

The Dynamics of Material Transnationalism: Australian Indigenous Authors in the US Marketplace

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One of the most productive concepts for engaging with the force of major works of fiction by Indigenous Australian authors published over the last decade is ‘Indigenous transnationalism,’ to quote the title of Lynda Ng’s 2018 edited volume on Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*. The critical work around Indigenous transnationalism has been prompted not only by the general transnational turn in the humanities but more immediately by the textual and material transnationalism of key Indigenous texts in their own right. On the textual side, the major works of fiction have projected forms of Indigenous being and belonging beyond the contained, minority status of Aboriginality within the nation and beyond the container of the nation itself. The Indigenous and the global, the Indigenous and the modern, are discovered co-extensively. Outside the literary academy this effect is best known in the art world, as registered in the collection of essays published under the title *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (McLean 2011). But something similar has happened in the literary sphere as well.

Importantly, literary scholarship has not just focused on the textual or conceptual dimensions of Indigenous transnationalism but also on what I’ve called the material transnationalism of the published works. I have in mind essays by overseas scholars such as Russell West-Pavlov (2018), Estelle Castro-Koshy (2018), Per Henningsgaard (2016), and Oliver Haag and his colleagues (2009, 2013, 2015), and locally by Roger Osborne and Gillian Whitlock (2013, 2016). In diverse ways these critical works have analysed the publishing histories and trajectories of selected texts, with a specific focus on the question of how the books *as books* have travelled beyond Australian shores—or more precisely how they have become *new* books for new audiences and new markets as foreign editions in English or other languages. This question in turn takes us from material production to the institutions of exchange and distribution (copyright, foreign rights markets, literary agents, editors, publishers and publicists) and the means and modes of reception both within the industry and the public sphere; or we might follow the process in the opposite direction, from reception to production, following the ‘communications circuit’ in its updated manifestations (see Squires 51–56; Murray and Squires). Material transnationalism, then, concerns the arrangements between publishers, authors, literary agents and other individual actors that enable books to travel from their place of origin; the transformations in their physical format through translation, production, design and paratext; their distribution and marketing in ‘foreign’ book worlds—how they have circulated or failed to circulate; and their reception or ‘comprehension’—how they have been read or not read in networks beyond our borders. As Paul Eggert has written in response to certain world literature paradigms,

the observable fact that only some works ‘travel’—whether in the original language or in translation—shows that underlying decisions of a different nature [from those of a phenomenology of reading] have been made in advance that permit the process to occur. Those decisions are made mainly by the book trade:

the transnationalising phenomenon has a material basis. Therefore each book production, and in turn each reading, is a situated act. (22)

But there is no absolute separation between the material or contractual and the cultural or symbolic dimensions, rather a dynamic interrelation at each point between reception/conception and material form or process.

The specific focus for the present essay is the history of Australian Indigenous books and authors in the US marketplace—obviously a different case from those where translation into another language is involved but perhaps also with more similarities than we might anticipate (and where other forms of translation are inevitable). What forms of presence or absence, of mobility or inertia, are in play for Indigenous Australian literature in *this* corner—or centre—of the world republic of letters? What has enabled or inhibited the capacity of individual books and authors to enter new markets or reach new audiences? How have they fared outside the academic communities that have an exceptional relationship to Australian literature and Indigenous literature—in the international marketplace, in multiple domestic markets, in the trade in foreign rights, and in mainstream commercial book worlds? Although from within our own local or national—and professional—situations, we might read these works as transnational or on the scale of world literature, just how ‘transnational’ have they been in the material terms of being published, distributed, noticed and read outside Australia? There are no simple measures for answering these questions. Foreign editions and translations do provide one measure, although both individual and institutional buyers can normally access Australian editions. Reviews and feature articles offer another dimension, demanding, as I’ll argue, that we move beyond academic journals to a much broader range of publications that constitute the industry and the marketplace, from specialist literary papers to the mainstream press, trade and professional journals, publisher websites, and digital reader platforms (beyond the scope of the present paper). Library holdings or Amazon algorithms will tell us something else again.

On a theoretical plane, addressing these questions of material transference and situated reception involves more than providing background or context, for it puts a certain pressure on the concept of transnationalism that circulates freely in contemporary literary studies. While the concept has offered a powerful methodology for denaturalising the nation, for transforming the scales in which our readings can take place or discovering how literary works themselves inscribe the transnational within their own textually-performed conditions of reading, the danger, in this very move, is that transnationalism and its close relations can function as little more than the latest euphemism for post-romantic notions of the literary, indeed of essential literariness (Carter and Osborne 11–12). Criticism has thus been able to leap from transcendence to transgression to transnationalism while scarcely missing a beat. More specifically, as Robert Dixon (2016) has argued, some of the most influential models of world literature manifest forms of sublimation and transcendence that displace the local (localising) and material dimensions of text and readability. The present paper might be read as an argument for extracting or salvaging transnationalism from world literature paradigms, following studies as different as Emily Apter’s and Chadwick Allen’s. But even at the heart of the world literature project itself we are reminded of the significance of material circulation, translation and production, to cite David Damrosch’s key organising categories. For ‘a culture’s norms and needs profoundly shape the selection of works that enter into it as world literature, influencing the ways they are translated, marketed, and read’ (26).

In more positive terms, perhaps in the terms of a literary sociology, the present study forces me to model the ways in which what I will call a *literary field* is constituted or fails to be

constituted, and the ways in which this is always situated and context dependent. I am not using ‘field’ here in the strict Bourdieusian sense, but rather to indicate a discursive field that enables individual works or authors to be understood in relation to others—that is, not just as individual works or authors but as participating in and thus constituting a field that as such is almost always named in relation to some extra-literary cultural or social entity. In terms of the present argument, how does a field like ‘First Nations writing’ or ‘Aboriginal literature’—not just the individual work but the field itself—move from the academic sphere, say, into the mainstream book world as a production or marketing category, a category that might, for example, get an unknown author onto a publisher’s list?

