obvious particularly in the case of highly political stories with covers that reflect classic design (see Figures 5 and 7 as examples). While the Indigenous artists of these illustrations are acknowledged, this is nevertheless problematic because the cover art does not relate to the political and socio-critical contents. The classic cover designs on more than 80% of the books tend to homogenise Indigenous literatures, suggesting they were mainly about myths, legends, and Dreamings. The book cover of an anthology with Indigenous and non-Indigenous women contributors (Hawthorne and Klein) is of particular interest because its cover shows an eye-catching picture of Kata Tjuta. Yet none of the Indigenous authors is a traditional owner of Kata Tjuta. The issue of who is represented by this picture and whether or not this representation is culturally and/or locally appropriate thus remains problematic (see Figure 6).

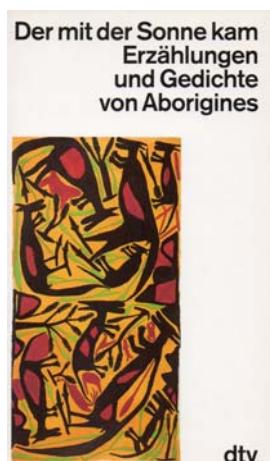


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

**The politicised discourse:** Politicised discourse concerns the contemporary situation of Indigenous peoples. Politicised terms such as ‘genocide,’ ‘apartheid,’ and ‘racism’ have increasingly gained currency in the broader views on Australia. For example, a Swiss-based non-governmental organisation, the *Society for Threatened Peoples*, captioned one of their reports *Apartheid Down Under* (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker). In Germany, as early as 1979 the term ‘genocide’ was applied to Australian politics (Roberts)—antedating the genocide debates in Australia itself. German media reports have recently raised awareness of racial disadvantages and land rights (e.g., ‘Stichwort: Aborigines’; Schleuning 78).<sup>6</sup> Additional examples also exist. The point here is that many translations exhibit this tendency, especially in the introductions.

I translated one part of a German introduction to an anthology of classic stories that do not deal with the contemporary political situation. Nevertheless, the editors decided to include information about the political situation of Indigenous Australians. The text reads, ‘Since the arrival of the white conquerors, the history of the Indigenous peoples of Australia has been the history of a 150-year lasting genocide’ (*Märchen* 138). Another example I translated dealt with the white editorial impact on Indigenous texts and the word ‘censorship’ was used to describe it: ‘[Aborigines] often found themselves confronted with an implicit censorship of their texts. It was common for their work to be changed considerably under the guise of correcting the English’ (Scherer n. pag.). Political issues, in other words, seem to have become increasingly important to German publishers and audiences. The romanticised view is thus not the only discourse impacting the German reception of Indigenous literature.

**The economic dimension of Indigenous literature and cultural property:** Indigenous arts and crafts sell, particularly in German-speaking countries where there is a growing market of shops selling bogus products with Indigenous designs and images. An online report draws attention to the cultural appropriations in Germany:

[. . .] we find lately excrescences in Europe—in our whole observational field, but particularly in Germany—which would not have been able to survive in Australia for such a long period of time. [. . .] Self painted Didjeridus with dots or rarrks (crosshatching). [. . .] German sanitary appliance (WC seats) with Aboriginal Design. (Hanstein)

This cultural appropriation also applies to the field of literature. For example, I counted 28 translations into European languages of Marlo Morgan's New Age books *Mutant Message Down Under* (1994) and *Message from Forever* (1998). This number exceeds that of the three most 'translated' Indigenous authors, Sally Morgan (12 translations), Dick Roughsey (seven translations) and Doris Pilkington-Nugli Garimara (six translations). Marlo Morgan is a highly controversial US-American author of esoteric books that distort Indigenous cultures and infringe Indigenous heritage rights (Griffiths; Ellis). Morgan has been roundly criticised by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous intellectuals (e.g., Neuenfeldt 89; Rolls 22-25). Notwithstanding this critique, the German translations of Morgan's novels, *Traumfänger* (1995) and *Traumreisende* (1998) are still promoted as Indigenous literature. Even more problematic, Goldman, the publisher of Morgan's German editions, sells them with Indigenous designs on the cover, suggesting they are authentic Indigenous stories.

Beyond such obvious hoaxes, there are also many translations of books about Indigenous cultures—particularly on arts and Dreaming Stories—which are sold as Indigenous literature. Included among these are the translations of Serbian-Australian author Sreten Bozic, also known as Bahumir Wongar, who has published on Indigenous issues.<sup>7</sup> On the blurb of *Der Schoß*, the German edition of *Walg*, publisher Lamuv says Wongar was an Indigenous person.

There are a couple of significant issues here. First, in German-speaking markets, there is little awareness of Indigenous cultural heritage and intellectual property rights as outlined by Terri Janke (38, 174). In fact, these rights are often infringed. Second, it is difficult for readers to distinguish between literature authored by an Indigenous person, literature about Indigenous persons, and hoaxes like those by Marlo Morgan. For many German publishers, Indigenous literature is not bound to authorship; anybody, it seems, can be an Indigenous author.

