

# Proust at Caloundra

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The question in the title of this volume is attention-grabbing, at least for interested Australian readers: has Australian literature, as a corpus or in the form of individual masterworks, gained some access to the stratosphere of world literature? To a non-Australian or northern hemisphere reader, such a question might appear presumptuous: Australia might be able to claim a couple of Nobel-prize-winning authors, sure, but no literary figures of serious trans-historical, planetary recognition like Shakespeare, Dante or Melville (all from way before the prize era of course). Is this something to do with Australian authors like Joan London (*Gilgamesh*) and John Kinsella (*Divine Comedy*) recycling the epic downunder? Another kind of reader—like David Malouf—might urge us to consider the question a moment longer (Buckridge and Morecroft 47). Who says Shakespeare, Dante and Melville aren't Australian? If transcendence of national origins, even national language, means anything, then surely these writers belong equally to the world, and to any part of the world? A professional reader, by contrast, who knows the *Longman Anthology of World Literature* (five volumes so far) will be aware that Australia has only a tiny, contemporary Indigenous, presence there, a poem by Oodgeroo and a story by Archie Weller. The semiotics of scholarly publishing confirm the hegemony of the global north represented by this publishing project and its pedagogical outreach: the 1633 Henricus Hondius map on the front cover of the compact, one-volume version of the anthology has a large outline of 'Terra Australia Incognita' wandering across the bottom. So Australia may be of geographical significance but it remains almost entirely unknown cultural territory, a kind of 17<sup>th</sup>-century view of Australian literature. The *Norton Anthology of World Literature* has an extract from Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, but it's the chapter on 'The Novel in Africa.' The 'entire' world of the *Bedford Anthology of World Literature* (6 vols) doesn't include any Australian or New Zealand writing. As Nick Jose reminds us in his essay in this volume, 'Cheeky,' the reality of this contemporary literary-cultural paradigm is that 'no literature maps simply, without loss or distortion, on to its allocated place in a world schema' (189). Given its thought-provoking value, then, Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney's question is a good one to ask. But the short answer is: get real.

In this connection I was reminded of a point Louis Menand made in an article in the *New Yorker* in 2005, 'All that Glitters: literature's global economy.' He was reviewing James English's *The Economy of Prestige* and Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* and pondering the evident complexities of the developed literary economy: in the classroom, where it is about aesthetic equities, we tend to ignore the middlepersons while outside, including in research mode, we recognise all the signs and effects of the literary market (cultural commerce), sometimes

predominantly. Across these sites, literary value is migratory and polymorphous. One needs multiple indices to read the returns and trends of the asset class called literature. One of the ‘richest stories’ about the ‘circulation of cultural goods’ for Menand, as for English, is that of Kerri Hulme and her novel *The Bone People*. Both recount this novel’s CV from its 1984 Spiral Press advent (Wellington feminist publishing micro-collective), its winning of two New Zealand literary prizes and assumption into the category ‘Maori fiction,’ the lucky chance of New Zealand’s hosting of one of these prizes, the ExxonMobil Pegasus Prize in 1984, the enabling identity media-scandal around Hulme herself, and then in 1985, publication in England by Hodder & Stoughton and the winning of the Booker Prize. It’s an account of how this novel came to be elevated into ‘the canon of what is now called world literature.’ Both English and Menand know how to sidestep the question of ‘authenticity’ and whether *The Bone People* ‘is’ Maori writing, or what constitutes ‘Maori’ writing. That doesn’t matter. Menand is interested, rather, in how the economy of world literature works and he judges that transcending the national—the upward desire of all world-ambitious writers according to Casanova—has been superseded by transcending ‘downward’—very appropriate for a writer from the south island of New Zealand and her progenitor, William Faulkner, both in the glocalised souths of the global north. Now, writes Menand, ‘[r]ecognition comes from having one’s work identified with a marginalized or “endangered” community within the larger national or global polity—with Ibo culture (rather than Nigerian), or Maori (rather than New Zealand).’ In other words, a work of ‘New Zealand’ literature, that is a ‘national’ or minor work in Menand and Casanova’s definitions, can never become world literature, only Maori literature can do that. So in Menand’s world view—insufferable as it is—Eleanor Catton’s *The Luminaries*, and its history of reception, is unimaginable.