As structured and structuring—as Bourdieu might well have said—the named field attaches texts to each other and readers to texts, constituting a field of reception, something like Tony Bennett’s (2007) notion of a reading formation but more than that as well: a field that also functions in the industry, as a field of production among publishers, agents and editors, and more broadly as a generative, framing discourse in the non-academic book world. The field, in this sense, might be as banal—and as powerful—as ‘American literature’; it might be a sub-field, perhaps something like ‘Southern literature,’ or defined by genre; or constituted in opposition or through otherness (Black writing, women’s writing, Asian, queer). Otherness, for better and worse, does operate as mode of recognition, incorporation and connection. We will see that Australian Indigenous literature in the USA has not really been in a position even to draw forth ‘otherness’ as a mode of reception; but also in recent times that some works have gone *beyond* otherness, perhaps without having to work through it.

The dynamics between complementarity and subordination, incorporation and othering or ‘isomorphism and differentiation’ (Sapiro 92) will seldom be stable, however normalised or institutionalised the dominant fields (‘American literature,’ ‘modern literature,’ ‘Australian literature’) appear to be. They will resemble, rather, the dynamics between national/provincial and metropolitan literatures modelled in Casanova’s world literary system, extended here to the situation of subordinate or emerging categories of writing within these larger normative fields at the metropolitan centre. Further, the categories I’m describing are transactional, the critical point for the present argument, enabling texts and authors to travel not so much into a world literary system as into specific domestic markets. In this sense, the movement of books across borders is *transnodal* (Carter and Osborne 12)—from city to city and market to market—rather than transnational in any larger or ‘planetary’ sense of the term. Casanova’s modelling has little to do with this latter kind of emphasis in world literature paradigms. Despite its own investment in major modernist figures who move from periphery to centre, it is less interested in border crossing as an ethical or intellectual imperative than in analysing the unequal and constraining structures of power operating between nodes within a literary system that takes itself as the ‘world.’¹

One indicative example of the dynamics of field formation might be the way that Latin American writing rose to global prominence in the 1970s, almost on the back of a single novel, Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (published in Argentina in 1967, in France in 1968, then in the US in 1970). One text or author *can* do it, acting as a tipping point or threshold suddenly bringing other authors and cultural densities into view, usually around some unifying ‘field concept,’ such as magic realism in this case, and/or a geo-cultural identification, or simply the status of literary classic. For the *New Yorker*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was ‘a major contemporary work of literature . . . the Latin American *Don Quixote* . . . a classic’ (quoted on the 1978 Picador paperback). Unexpectedly, we have a parallel example from Australian literature in the American marketplace. Henry Handel Richardson’s

Ultima Thule was a remarkable success in the US following its 1929 publication there, first as a contemporary classic in its own right and then, with the full Mahony trilogy in print alongside other Australian novels in the unifying genre of historical saga, giving rise to a sudden perception of ‘Australian literature’—as a field—pretty much for the first time among American reviewers and publishers (Carter and Osborne 202–24). As one reviewer put it, noting the presence of *Ultima Thule* alongside Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Working Bullocks* and *Coonardoo*, ‘Australia at last seems to have become articulate’ (Carter and Osborne 195). In Australia, ‘Aboriginal literature’ now functions as a field in this sense: not merely as a string or spread of individual works and authors but in complex, dynamic relations to each other and to place, culture, nation, to a range of social entities.

As Casanova’s model might suggest, the construction of a national literature itself can be understood as the process of bringing such a field into being, a process at once intellectual and institutional as many of our mid-century critics and writers understood. And seeing it in this way opens up possibilities for a revised history of Australian cultural nationalism as something other than merely white settler colonialism in another guise, recapturing its transnational, modernising and professionalising dimensions (Carter 2013, 22–26; Dixon 2009).

Ideally, then, my question becomes not just how this or that text circulated overseas but how the field of Aboriginal writing—or whatever the transactional category is found to be—is constituted, how it circulates or ‘sticks,’ or perhaps how that field is never quite constituted. The critical essays mentioned in my second paragraph focus largely on translations and establish that since 1990 certain Indigenous texts/authors have indeed been widely translated, into French, German, Dutch, Polish, Slovenian, Italian, Chinese and Japanese. There are different histories in each instance, dependent upon formal and informal connections in the editorial world, diverse reception contexts (an interest in Indigenous and Oceanian cultures, for example, in France), and in certain cases, in China and Japan in particular, targeted support from Australian government agencies. But putting this history against the US story suggests, perhaps surprisingly, that the archive of translations is in fact richer than that of American editions. Selling rights to Australian books in the American market can indeed be more difficult than selling foreign/translation rights into non-Anglophone domains, even for the Australian branches of US-based multinationals. As a general rule there is no special ‘inside running’ or first option agreements between an Australian office and its American counterpart (or headquarters) in rights negotiations for the US market.

There is certainly academic interest in Aboriginal literature in the United States as evidenced in some key publications: the Sabbioni, Schaffer and Smith anthology from as early as 1998, and more recently Belinda Wheeler’s *Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature* in 2013 and her *Companion to the Works of Kim Scott* in 2016. But while the academic definition of a field such as this can certainly influence readerly and editorial interest more broadly—as it helped build the recognition of women’s writing or postcolonial fiction as distinct fields for example—in this case the academic investment is not matched by any targeted or sustained engagement from the publishing industry or the mainstream book world. In terms of publication, it might be argued that the relative lack of US editions is unimportant given that the books will already exist in English and are thus accessible for American Anglophone readers. But without local editions, such books will not be reviewed in the mainstream or trade press; they are unlikely to appear in bookstores or in educational settings; they will even be less ‘findable’ online. As I’ll argue later, they will also be less likely to appear in public libraries.

One of the themes of *Australian Books and Authors in the American Marketplace, 1840s–1940s* (Carter and Osborne) was the recurrent pattern in the United States of rising and then rapidly falling interest in Australian literature as such—that is, beyond passing interests in individual titles or authors. Most striking in this first century of Australian books in the American marketplace is the unprecedented rise in critical notice of Australian literature among reviewers and publishers in the interwar years, following the success of *Ultima Thule* as noted, a cumulative engagement that nonetheless suddenly disappears in the mid-late 1940s, almost without trace (Carter and Osborne 231–70). What we suggested to account for this pattern was the absence of any sustaining institutional or discursive context for Australian works to be read as Australian literature in the full sense of the term or even in a productive commercial sense: that is, in the terms of this paper, as actors or items within a field rather than as one-off titles or the works of a single author. Without such a context, new works might be brought together around certain successful books or authors for a short period but this could not be sustained. How much more so, we might ask, for the field of Aboriginal literature?