### Conclusion

The translation of Indigenous Australian literature into European languages commenced in the late 1970s. German is the most frequent among the translation languages, and 42% of the German publications have been issued by high quality presses—a remarkable development. However, not everything is positive: there are difficulties in performing the translations, and some are troubled by a lack in awareness of Indigenous property rights. Many challenges are still ahead before we can break away from the stereotypical images that trap Indigenous cultures and peoples. The findings on the differences in gender and genres as well as the causes of the proliferation of translations merit follow-up research.

Table 1

Bibliography: Indigenous literature in European languages (other than English).

Year	Name	Gender	Genre	Publisher	Language	Original Title /Year
1977	Walker		Autobiography	Special (Children)	Polish	Stradbroke Dreamtime (1972)
1978	Roughsey	M	Autobiography	General	Russian	Moon and Rainbow (1971)
1979	Porter	M	Juvenile Literature	Special (Children)	Norwegian	Swiftlet Isles (1977)
1980	Roughsey	M	Juvenile	General	Swedish	Rainbow Serpent



	Johnson	M	Literature Fiction	General	Russian	(1975) Wild Cat Falling (1965)
<b>1981</b>	Löffler	M&F	Anthology	General	German	--
<b>1982</b>	Boltz	M&F	Anthology	General	German	--
	Treize and Roughsey	M	Juvenile Literature	General	Swedish	Quinkins (1978)
	Treize and Roughsey	M	Juvenile Literature	Special (Non- European literature)	Danish	Quinkins (1978)
<b>1983</b>	Crocker and Papunya Tula Artists	M&F	Culture/arts	Special	French	--
	Papunya Tula Artists	M&F	Culture/arts	Special	German	--
	Gulpilil, Rule, and Goodman	M&F	Anthology (Dreaming stories)	Special	Dutch	Stories of the Dreamtime (1979)
<b>1984</b>	Kimber, de Oliveira, and Libório	M&F	Culture/arts	Special	Portugu ese	--
<b>1988</b>	Weller	M	Fiction	General	Dutch	Day of the Dog (1981)
<b>1989</b>	Boltz	M&F	Anthology	General	German	--
	Papunya Tula Artists	M&F	Culture/arts	Special	Spanish	--
	Skartsis	M&F	Anthology	General	Greek	--
<b>1990</b>	Sykes	F	Poetry	General	German	Love Poems (1988)
	Treize and Roughsey	M	Juvenile Literature	General	German	Turramulli (1982)
	Treize and Roughsey	M	Juvenile Literature	Special (Non- European literature)	Swedish	Turramulli (1982)
	Treize and Roughsey	M	Juvenile Literature	Special (Non- European literature)	Danish	Turramulli (1982)
<b>1991</b>	Morgan	F	Autobiography	Special (Feminist)	German	My Place (1987)
	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Dutch	My Place (1987)
<b>1992</b>	Wolf*	M	Anthology	General	German	--
	Grawe*	F	Anthology	General	German	--
	Hawthorne and Klein*	F	Anthology	Special (Feminist)	German	--
	Mudrooroo	M	Fiction	General	Dutch	Wooreddy's Prescription (1983)
<b>1994</b>	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Dutch	My Place (1987)
<b>1995</b>	Endriss and Scherer	M&F	Anthology	Special	German	--
	Mudrooroo	M	Fiction	General	French	Master of the Ghost Dreaming (1991)
	Perry and Sykes	F	Autobiography	General	Italian	MumShirl (1981)
	Poulter	M	Juvenile Literature	General	French	Secret of the Dreaming (1988)
<b>1996</b>	Yin	M&F	Anthology	General	German	--
	Mudrooroo	M	Encyclopaedia	General	German	Aboriginal Mythology (1994)
	Noonuccal	F	Autobiography	General	German	Stradbroke Dreamtime (1972)
	Markmann and Rika- Heke	M&F	Anthology	General	German	[Bilingual edition]
<b>1997</b>	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Italian	My Place (1987)
	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	French	My Place (1987)

