Anna Dimitriou. *Reading Greek Australian Literature through the Paramythi: Bridging Multiculturalism with World Literature*. Anthem Press, 2024. 210 pages. $AU110.00. ISBN 9781839991714

"Greek-Australian literature—but what is it?," Nikos Papastergiades once asked in his contribution to Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley's edited collection, *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations* (1992). Beyond obsessions with *who* and *what* qualifies, his answer was quite simple. Focusing on the hyphen in the term Greek-Australian literature, his definition placed emphasis on realities of culture's hybridity and a "displacement with the conventional sense of belonging" (149). Writing more than thirty years later, in *Reading Greek Australian Literature through the Paramythi: Bridging Multiculturalism with World Literature*, Anna Dimitriou takes the approach promoted by Papastergiades in new directions.

Reading Greek Australian Literature through the Paramythi (note the hyphen is no longer) is a welcome addition to critical literary studies. The book acts as a bold extension of an academic calling, best pioneered and practised by the late great Sneja Gunew, to carefully examine literature that has been marginalised, or altogether excluded, from the canon of Australian literary criticism. Building on what Gunew described as "multicultural literature," Dimitriou suggests a new pathway that presents a generative offering to Australian literary history but also the idea of world literature. In asking us to consider the conceptual space that bridges multicultural literature and world literature, we are invited to acknowledge that many of the poems, novels and stories written by Greek Australians bypass canonical literary checkpoints by crossing borders underground.

The volume acts as a work that gives visibility to the multiplicity of Greek diasporic literary expressions and heritages. Via a fulsome reading of many writers, it renders Greek pluralism from Australian shores indisputable. This attention to the heterogeneity of Greek textual expressions importantly (re)challenges monocultural framings of both Australia and Greece. In (re)challenging, our familiar and dominant worldviews are unsettled and an adventure unfolds into stimulating diasporic terrains. And, perhaps most strikingly, the book acts as a work of conceptual sophistication that gives heuristic context to knowledges once considered irrelevant, out of place, or illogical.

Diving deep into an assortment of writers—some migrants, others the children of migrants, some priests, others feminists—we are invited to consider a polyphonic yet distinctive, identifiable literary diasporic culture. This culture has been producing (from everyday Australian multicultural realities) a range of expressions that gently propel us to see the global potential of meaningful cosmopolitan representation. The writers we are introduced to transgress the here and there, the then and now. They are writers caught in constructive psychoanalytical spaces of translation and negotiation, of adaptation and reflection, of journeying and transformation, of unbecoming and unbelonging. The emotions of trauma and dislocation, of experiencing "otherness," are given value through their thoughtful textual renderings of past storytelling traditions—and more on this in a moment.

Antigone Kefala and Dimitris Tsaloumas, two celebrated writers who each received the Patrick White Award, are expertly re-explored as foundational figures who paved the ground for an alternative literature movement that wrote from Australia with a multilingual voice—a high achievement given the dominance of the monolingual landscape of the Arts in Australian cultural echelons. They were "new Australians," as well as "New Hellenes" (*Νέα Ελληνικά*/Néa Elliniká). Works by Fotini Epanomitis and Christos Tsiolkas are also given attention. As the children of migrants, their experimental and transgressive works are explored as opening alternative spaces of possibility. Empowerment and selfhood for women become graspable, while the merging of confronting realism with dark fantasy forces us to address lingering

traumas and flip commonly held assumptions about progress and Europe as the centre of high culture.

Helen Koukoutsis is presented as a feminist resistor. Her poetry acts as a hand in the face of hegemonic masculinity. Stylianos Harkianakis's poetry, on the other hand, is examined as giving words to silence and, via an exploration in which we see Orthodox symbolism merge with Indigenous traditions, we see that a borderless Hellenism is possible. Finally, engagement with Dean Kalimniou's distinctive style offers us entry into the politics of the untranslatable, the constantly transformed, and the transhistorical. Lesser-known epochs of Hellenic culture reveal preference for a dream-like prose over a didactic and nostalgic philosophical tone.