During the 1930s and early 1940s, the theme of Aboriginal/settler relations was in fact quite visible in the successful Australian books in the US, for the dominant genres were those of historical fiction or the pioneering saga. Prominent works included Prichard's *Coonardoo*, Herbert's *Capricornia* and Dark's *The Timeless Land*. And the Aboriginal or racial themes were noticed in reviews, often forcing surprised comparisons with American 'pioneering' history, for the books cast a critical gaze over triumphalist colonising narratives even as they sought a way of making Australia home from a white perspective (Carter 2015). But there was no carry-forward that might subsequently have been linked to the work of Aboriginal writers speaking in their own voices. With few exceptions (Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, especially with the movie release; White's *A Fringe of Leaves*), the themes of dispossession and racial conflict were not prominent in the Australian works that made a splash in the United States from the fifties to the nineties, from Morris West to Peter Carey. The mini-boom for Australian fiction in the States in the 1970s and 1980s had more to do with American perceptions of Australia's unexpected (post)modernity; also the emergence of women's writing as a field. For better or worse, the most visible representation of Australian Aboriginality across these mid-century decades was almost certainly in Arthur Upfield's detective fiction featuring the detective Napoleon Bonaparte—intriguing enough in its own right, insofar as Bony was a figure of modern indigeneity, or Indigenous modernity, whatever elements of the primitivist or exotic were also brought into play (Carter and Osborne 173–77).

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Against this background, what does the more recent history of US editions of works by Australian Indigenous writers reveal? Leaving aside a number of children's books published since the early 1970s, the story is one of scattered individual titles, few in number, and with little or no evidence of interest in Aboriginal writing as a field in its own right. Looking across single-authored volumes of poetry, fiction and life writing (Table 1), only five titles appeared in the thirty-five years from 1965 to 2000 (four if we exclude Mudrooroo's novel); only three titles in the period 2002 to 2009; but then, more promisingly, twelve separate titles in the decade from 2010.²

Year (US ed.)	Title	Author	First publication	US edition	Other foreign editions	US Library holdings (selective)
1932	<i>Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals</i>	David Unaipon ('by W. Ramsay Smith')	1930 Harrap, London	Farrar & Rinehart (NY) (republished in 1970 and 2003, still under Ramsay Smith's name)		
1965	<i>We Are Going</i>	Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal)	1964 Jacaranda Press	The Citadel Press (NY)	Italian	c.100
1986	<i>Doctor Wooreddy...</i>	Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson)	1983 Hyland House	Ballantine Books (NY); republished 1986/1989	Dutch	
1988	<i>My Place: An Aborigine's Stubborn Quest for Her Truth, Heritage, and Origins</i>	Sally Morgan	1987 Fremantle Arts Centre Press	Seaver/Henry Holt (NY)	UK (1988), India, German (1991), Swiss, Dutch, Japanese, Indonesian, Malay, Chinese, French, Italian, Turkish, Czech, Catalan, Spanish, Portuguese, Slovene, Italian (2012)	c.500
1990 ³	<i>My Place</i>	Sally Morgan	1987 Fremantle Arts Centre Press	Arcade/Little, Brown (NY, Boston)		
1991	<i>Wandering Girl</i>	Glenyse Ward	1987 Magabala Books	Henry Holt (NY)		
1994	<i>Dreamtime</i>	Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal)	1972 as <i>Stradbroke Dreamtime</i> , Angus & Robertson (repub. 1993)	Lothrop, Lee & Shepherd (NY)	Polish (1977), Japanese, German (1996)	
2002	<i>Rabbit-Proof Fence: The True Story of One of the Greatest Escapes of All Time</i>	Doris Pilkington (Nugi Garimara)	1996 as <i>Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence</i> , UQP; movie ed'n 2001	Miramax/Hyperion (NY)	Chinese (2002), Turkish, German, Dutch, French, Japanese, Italian, Swedish, Slovene, Sinhalese (2017)	450+
2002	<i>Scream Black Murder</i>	Philip McLaren	1995 HarperCollins	Intrigue Press (Phil.)	French (2003 & 2006)	
2009	<i>Carpentaria</i>	Alexis Wright	2006 Giramondo	Atria (Simon & Schuster) (NY); pb 2010	Italian (2008), French, Polish, Chinese (2009)	484
2010	<i>That Deadman Dance</i>	Kim Scott	2010 Picador/Pan Mac (Aust.)	Bloomsbury (NY)	Japanese (2017)	272
2010	<i>Clogs and Bare Feet</i>	Rosemary van den Berg	Dorrance (Phil.)	Dorrance (Phil.)		
2013 <i>A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature</i> , ed. Belinda Wheeler, Rochester (NY): Camden House						
2014	<i>Am I Black Enough for You?</i>	Anita Heiss	2012 Bantam (Aust.)	U of Hawaii P		
2014	<i>The Interrogation</i>	Ambelin Kwaymullina	2012 Walker Bks (Aust.)	Candlewick Press (Cambridge, MA)		

	<i>of Ashala Wolf</i>					
2015	<i>Ruby Moonlight</i>	Ali Cobby Eckermann	2012 Magabala	Flood Editions (Chicago)		
2016 <i>A Companion to the Works of Kim Scott</i> , ed. Belinda Wheeler, Rochester (NY): Camden House						
2016	<i>The Disappearance of Ember Crow</i>	Ambelin Kwaymullina	2013 Walker Bks (Aust.)	Candlewick Press (Cambridge, MA)		
2017	<i>The Foretelling of Georgie Spider</i>	Ambelin Kwaymullina	2015 Walker Bks (Aust.)	Candlewick Press (Cambridge, MA)		
2018	<i>The Swan Book</i>	Alexis Wright	2013 Giramondo	Atria (Simon & Schuster)	UK (2015), French (2016)	371
2018	<i>Too Afraid to Cry</i>	Ali Cobby Eckermann	2013 Ilura Press	Liveright/Norton (NY)		
2018	<i>Terra Nullius</i>	Claire Coleman	2017 Hachette (Aust.)	Small Beer Press (Easthampton, MA)		
2019	<i>Catching Teller Crow</i>	Ambelin & Ezekial Kwaymullina	2018 Allen & Unwin	Knopf		
2019	<i>Taboo</i>	Kim Scott	2017 Pan Macmillan (Aust.)	Small Beer Press (Easthampton, MA)		

Table 1. Australian Indigenous Fiction, Poetry and Life-Writing Titles Published in the USA, 1932–2019.