	Morgan	F	Biography	General	German	Wanamurraganya (1989)
	Mudrooroo	M	Encyclopaedia	General	Polish	Aboriginal Mythology (1994)
<b>1998</b>	Englaro	M&F	Anthology (Song poems)	General	Italian	--
<b>1999</b>	Johnson	M	Anthology	General	French	--
	Haviland and Hart	M	History	General	German	Old Man Fog (1998)
	Lowe and Pike	M&F	Juvenile Literature	General	Italian	Girl with No Name (1994)
	Mudrooroo	M	Fiction	General	German	Master of the Ghost Dreaming (1991) [Bilingual edition]
	Zimmermann and Noonuccal	M&F	Anthology (Poems)	General	German	
	Wright	F	Fiction	General	French	Plains of Promise (1997)
<b>2000</b>	Doring	M	Oral History	General	German French English	[Trilingual edition]
	Langford	F	Autobiography	Special	Finnish	Don't Take Your Love to Town (1988)
	Lucashenko	F	Fiction	General	German	Steam Pigs (1997)
	Noonuccal	F	Oral History	General (Audio books)	German	--
	Pribac	M&F	Anthology (Poems)	General	Slovene	--
	Roe, Muecke, and Merkatz	M	Oral History	Special (Audio books)	German	Gularabulu (1983)
	Weller	M	Fiction	General	German	Land of the Golden Clouds (1998)
<b>2001</b>	Wright	F	Fiction	General	French	--
<b>2002</b>	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Turkish	My Place (1987)
	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Catalan	My Place (1987)
	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Spanish	My Place (1987)
	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Czech	My Place (1987)
	Scott	M	Fiction	General	Dutch	Benang (1999)
	Scott	M	Fiction	General	French	Benang (1999)
	Wright	F	Fiction	General	French	[Collection of short stories]
<b>2003</b>	Gilbert and Brezina	M	Juvenile Literature	Special (Audio books)	German	Me and Mary Kangaroo (1994)
	McLaren	M	Fiction	General	French	There'll Be New Dreams (2001)
	McLaren	M	Fiction	General	French	Scream Black Murder (1995)
	Mudrooroo	M	Fiction	General	Italian	Wild Cat Falling (1965)
	Pilkington	F	Biography	General	Turkish	Rabbit-Proof Fence (1996)
	Pilkington	F	Biography	General	French	Rabbit-Proof Fence (1996)
	Pilkington	F	Biography	General	German	Rabbit-Proof Fence (1996)
	Pilkington	F	Biography	General	Dutch	Rabbit-Proof Fence (1996)
<b>2004</b>	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Portuguese	My Place (1987)
	Pilkington	F	Biography	General	Italian	Rabbit-Proof Fence (1996)
<b>2005</b>	Heiss	F	Fiction	Special (Non-European)	Spanish	Who Am I? (2001)

	Pilkington	F	Biography	literature) General	Swedish	Rabbit Proof-Fence (1996)
	Unaipon and Merkatz	M	Culture/arts	Special (Audio books)	German	Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines (2001) [1924]
2006	Scott	M	Fiction	General	French	True Country (1993)
	Taylor	M	History	Special (Non- European literature)	Spanish	Long Time Now (2001)
2007	McLaren	M	Fiction	General	French	--
	Morgan	F	Autobiography	General	Slovene	My Place (1987)
2008	Pilkington	F	Biography	General	Slovene	Rabbit Proof-Fence (1996)
	Heiss	F	Fiction	Special (Pacific literature)	French	Who am I? (2001)

Annotation: Asterisk after name indicates that not all contributors are Indigenous; original titles are shortened

where appropriate. Except for Gulpilil, Rule, and Goodman, all anthologies are compiled by European editors.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> There is no resource on the publication of Indigenous literature in Germany. Two monographs co-edited by Gerhard Stilz, *Australienstudien in Deutschland* (1990) and *Australien zwischen Europa und Asien* (1993), contain a wealth of intriguing articles, but neither deals with the subject of this essay. The same applies to the *GASt-Newsletter* (now *Zeitschrift für Australienstudien*). This bibliography rests, *inter alia*, on the following sources: Black Words; Heiss 220-234; Arnold and Hay.

<sup>2</sup> The number of translations is certainly small. Nevertheless, the statistical findings are significant given that the bibliography is comprehensive.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term 'Indigenous' because my research is not limited to Aboriginal literature: the fact that there is no translated Torres Strait Islander literature is a finding of this study. There are debates about the Aboriginality of Mudrooroo and Roberta Sykes. Heiss does not include them in her bibliography (3-9). However, I include them here because European publishers assumed that both were Indigenous. Only books are included in the present bibliography; translated poems and short stories published in journals and magazines are excluded. As the entries in 'Black Words' show, there are more translated Indigenous short stories/poems than books. Another source is Nataša Karanfilović, who counted 21 Indigenous short stories in Serbian translation (<http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/BlackWords>).

<sup>4</sup> In addition, I use 'encyclopaedia' as a distinct category.

<sup>5</sup> This is also noted by Anne Brewster in her forthcoming article 'Teaching *The Tracker* in Germany: a Journal of Whiteness'. *The Racial Politics of Bodies, Nations and*

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<sup>6</sup> It may be worth examining whether the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is currently leading towards an increasing awareness in European countries of the political situation of Indigenous peoples.

<sup>7</sup> There are debates as to whether Bozic appropriated Indigenous identity/cultures. However, his books are received/reviewed less negatively than those of Morgan (Picard; Gunew).

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