It’s worth remarking, then, the degree to which perceptions and structures have changed since Menand’s article, nearly a decade ago. In fact, the world has changed. The continually evolving shifts in globalising literary studies have largely subsumed the metaphors of governance and the economics of identity politics and literary prestige into a fast-shifting set of spatialised, post-national configurations. These shifts are currently in the process of being operationalised into distributed critical readings and literary histories, a process that *Scenes of Reading* belongs and contributes to. The terms that are enabling here might be characterised under the headings of de- or re-territorialisation, where the isomorphism of literature and the geo-political is questioned, deconstructed, put under erasure, or re-imagined, and the previously bounded territories of national and continental literatures are re-projected as planetary, regional, trans-national, or trans-historical overlays (Radway 16). ‘Non-national blocs of culture’ as Emily Apter refers to them (42).<sup>1</sup> In this un-nationalising turn, new vocabularies and keywords are pressed into service: ‘remapping,’ ‘worlding,’ ‘trans-Atlantic,’ ‘trans-Pacific,’ ‘transnational,’ ‘oceanic,’ time zones and hemispheres [latitudinal and longitudinal], ‘deep time,’ ‘ecoglobal,’ the Anthropocene, cross-boundary flows, etc (Apter 42). So the various ‘exceptionalisms’ and identitarian discourses that once provided the centripetal gravity for national literary fields, like the Australian one, have had their power as ‘disciplinary unconscious[es] and field imaginaries’ eroded (Pease, in Radway 2). Rather than the historiography and cartography of nations and empires, now the terrain, the world, the planet, the globe, the Anthropocene provide the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of our critical apparatus. And this includes revisionary, historical readings of once-nationally bounded bodies of literature. The reality, though, is that none of these enabling critical terms is neutral or without political provenance, the world is always already structured and despite appearances none of these shifts has been innocent and/or free—a point I come back to.

These are the aspects of world literary study that the editors Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney wish to address in their introduction, especially since they're well aware of the ways in which Australian literature is practically unimaginable in the (North American academic) world. Their 'scenes of reading' are disciplinary or professional, about literary studies and what kind of narrative about 'Australian literature' can be fashioned at this moment: 'the problem confronted by the *Scenes of Reading* project, then, is the need within Australian literary studies [as they see it] to negotiate and constructively to redefine the relation between its past and its future' (xv). Previous narratives of Australian literature are limiting or no longer adequate. They're too bound to stories of the nation or at least to the stories of the nation available to literary history. To paraphrase Moretti's aphorism about world literature, now national literature is not an object, it's a *problem* (149). The essays Dixon and Rooney present here 'begin the important work of examining the various pressures currently driving change in the discipline of Australian literary studies, critically evaluating their consequences, and demonstrating by example how new transnational and comparative modes of literary history and literary criticism might be incorporated, adapted and developed'—and without 'surrendering the force and specificity of local epistemologies that make Australian literature interesting and challenging to readers at home as well as those steeped in other national traditions within the world republic of letters' (xvi).

The editors' sense of current drivers of post-national readings is one half of the story. And while they are presenting 'new [versions of] transnational and comparative' critical praxis, it is also true that these perspectives don't spring entirely new-formed from their disciplinary matrix. They owe much to a broad and eclectic range of scholarly and critical work over the past decade or so, for example: Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's reading of critical, discrepant and rooted cosmopolitanism, or cosmopolitanism from below, in 'racialized communities of [Indigenous and Asian] performance' (4–5); Gerhard Fisher's German-situated transnational work on Australian and New Zealand fiction and drama; Russell West-Pavlov's flexibly termed work ('postcolonial,' 'transcultural' and 'diasporic') in the translation zone, or interestingly in the case of Heinrich Böll's 1973 translation of Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*, the *mistranslation* zone (17); work in Australian-based transnational critical reading such as Ien Ang's 'beyond diaspora,' Brian Castro's 'writing Asia and Auto/Biography,' R.K. Dhawan's 'writers of the India diaspora,' and Mabel Lee's 'literary intercrossings' in her Sydney World Literature series; the *intra*-national politics of multiculturalism explored by Wenche Ommundsen and Tseen Khoo; Simon During's analysis of Christina Stead's place in the global canon and its relations to the national project of Aus Lit in his *Exit Capitalism: Literary culture, theory, and post-secular modernity* (2009); as well as various instances of spatial reading, fictocriticism, locational and ecopoetics, and international localism. The conceptual geography of 'world' here is perhaps even more problematic than Dixon and Rooney allow, starting as they do from Damrosch's geometry. Just one question this raises is the usefulness of 'world' models, however Transformer-toy like, vs. transnational models: the world and the planet (even diaspora) tend towards unitary and perspectival ways of seeing/reading—the everywhere (from here or there)—while 'transnational' models seem to allow more polysituatedness and transit—the here and the elsewhere together, across time.