These figures do not include two new editions of David Unaipon's *Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals*, initially published in the USA in 1932, then reprinted in 1970 and 2003 but still under the name of W. Ramsay Smith. Nor do they include a series of titles by Mudrooroo distributed in the US or the works of B. Wongar, although for brief periods these were probably the two names most identifiable as 'Aboriginal' authors in the US marketplace. In 1993–94, Angus & Robertson/HarperCollins released Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling*, *Wild Cat Screaming*, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* and *The Kwinkan* in the US where they were noticed in *Publishers Weekly* and some scattered, favourable newspaper reviews (e.g. Ruta).³ Wongar (Sreten Božić) had six titles published in America from 1978 to 1987, beginning with *The Track to Bralgu*.⁴ The American editions were the first editions in most cases, and the early works in particular were awarded significant reviews. Indeed, at the very beginning of this complex story, Tom Keneally reviewed *The Track to Bralgu* for the *New York Times*, summarising the collection as 'a black man's picture of that lethal conflict between a race that sees the earth as no more than a quarry and another and more ancient one to whom it is an extension of body, soul and family.' Wongar's reception and influence remain to be explored but unsurprisingly he was first read as an Aboriginal author, then 'part-Aboriginal' (at least through to *Karan* in 1985) as the books themselves announced, before his European identity was fully revealed. Obviously his (dis)qualified Aboriginal credentials removed any potential the works might otherwise have had, given the strong early reviews, for initiating a field of Aboriginal writing in the US.

Having made these exclusions, my first reaction was puzzlement, even outrage, at the thinness of the record. A more sober analysis however, with book history to the fore, suggests that what we find is pretty much what we should expect given the local record and the realities of commercial publishing across different copyright territories and domestic markets: a handful of the most successful or accessible texts and genres, but with few signs of continuity or wider,

sustained investment. After all, to some extent the lack of continuity mirrors the Australian history of publication, which begins with scattered titles from the 1960s to the 1980s, at least to the appearance of Sally Morgan's *My Place* in 1987. While we can now point to a long history of Aboriginal appropriations of the English language and its most potent genres, the key point for my story is the relatively recent emergence of the novel as a dominant genre. Poetry and theatre became major vehicles for Aboriginal expression in the 1960s and 1970s, closely tied to civil rights and land rights movements. Life narrative, especially Aboriginal women's stories, became a dominant genre in the 1980s and 1990s. While never the largest in terms of output, the novel has come to dominate over the last decade in terms of public impact and critical esteem. With regard to the titles picked up for publication in the United States, there has been a parallel shift over the last decade from life writing to the novel.

Kath Walker's (Oodgeroo Noonuccal's) *We are Going*, widely recognised as the first volume of poetry in English by an Indigenous author, is also the first such book to have a US edition. No reviews have been located, but the book's appearance was noted in the *New York Times* in a routine listing of newly published titles (11 July 1965). Its trajectory—from Brisbane's Jacaranda Press to New York's Citadel Press—is surprising and unfortunately research has yet to uncover any detailed information about just how it happened.⁵ Citadel was founded in 1956 by one Lyle Stuart, infamous then as 'the bad boy' of American publishing (Tebbel 310). In historian John Tebbel's words, Stuart's formula was 'sex, money and politics' (311), and the Press's advertisements in the *New York Times* bear this out. But they also indicate a serious international and political dimension to Citadel's list. The press published books on everything from psychoanalysis to Zen, from a *History of Eroticism* to *2000 Insults for Every Occasion*. It also published books on third-world politics, black America, European literature, and social reform, including many foreign titles, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir to Fidel Castro. This does, I think, indicate a 'transactional' place for Oodgeroo Noonuccal's book on Citadel's list through the discourses of third-world decolonisation or black writing for example. Indeed, it suggests that the poetry's contemporaneity—its location in the 'present progressive' in Chadwick Allen's (2017) term—was visible in this small internationally-oriented corner of the book world in ways it was not in Australia.

Apart from children's picture books, nothing further by Indigenous authors appeared in the US across the next twenty years. With Sally Morgan's *My Place*, however, Aboriginal narratives entered the Australian mainstream and the international marketplace. The story of Morgan's late discovery of her own and her parents' and grandparents' Indigenous heritage—the stories, indeed, that led them to conceal this heritage—were made accessible to non-Indigenous readers through the familiar genre of self-discovery, although the book also insists on bringing this history into the narrative present and in distinctly Aboriginal voices. More recent analyses have re-positioned the work as testimonial (Whitlock 2015). No doubt the book's generic familiarity, alongside its local commercial success, underwrote its international uptake. It remains the only Australian Indigenous work with multiple US editions and reprints, and has the highest number of US library holdings.

The presentation of the original American edition is suggestive. A sentimental, generic subtitle was added—'An Aborigine's stubborn quest for her truth, heritage, and origins'; appropriate enough, but also linking the book to the post-slavery narratives associated in the States with the *Roots* phenomenon from a decade or so earlier.⁶ The cover image, too, seems to be drawn from the iconography of American slavery narratives as much as from Australian history, although, as if in recognition of this lack, the image is partly covered by an envelope bearing a Corunna Downs postmark and a 1988 Australian stamp.⁷ The covers of the 1990 Arcade and 1993 Little,

Brown editions announced *My Place* explicitly as ‘The Australian *Roots*.’⁸ If these generic reference-points enabled the work to travel into the American market, indeed to multiply its presence there, they do not represent a framework able to sustain any working sense of ‘Aboriginal literature.’

The next book to appear, perhaps an unlikely choice, was Glenyse Ward’s *Wandering Girl*, most probably an attempt by Henry Holt, Morgan’s US publisher, to replicate the success of *My Place* with another Aboriginal female life story. But *Wandering Girl* is less generically friendly, far more anchored in the unfamiliar experience of ‘an aboriginal Australian, forcibly taken from her parents and raised in a strict Catholic institution, describ[ing] her time as a servant during her 17th year,’ in the words of *Kirkus Reviews*. The reviewer was uncertain what to make of the book: ‘Glenyse’s voice is artless and untutored, giving her narrative immediacy, but also leaving it open to interpretation. Clearly she has real cause for anger, but she also seems to exaggerate. . . . Still, an authentic, honest account of injustice: unusual source material.’⁹ No other reviews or notices have been located.