But what are the unifying modes by which Anna Dimitriou charts these diasporic literary practitioners? What are the modes by which their stories are told? How do they reinvent or transform storytelling? Breaking fresh ground in literary criticism, Dimitriou uncovers the intensity of meanings that can be found when thinking with, and through, the *paramythi*. By seriously considering how elements of a traditional but non-literary form of storytelling—the folktale (or what one endorsement describes as the "uber-myth")—are reworked into literary texts, the phenomenon of diasporic writing produced from Australia is given new meaning. Dimitriou's dextrous readings of these writers show that they use the *paramythi* as a transformational technique. As a bicultural and bilingual interpreter and literary critic, she carefully considers the *paramythi*'s dual function: the way that *paramythi* symbolises various aspects of Greek culture, but also how it challenges the invented traditions associated with Greekness. For example, she shows how these writers from a highly patriarchal culture perturb the familiar when they employ the comforting paramythic voice of the past in satirical and playful ways. Multiple meanings are opened. Here any notion of true meaning is distorted as there is no longer a single meaning, fixed endpoint nor a sense of closure. These paramythic texts describe outsider (Greek) realities and "unrealities" (metaphysical, religious or superstitious beliefs) in a type of verbal art or wordplay that acknowledges the ambiguity of living between cultures and operating with diverse vernaculars.

Indeed, within a Greek cultural context, and since antiquity, myth and *paramythi* have had a very long and entangled relationship. The term *paramythi* connotes a prosaic tale told by a commoner. It has a fictional status, and when used as an adjective it signifies a consolatory function. Think, encouragement, exhortation, reassurance or gentle persuasion. Dimitriou reminds us that if we consider *para-mythi* etymologically, we have the sense that it originates from myth or what lies on its periphery, but it can also mean "in spite of," in which case it may suggest a parody of myth, or a counter-myth. In a cultural-political sense, we could interpret Dimitriou locating the *paramythi* in Greek Australian literature as not only revisiting the protest of migrant or ethnic writing against marginalisation referred to by scholars like Gunew, but also opening a new conceptual landscape in which past storytelling expressions are *retained* and *reworked* for present-day purposes.

The focus of *Reading Greek Australian Literature through the Paramythi* gives attention to fragmentations as a means to protest the simplification of a core whole. By revealing the creative potential of the *paramythi*, which has had a marginal status since it has been considered as an anti-literary trope associated with the ordinary, colloquial or everyday, we begin to see how Greek Australian writers, purposely or not, have used this form of traditional storytelling as a mode of communication that accords with what we could think of a diasporic condition. As Ghassan Hage informs us, diasporic lives often resist mono-realism and are experienced as living multiple realities within a single space. By analysing various writers' uses and transformations of the *paramythi*, Dimitriou enables us to see the *paramythi* as a functional medium—both as a practical sign and an aesthetic symbol—that can account for the real tensions and contradictions experienced by diasporic subjects who are frequently balancing different words and worlds at any single moment.

Dimitriou's analysis takes into account decolonial positioning, and non-western or less Eurocentric takes on literary culture produced through diasporic lenses. Scattered like the diasporic writers she centres, throughout her critical reading there are moments of attention to how Greek writers on Indigenous lands draw links, a coexistence if you will, between Greek and Aboriginal traditions. Entanglements between spiritualities are identified, for example. Encounters that blur binaries are stressed. Juxtapositions between collective shame and the cowardice of individual silence place the notion of modern progress into flux. The presence of the *paramythi* functions not as a dividing line between past and present, but as a trajectory from which the multilingual writer can negotiate a sense of selfhood or place in the world of literature. By studying this paramythic element in diasporic texts, Dimitriou probes us to grapple with the layered but also haunting processes of cultural identity. By reading texts written by those who come from other places and speak in other tongues, we are invited to view Australian writers of Greek decent as masterful mediators. By identifying that these writers bridge multicultural and world literatures via an adoption of the symbolic realm of the *paramythi*, we are provided with a new entry point through which we can grasp, translate and interpret the worldly vernaculars of diasporic modes of expression.

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