In relation to these variously tectonic shifts in thinking about any national literature and its effective life both within and beyond the nation, it is the understanding of world literature as a *space of reading* that Dixon, Rooney and their contributors wish to deploy. This is the abstract

space of individual and communal experience of literature rather than the politics of literary valuing and institutionalisation narrativised by either the nationalist or cosmopolitan professional. Such a concept of the space of reading owes much to the work of David Damrosch, although Dixon and Rooney acknowledge the way critics like Emily Apter, Wai Chee Dimock, Paul Giles and Benedict Anderson have all contributed to its development. Damrosch's original formulation was that a work has 'an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture' (4). Damrosch is dealing with the eurochronology problem and with the Western centre-periphery model of all cultural, including literary, history. In this sense, the word 'system' is the crucial one here because Damrosch's formula has as much to do with the circulatory and institutional aspect of literary worlding as it does with scenes of reading. And actually, its underpinning assumption about literary works having an 'original' culture only re-introduces the problems he is attempting to escape—in what sense do texts like Christina Stead's *The Salzburg Tales* or Armand Schwerner's *The Tablets* have home cultures? Damrosch is talking about originary *scenes of writing* (and of language), not of reading—that is what he means by a text's 'home.' In other words Damrosch tends to repress the possibility, as expressed by Auerbach, of a literary text's home being in language (its philological *heimat*) rather than in territory, nation or historico-cultural sites (Apter 198). Nevertheless taken together with (for instance) Paul Giles and Wai Chee Dimock's supplementary representation of any nominally national literature as not so much a discrete entity as 'a criss-crossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures' that all bind literatures to the world system, the emphasis shifts to the affective rather than the effective life of literature and to the context of individual readers and communities of reading, from world to poly-worlds (Dimock, 'Recycling,' in Dixon and Rooney xii). The worldliness of reading, in its individual and human specificity, can either escape or provincialise the politics of first-world literature. Here Damrosch's actual readings have an exemplary role. *Gilgamesh*, traces of pre-Conquest Mesoamerica in the Catholic scholarly archive, anonymous lyrics from Egyptian papyri, P.G. Wodehouse's transatlantic popularity, Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars* are all outlandish texts in relation to the Anglo-American canons.

In this context, Nettie Palmer as reader has an iconic value for Dixon and Rooney. Palmer wrote for *The Times* in 1928 about reading *Remembrance of Things Past* on her verandah in Caloundra, where she was surprised by a hatter. It is an exemplary scene of reading, as the editors argue, one of the infinite number of individual literary encounters where a literary work is framed and determined in 'diverse yet also quite specific sets of institutional, cultural, personal and geopolitical' ways (ix). Palmer's

provincialism is real and heart-felt, but also strategic in the sense that she locates it deliberately in relation to her knowledge of world literature. She locates Furphy's distinctiveness [concentrated in the Australian vernacular and meanings of the word 'hatter'], not in isolation, but in relation to Proust's Frenchness . . . She locates herself as a cosmopolitan reader' of national, outlandish and Modernist literatures, but at the same time 'strategically and deliberately . . . provincial. (xxv)

This doubleness of metropole and province, reader and Literature, north and south, is captured in the self-conscious optics of critical discourse about world literature. How literature is worlded depends, at least in theory, on where you're sitting and from what angle you're looking. It's

perspectival. In Damrosch's succinct formula from the conclusion to *What is World Literature?* it is 'an elliptical refraction of national literatures' (as well as 'writing that gains in translation,' and 'a mode of reading') (281). This is, however, just the surface of Damrosch's model and its deep structure remains West-imperial, manifesting on the surface as friendly and diplomatic geometries of world, nation and home. The focal points of any ellipsis tend to have a limited range of mobility. Similarly, the Paris-centrism of Casanova's model of a sovereign or autonomous literary world is only a surface feature; its deep structure is its republic-ness, an imaginary polity with a powerful Gaullist ideology. For Casanova, a *federation* of world letters, for example, is foreign and unimaginable. Moretti's world system is structured as a database ontology. All models of the world literary system then, are structured according to complex political and cultural geometries and desires, as much as by national cultural genetics. There is no born-global model of world literature.