Kirkus Reviews is a New York-based trade journal rather than a literary magazine, full of short pre-publication notices of new books aimed at librarians and booksellers, and indeed, as such, very influential ever since its foundation in 1933. It indicates an important sphere of influence, that of trade or professional journals, often neglected in literary scholarship and even in publishing studies. In the present instance, what is striking about the US context is that outside the pages of *Kirkus Reviews* and some comparable publications discussed below, there are almost no reviews of any of the titles listed in Table 1; that is, no reviews in the mainstream literary press, in papers such as the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Washington Post* or *LA Times*. *My Place* is the exception, at least to the extent of one review in the *New York Times* by expatriate Australian author Janette Turner Hospital (1989), a good choice as she is able to locate the book in the broader context of ‘national amnesia about the role and treatment of aborigines in Australian history.’ On the same date, the *Times* printed a brief article based on an interview with Morgan (Fowler). Turner Hospital is alert to the significance of the book’s content *and* of its accessibility, and offers productive frames for its reception: ‘*My Place* is a historical document which should be (and doubtless will be) on every black studies and women’s studies course in Australia and round the world. It is also a book for everyone; a book with the form and texture of a novel and the complexity and pace of a mystery not solved until the final pages. It is wonderfully entertaining and a luminous prose poem.’ ‘Black studies’ can translate the book into the American book world.

There is again more than a decade between *Wandering Girl* and Doris Pilkington Garimara’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, released not for its own sake but retitled and published in 2002 by Miramax/Hyperion, six years after its original appearance, to coincide with the release of the film of the same name and with another Hollywood sub-title added: ‘The true story of one of the greatest escapes of all time.’ Again the text itself allows this generic transfer even as it complicates it, but it is the film that enables the book to travel, and it is the film’s version of an accessible human tale and adventure story rather than the challenging particularities of Aboriginal experience that is operationalised in the transaction. (This characterisation of the film, of course, is not fair to its final scenes with the Aboriginal women themselves.) Again, no reviews of Pilkington Garimara’s work have been located.

The absence of any situated reading formation or discursive field for the books’ reception has the effect of making each new title a brand new start and likely to be a one-off, even more than is normally the case in trade publishing. The other book from 2002 is just such a one-off, Philip

McLaren's *Scream Black Murder*, an early Indigenous venture into genre fiction, picked up by the small independent Intrigue Press from Philadelphia. Despite McLaren's later successful novels in the crime genre, no more have been published in the United States.

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Although a wide range of Indigenous writers were active in Australia over the decade to 2002, only a small number of novels were published. Aboriginal literature as a field—within the broader field of books and writing in Australia—was still in the process of formation. Many of the titles that did appear were poetry, short stories or quite 'local' life stories, types of books unlikely to find an overseas publisher unless they already had high levels of commercial success or a film tie-in. Or they were first novels, again making foreign rights sales less likely. Alexis Wright's, Kim Scott's and Melissa Lucashenko's first novels all appeared in this period, and although all garnered serious critical attention in Australia none had the kind of market success that might be noticed—or pushed—overseas. There was also *Benang*, Scott's second novel, which won a number of significant awards, including the Miles Franklin, and in many ways broke the mould of expectations of Aboriginal literature as neither first-person life story nor local realism. *Benang* was published by Fremantle Press—publisher of *My Place*—but it was not until Scott's move to Picador, i.e., to the Australian branch of a multinational publisher, that he was picked up in the United States with *That Deadman Dance* in 2010, the first book since *My Place* to be published in America soon after its Australian release instead of after several years.¹⁰

It is important, however, to emphasise that there is no simple moral to this story to the effect that such a move from local to multinational is the secret to US publication. The list of titles picked up by US presses includes works first published in very different sectors of the Australian industry: dedicated Indigenous houses such as Magabala; local independents such as UQP, Giramondo or Fremantle; medium-sized international operations such as Walker Books; and multinationals such as HarperCollins, Pan Macmillan and Hachette. Scott's novel indeed was *not* published in the US by the American branch of Picador or any other Macmillan or Holtzbrinck imprint but rather by the independent Bloomsbury USA (Bloomsbury's head office is in London, with branch offices in Sydney and New York). The US edition was negotiated by Scott's Australian agent in partnership with an American agent, but there was little follow-up on the US side. Nor did Bloomsbury take Scott's next novel. Despite 'transnational' publication in the United States, Scott felt 'very distant from the process of getting published there.'¹¹

Publishing, of course, is not the full story. As mentioned, American buyers can access Australian and UK editions. US library holdings, for example, reveal a complex picture. Osborne and Whitlock (2016), for example, have indicated how widely *Carpentaria* appears in libraries across the USA (although my count of 484 individual holdings of *all* editions is significantly lower than their 'more than six hundred' of the American edition alone). More broadly, WorldCat indicates there are large holdings for certain books (*My Place*, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Wright's novels), although we do not know how many of these purchases were active choices rather than the effect of standing orders, which are more likely in the case of larger publishers and larger libraries. Nor do these numbers reveal rates of borrowing or reading. Breaking down the overall figures, one pattern that does emerge is that larger university libraries and major public libraries such as New York's will often hold the UK or Australian edition—i.e., purchasing a title soon after its first English-language publication—but regional or local public libraries, and we can probably add school libraries, are very much more likely

to hold US editions alone. That wider distribution does seem to depend on there being a separate American release.

My list of titles (Table 1) could suggest a thickening of presence for Aboriginal literature in the US from around 2010 following the publication of *Carpentaria* and *That Deadman Dance*. Table 1, as noted, lists twelve titles since 2010 compared to seven over the previous four decades. But it would be easy to overestimate or misinterpret this development. Wright's and Scott's own follow-up books are picked up in the US, but there is little evidence to suggest that the books' status as Aboriginal or Indigenous literature was significant in their publication or reception. And once again the absence of reviews is striking, perhaps the most striking aspect of this whole history.

With *Carpentaria* we have a prize-winning and commercially successful novel in Australia being published by a major US house, but no major reviews. Again, where the novel was noticed is in the trade and professional journals—*Kirkus Reviews*, the *Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly*—and, indeed, noticed with the kind of praise that should have brought the book to the attention of the mainstream review pages. For *Kirkus Reviews*, *Carpentaria* was a 'stately epic . . . a dreamlike novel of a dreamtime interrupted,' recalling Márquez but with the magic of Aboriginal mythology: 'A latter-day epic that speaks, lyrically, to the realities and aspirations of aboriginal life.' *Publishers Weekly* referred to Wright's 'latest masterpiece,' suggesting some knowledge of earlier work, and via a weird comparison—'the drama unfolds with all the poetry and eclecticism of a Bob Dylan song' (and this was before the Nobel Prize!)—the review concludes with high praise: 'Rarely does an author have such control of her words and her story. Wright's prose soars between the mythical and the colloquial.' The *Library Journal* goes even further: 'a sprawling, surreal anti-*Odyssey* in which time and space contract and expand and experience takes place in the Dreamtime, on the sea, and on and under the continent of Australia.' The book offers 'one of the most compelling literary protagonists since Odysseus and will surely stand as a masterpiece of modern English-language literature (Matthews 85, 86).' The reviewer was from Washington State University Library.

While *Kirkus Reviews* was lukewarm about *That Deadman Dance*, the *Library Journal* was extremely positive, and well informed in framing its reading: 'This well-written, insightful novel will be enjoyed by readers interested in Australian historical fiction, indigenous literature, and post-colonial fiction in general' (Vredevoogd). The novel 'deserves notice from a broader international audience.' Again the reviewer is a university librarian, here from Marymount University, Virginia; influential in one sphere, certainly, but not necessarily in the New York book world. As later examples suggest, New York's centrality has been somewhat diffused by the multiplication of online and popular media platforms, by new local publishers and emerging book markets; yet it remains the largest and most influential publishing, contracting and reviewing hub.

The one 'big hit' in the influential New York papers following *My Place* is an article that appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* in November 2007 under the heading 'Letter from Australia: Aboriginal Lit'—not a review or critical essay, but a relatively detailed feature article on Wright's success with *Carpentaria*, its Miles Franklin Award and the appearance of other Aboriginal writers, all in the context of the Northern Territory intervention. The article was by the *Times*'s London correspondent, Jane Perlez, a London-born, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who had been educated in Australia before pursuing her career in journalism internationally (Osborne and Whitlock 4). More to the point, she was known to Giramondo publisher Ivor Indyk (through his brother, the author and former diplomat Martin Indyk). He

gave Perlez a copy of the novel and no doubt plenty of encouragement to bring it to the attention of readers—and editors. Indyk’s intervention can perhaps be seen in the pointed parenthetical statement in the article that the book had yet to find an American publisher.

In fact *Carpentaria* had been doing the rounds in the US ever since its Australian appearance in 2006, and an offer was eventually made by Barbara Epler at New Directions.¹² But a rival offer appeared more attractive. Perlez’s agent, Gloria Loomis, who was also Martin Indyk’s agent, took the book on and eventually caught the interest of Judith Curr, an Australian editor in charge of the Atria imprint at Simon & Schuster. Curr, in Indyk’s words ‘was trying her hand at developing an international list.’ If that’s the good news, the results were less positive: ‘Alexis got a good advance, but it was the wrong imprint and the book sank without trace, not having scored a single print review’ (Osborne and Whitlock 10). New Directions, Indyk believes, would have been a more appropriate publisher and would have known how to market this challenging book; in my terms, they may have been able to activate a more clearly defined field for this literary novel’s marketing and reception. For Wright’s *The Swan Book*, American publisher Little, Brown had world rights through the UK edition but did not offer to publish the novel in the USA. Eventually it followed *Carpentaria* to Atria. And once again no reviews have been located outside the professional journals (and *O, The Oprah Magazine*).

4

The one-off nature of the publishing described thus far means there is no single, recurring set of institutional arrangements or professional linkages sustaining the transference of Indigenous texts into the American publishing industry. The partial exception to the rule, and one of increasing importance, is where we see the power of *genre* pulling titles across copyright territories into new markets, into nameable generic fields. Most significant here is the YA dystopian fantasy of Ambelin Kwaymullina: her ‘Tribe’ series in the mode she calls ‘Indigenous futurism,’ a term picked up in *Kirkus Reviews* (which had labelled the first volume in the series Fantasy, but used Kwaymullina’s term after that) and also in the *School Library Journal* (Gruver). The praise in these venues is high, and alert to Aboriginal inflections: ‘Kwaymullina’s rich world-building, which incorporates the worldviews and ancient stories of Australia’s indigenous people, makes this series stand out in the crowded field of YA dystopian fiction’ (Oluonye).¹³ Kwaymullina is published locally by Walker Books Australia and in the US by Candlewick Press, a division of Walker that specialises in children’s and YA books.

The repeatable YA connections that work for Kwaymullina’s books through the federated company structure of Walker Books and the global genre of YA fantasy is something of a special case as indicated. And yet there are connections to *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book*, pulled into a cognate generic field, and to Claire Coleman’s extraordinary novel *Terra Nullius*, a book that manages to be about colonial pasts and dystopian futures at the same time. *Terra Nullius* made its way into the American market by accident (not unusually), through the special interest of its US publisher, Gavin Grant, the co-founder of the independent Small Beer Press based in Easthampton, Massachusetts. Small Beer Press specialises in science fiction and mystery but has a wider interest, in Grant’s own words, in ‘books that move across generic borders.’¹⁴ Grant read a review of the novel in the UK *Guardian* and said to himself ‘I have to read this book.’ Having done so he emailed Hachette Australia and a deal was done. Although resident in the US for 25 years, Grant himself is originally from Scotland, and it is tempting to hypothesise about the difference his background might make. Either way, it was the speculative/dystopian genre framing that was dominant in ‘locating’ the book, although, no less critically, this did not efface its presence as Aboriginal writing.