The specific readings of the collection, following from a Sydney University conference in May 2012, exemplify the individual, communal, historicist and contextual aspects of worlded literary study, rather than the schemata or *grands récits* of world literature and globalisation theory. This is a usefully provincialising set of responses from within Australian literary studies. In their introduction the editors explain the important role of Paul Sharrad and Bill Ashcroft's essays at the opening of the volume. These two critics' scenes of reading are sceptical and searching about the world literature paradigms, mindful as they are of other established fields and industries like 'comparative literature, Commonwealth and postcolonial literatures, Australian literature and Indigenous writing, and their many methodological and political entanglements' (xxvi). Both Sharrad and Ashcroft, who maintain their delight in individual literary works and writer biographies, speak out of career-long experience in postcolonial literatures that belonged to and defined a wider 'world' because they weren't canonically and narrowly English. For these critics, 'postcolonial' 'anticipates world literature in proposing "a way of reading and mode of circulation" that remains more politically attuned to the dangers of Eurocentrism and universalism' and more within the translation zone (xxvii). A better, non-first-world world literature, in that sense. But realising that the terrain is shifting, Ashcroft usefully proposes the heuristic 'transnation' for reading the vertical strata of cultural phenomena, starting from but flowing beyond the nation and resistant to the various horizontal, hierarchical authorities of the state (xxvii). This model resembles Dimock's 'planetary' model. Sharrad has a sharp eye for the relegation in literary analysis of '*ethnos*' and Indigeneity in relation to humanist universalism (in Emily Apter and Moretti for example) and also for the ideological agenda (in the US) so persuasively anatomised by Christopher Newfield, that reaches into the curricular level of education, with Tea Party-inflamed calls for the 'removal of postcolonial studies' (21). To a limited degree, these perspectives of Ashcroft and Sharrad align with Graham Huggan's call for an 'Australian-centred . . . comparative postcolonialism in which Australian literary/cultural trends and movements are understood within the larger context of transnational and global economic flows,' although they are less explicit about what Huggan also calls the 'new racisms' (xiv, x).

Patrick Buckridge and Eleanor Morecroft's chapter continues the provincialising engagement with its consideration of 'the ways in which the idea of world literature was adopted, analysed, manipulated and elaborated in Australia in the period between the two world wars' (48). They provide a partial empirical context for the iconic scene of reading of Palmer on the verandah at Caloundra, derived from their mining of the National Library of Australia's *Trove* database for

popular press references, by Australians, to German, French and Russian literatures. Threaded through this report is the local influence of Damrosch precursors like Richard Green Moulton (*World Literature and Its Place in General Culture*, 1911). Buckridge and Morecroft's tentative conclusions, acknowledging the parameters of their data, are nevertheless interesting: 'Australian readers in the interwar period tended to imagine world literature as an ideal totality, a democracy of letters. But this totality, placed as it is in a specifically Australian perspective, turns out to comprise a sharply differentiated array of separate national literatures, some of which exist in a sort of moral relation to Australia's own literature—for example, cautionary, inspirational, fraternal (56–57) but never 'hemispherical.' The tension between this and critical paradigms like Moulton's, with its emphasis on unity, English-speaking peoples and the idea of civilisation, persists into the present. Svend Erik Larsen's contribution to this section of *Scenes of Reading*, about rewriting literary histories in the age of globalisation, is an energetic and absorbing account of a project to write a new literary history for use in Danish secondary schools. This essay, together with the resultant *litteraturDK*, provides an attractive model for how to present local and 'trans-local' literary history in a specific educational setting and how to work, modally and thematically, with the constraints of the secondary structures and levels. Larsen's story of conceptualising and writing *litteraturDK* is informed by theory, methodological considerations and research discoveries; it's not about the packaging of static, pre-existing knowledge for pedagogical applications. It's also impressive at the level of pedagogical design. Not the least engaging aspect of his chapter is the way in which Larsen's research for *litteraturDK* led to his discovery of the trans-hemispherical figure of the Danish-Van Diemonian writer Jørgen Jürgensen. Till recently, Jürgensen remained a chimerical presence in Australian colonial writing, buried in the 1835 *Hobart Town Almanack and Van Diemen's Land Annual* and in Frank Clune's long out-of-print biography (*The Viking of Van Diemen's Land*, 1954). Recently, though, he appears as an extra—as a corpse actually—in Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish*. How these archival, biographical and fictional versions of Jürgensen compare with his ongoing life as an original Danish author, edited in 1973 and 2006, is an inviting project for a transnational literary criticism.