While the American edition locates the novel through a blurb that places Coleman in the company of Ursula Le Guin, Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler (written by the Press's co-founder, sci-fi/fantasy author Kelly Link), the cover not only repeats the Aboriginal imagery of the Australian original but adds the colours of the Aboriginal flag. Further, while the US edition reproduced Hachette's setting, it added a Reader's Guide to 'help break down barriers for American readers,' as Grant puts it. This consists of an interview with Coleman by fantasy author Jenny Abeles in which Coleman locates her novel within the broader context of colonialism, linking America and Australia, and offers a list of other Indigenous authors for American readers. Then there's a set of Reading Group Discussion Questions, some bland about sympathetic or unsympathetic characters but others directly about colonisation, followed by an Author's Note in which Coleman explains the concepts of terra nullius, slavery for Indigenous workers, and the Stolen Generations. She also thanks the Press's owners for taking her book 'out to another part of the world.'

This complex framing of *Terra Nullius* had its effects, perhaps the kind of effects Indyk saw for *Carpentaria* if published by New Directions. The publisher's website offers a long list of quotable quotes, not quite from the mainstream press but from National Public Radio (Best Books of 2018), online sites *Book Riot* and *Locus* (where it was reviewed by prominent sci-fi author Gary K. Wolfe), *Kirkus Reviews* again, and starred reviews in the *Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly*.¹⁵ There's also a link to an interview in the *LA Review of Books*, which had earlier interviewed Kim Scott (Wood 2017, 2018). In Grant's view, the book was read positively by the YA and sci-fi communities but also as a book by a 'queer woman of color.'

According to the publisher, *Terra Nullius* by mid-2019 had sold 'more than a couple of thousand copies' (and the Reader's Guide had been downloaded almost 700 times); not best-selling, but its impact has been significant. After its appearance, Small Beer Press saw a sudden increase in submissions from Australian agents, not least from Kim Scott's US agent regarding *Taboo*. Small Beer Press published *Taboo* in September 2019, and Scott visited the States, meeting his publisher and appearing at a forum held at the Library of Congress. Again the Press's website offers a generous selection of excerpts from reviews, Australian and American, including from the *Boston Globe*, as well as *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*.¹⁶ In this instance, the specific histories of settler/Aboriginal relations are unavoidable.

The final example I have of a book's journey into the American marketplace is Ali Cobby Eckermann's memoir *Too Afraid to Cry*, sourced from a two-page article on book and author in *Publishers Weekly* (Werris). In 2017, for this book Cobby Eckermann won the important Windham-Campbell nonfiction prize administered by Yale. When the award was announced, American author Adam Fitzgerald happened to be in Australia. They met and she gave him a copy of her book; he passed it to Norton Liveright editor-in-chief Robert Weil, who lobbied for its publication based in part on his experience of publishing Native American authors such as Russell Means and Leonard Peltier: 'I know a good bit about "adoptions" of native American infants in the US . . . So I was especially drawn to Ali's wrenching personal story' (Werris 31). Eckermann also attracted the interest of a US agent.

The rare link explicitly made here between Australian and American First Nations people was also revealed in Osborne and Whitlock's 2015 mapping of consumption patterns via Amazon around the US edition of *Carpentaria*. *Yasiv.com* maps the links between purchases of specific books in relation to a selected example. The graphic showed *Carpentaria* in close proximity to Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* and a number of Native American anthologies, as well as a node of South Pacific writing—a representation of a 'transnational Indigenous literary network' that

was even more pronounced in the graphic generated by Amazon's Canadian market but largely disappears for the British equivalent (1–2).

When I repeated this experiment in mid-2019 a revealingly different set of reading relations emerged.¹⁷ The closest links at this point in time were to the novels of African-American sci-fi author Octavia Butler. On one side, the book is in proximate relation to other African, black and postcolonial figures including Jamaica Kincaid, J.M. Coetzee, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith and Sudanese author Tayeb Salih. On the other, it connects to Atwood in post-apocalyptic mode and a cluster of works, fiction and non-fiction, on climate catastrophe. Another line connects *Carpentaria* to Scott's novels, and, in the opposite direction, to Australian authors such as Peter Carey, Tim Winton and Kate Grenville. But the key point is the new global visibility of sci-fi, cli-fi and dystopian fantasy as major genres being registered in the novel's consumption.¹⁸ While there is a transnational cluster of race and postcolonial interests, it does not appear to be tied primarily to indigeneity.

Osborne and Whitlock also trace the changing fortunes of the book through its covers. As we have seen already with *My Place*, as a 'book moves offshore and into transnational literary space'—or rather into a different domestic marketplace—'the cover art responds by creating different thresholds of interpretation' (7). The US hardback edition of *Carpentaria* reproduced the serpent image used for the Australian edition, but with a more generic 'red centre' background rather than the country-specific landscape of the original. As well as quoting from *Kirkus Reviews*, the *Library Journal* and Perlez's article, the publisher sought an endorsement for the cover from another Simon & Schuster author, the African-American mystery writer Walter Mosley (positioning the book as black genre fiction perhaps, although Mosley's comment points elsewhere).¹⁹ The paperback edition delocalises the novel even further, invoking a far more predictable generic image of anonymous Aboriginal people on country, but not Wright's Waanyi country, offering a kind of empathetic primitivism but suggesting nothing of the novel's own complex modernity.²⁰ The cover for *The Swan Book* shifts register again, reproducing an Aboriginal painting (from publisher Judith Curr's own collection) which is embellished with an enthusiastic exclamation from *O, The Oprah Magazine*: 'Astonishingly inventive.'²¹

In conclusion, we can point to degrees of thickening or quickening of engagements with Australian Indigenous writing over the last decade and even more so the last four or five years. Connections with black writing are still potent, now in more complicated ways than when *My Place* appeared, through networks of transnational black, minoritarian or postcolonial writing, alongside some links to Native American writing but constellated around issues of race perhaps rather than indigeneity. The most powerful transactional category in recent years has been that of futurist fantasy or dystopian speculative fiction. This could be seen negatively, as effacing the particularities of Indigenous narratives, dissolving the specificities of Aboriginal experience into easily transferable, global generic modes. But I would argue optimistically about the potential such framings have for opening up the texts to much wider sets of connections and modes of reception, not so much effacing Indigenous literature as connecting it into complex networks of interpretive formations, scales of readability, and, no less important, industry mobilisations.

West-Pavlov notes a slightly different, more literary, but complementary potential for *Carpentaria*:

Carpentaria is out there in the European and American markets. Its place in the global publishing scene is admittedly precarious, yet precisely that precarity may give it a crucial ‘minor’ status, in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of the word. That ‘minor’ tenor entails the capacity to generate—on the margins of that field of cultural production—‘lines of flight’ within the collective fabric of linguistic life. By virtue of their constitutively unforeseeable trajectories, such ‘lines of flight’ will surely take *Carpentaria* to future junctures, where audiences will be more able to recognize and respond to it as a work of world literature. (43)

Transnationalism remains a powerful conceptual lever for tracing the mobility of texts across borders and breaking open the hold that national framings of literatures still exert, both historically and heuristically. ‘Indigenous transnationalism’ remains an essential tool for reading contemporary Indigenous fiction. And yet when we follow the actual transit of books across borders, when we trace the circulation of books as books (and as bundles of rights), we soon bump up against the barriers to such movement, the limits of transnational or transnodal exchange in the power dynamics of culture and commerce. What we find is less the transcendence of borders than their often difficult negotiation, as works are transported from one domestic market, industry or copyright territory into another, seldom emerging unmarked from the process, and, in this case, seldom producing sustained patterns of transference or reception.

The transfer of Australian Indigenous writing into the American marketplace thus remains small-scale and dispersed despite the more recent developments, nothing that yet constitutes a field of Australian Indigenous writing beyond one corner of the academic sphere. This is not surprising given that we can scarcely talk of Australian literature as a field in the American marketplace. At the same time, it is not too difficult to conceive of the time when Australian Indigenous writing becomes recognised as a field in this sense before or beyond Australian literature itself. After all, that is already the case for contemporary Aboriginal art in relation to the broader field of Australian art.

NOTES

¹ Much of the Anglophone criticism of Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* as Gallocentric reveals the critics’ own Anglocentricity. While the absence of significant attention to London and New York is notable, much of Casanova’s analysis of the role of Paris in the international careers of writers such as Joyce and Faulkner remains persuasive. And for many cultures and languages beyond English, Paris, not London or New York, remains the key centre for translation and international circulation.

² Children’s books, usually picture books, were much more prominent than fiction in the years to 2000 in the USA: thirteen titles with at least an Indigenous illustrator on the creative team. Authors included Dick Roughsey, Percy Trezise, and, from 1993, Sally Morgan. Only four titles in this area have appeared since 2000. Data here and throughout derived from AustLit.

³ The books’ release in paperback would have limited access to the reviews pages. Mudrooroo’s identification as Indigenous was first questioned in 1996. Angus & Robertson editions of Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, Wongar’s *The Track to Bralgu* and Mudrooroo’s *The Master of Ghost Dreaming* were reviewed together in the *LA Times*, 27 June 1993. Sam Watson’s *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990) is listed as published by Penguin Australia and Viking Penguin (USA) but the latter was not a separate edition. No reviews have been located.

⁴ Wongar (Sreten Božić) was born in Serbia, moved to Australia in 1960, and lived with an Aboriginal group in Australia’s Tanami desert for ten years. His non-Aboriginal identity was revealed in 1981 in Australia. While his publishing under an Aboriginal name has provoked controversy, his writing itself has also been critically defended. His US editions are *The Track to Bralgu* (Little, Brown, 1978), *Barbaru* (U of Illinois P, 1982), *Walg* (Dodd,

Mead, 1983; Braziller, 1990), *Bilma* (Ohio UP, 1984), *Karan* (Dodd, Mead, 1985; Braziller, 1991), *Gabo Djara* (Dodd, Mead, 1987).

⁵ There is no record of the contracts or negotiations in Oodgeroo Noonuccal's papers in the Fryer Library, University of Queensland (UQFL 84). No records for Citadel Press have been located. Jacaranda was primarily an educational publisher though with a growing general list. It had expanded from its Brisbane base by the mid-1960s, establishing offices in Victoria and NSW (Blaxell 36). The book's price in the USA was a cheap \$1.

⁶ Alex Haley's novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* was first published in 1976. The enormously successful TV miniseries went to air in 1977 with a sequel in 1979.

⁷ Oddly the stamp bears the German word 'Australien' over the shape of the continent. I have been unable to identify any actual stamp from 1988 with that design.

⁸ For these covers see: https://www.thriftbooks.com/w/my-place_sally-morgan/334496/all-editions/

⁹ The brief review appeared twice, in April 1991 under the heading 'Children's,' and in May as 'Non-Fiction.' The book was categorised as 'Autobiography 12+.'

¹⁰ As one of the reviewers of the present essay suggested, perhaps *That Deadman Dance*'s whaling stories had a particular resonance in the US; but no evidence for this has been found in reviews or correspondence.

¹¹ Personal communication.

¹² Personal communication.

¹³ In support of my earlier point that public libraries were likely to hold copies only if there had been a US edition, the two reviewers for the *School Library Journal* (of the print and audio editions of *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*) were librarians from the Burlington County Library, NJ, and the Shaker Heights Public Library, OH, respectively.

¹⁴ Personal communication.

¹⁵ <https://smallbeerpress.com/books/2018/09/18/terra-nullius/>

¹⁶ <https://smallbeerpress.com/books/2019/09/03/taboo/>

¹⁷ A later search around *Carpentaria* (March 2020) gave less prominence to the dystopian/speculative fiction and non-fiction works and more to a very diverse range of 'world literature' texts and authors: New Zealand, Pacific, African, Vietnamese, Asian-American, African-American, Indian etc.—plus *Terra Nullius* and Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*. But results for *The Swan Book* were closer to the earlier results for *Carpentaria*, showing close proximity to a range of Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler titles, as well as Asian American and African-American authors.

¹⁸ And in August 2020, the *New York Times* published an article on American Indigenous/First Nations authors' engagement with science fiction and fantasy genres: Alter (2020).

¹⁹ 'Wild and filled with strange beauty and hardship, *Carpentaria* celebrates the mythic and the pedestrian of Aboriginal life in Australia's heart. Inventive and epic, the novel reveals the complex connections between land and human, public and private life, class and destiny, faith and modernism. Alexis Wright weaves a magical tale with characters that will live on long after the last page is turned' (Cited in Osborne and Whitlock 7).

²⁰ Indyk complained at length about this cover and asked the publisher to revert the rights in the book, without success. Personal communication.

²¹ For the Australian edition, Giramondo had the courage or confidence not to use a recognisably Aboriginal image for the cover, but rather a line drawing of a swan by designer Darren Gilbert.

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