Nicholas Birns's essay on 'Australia, the Russian Pacific, and the Transnational Imaginary' is one of the most impressive contributions to *Scenes of Reading*. It has its inception in one of those moments of defamiliarisation it seems only a visitor or migrant has the capacity for. Birns writes:

I first conceived of this essay in July 2008, when a visiting research fellow at the University of Wollongong. There, I walked around a large nineteenth-century fort in the harbour. It turned out that it had been built out of fear of invasion by Tzarist Russia, a material sign of pre-Soviet Russophobia largely transferred from the imperial centre, with its origins in the Crimea in mid-century. (74)

Having already offered a view of Australian literature from the East coast of the US in his *Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900* (2007; edited with Rebecca McNeer), Birns is here prompted by the colonial archaeology of the Smith's Hill Fort to read a diffracted analogy of national cultures where both 'Russian and Australian literary studies have undergone transnational turns because both were embedded within definitions of landedness that seemed more epistemologically secure than, in fact, they were' (76). This leads to a brilliant vignette about Letty Fox's primal scene of reading, in Christina Stead's novel, and its formative, maternal, Chekhovian language. Threading his way through Prichard, Harrower, White, Hewett, Devanny

and others, Birns alights at 1985 and the conjunction that year of a glowing review of Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* in the *New York Times Book Review*, the geostrategic move by Soviet Russia in signing a fishing treaty with Kiribati, and a visit to Australia by Secretary of State George P. Shultz—a 'metonymic propinquity' where Australia began to matter when expansionist Soviet interest in the Pacific region caused Cold War perturbations. Birns's reading of this moment is aligned with another well-judged anecdote about his attendance at the 'Common Wealth of Letters' conference at Yale in 1988. Witnessing the dying fall of a pro-Soviet tradition in Australia's cultural settlement, virtually synchronous with the *Mauerfall*, and with its provenance in the radical nationalist moment of the 1890s, Birns intuits an '*entr'acte* for the transnational conditions under which Australian studies is practised today,' that is, post-Cold War, post-Mabo (84).

David Carter's report on the transnational entanglements of the lives and writings of three popular writers of the turn of the twentieth century, Fergus Hume, Guy Boothby and Carlton Dawe is important historical work, once again refining our understanding of genre development and its relation to writing careers and publishing history. Carter fillets out the careers of these three writers from near contemporaries Ada Cambridge, Rolf Boldrewood and Rosa Praed, to describe a 'changed literary space, marked by the emergence of the modern genre system on both sides of the Atlantic and thus in Australia, too' (87). Brigid Rooney, Bernadette Brennan, Brigitta Olubas, and Georgina Loveridge offer more textually focused transnationally aware readings of Christina Stead, Eleanor Dark, Patrick White, and Shirley Hazzard but attentive nevertheless to publishing histories, lines of influence and mutating chronotopes (like ferry wreck narratives). Lynda Ng's chapter is a return to the warning, expressed by Djelal Kadir, that the 'world literature project can be co-opted into the wider aims of cultural and political hegemony' (157). Usefully, Ng considers recent Australian fiction and non-fiction that characterises the 'outward-facing perspective of the contemporary Australian nation' and performs its own distinctive kinds of 'worlding' (166). Aaron Nyerges creates some intriguing, if unexpected, lines of connection between Jack Spicer and Michael Dransfield in an intense reading of a couple of 'drug' poems.

Gillian Whitlock's 'Outside Country: Indigenous Literature in Transit' is the most methodologically adventurous contribution to the volume and the only one to focus primarily on Indigenous writing. Starting from the key-word 'country' in Aboriginal English, used all over Aboriginal Australia to name the place where a person belongs in terms of 'kinship that imposes mutual responsibilities of caring and keeping upon land and people' (179), Whitlock points to the 'management' of Indigenous cultural knowledge in bureaucratic forms like the Australia Council's 2007 guidelines for 'Producing Indigenous Australian Writing' (179). For 'country' is also constitutional and legal, the matrix out of which Aboriginal sovereignty is conceived and thus in profound tension with 'Australian' settlement's anxious legitimacy in (dispossessed) property. Reading the homology of these pressures in the anthologising of Australian Indigenous writing within and without recent national anthologies, Whitlock discerns that the 'national literature is an aggregation, a fragile coalition' (180). Specifically, her tracking of the circulation of Indigenous literature offshore, using quantitative methods and the 'Black Words' subset of the *AustLit* database as data, produces a kind of transcountry, by analogy with Ashcroft's transnation. Add to this the 'affiliation' of life, witness and stolen generation Indigenous narratives to the 'transnational field of trauma literature,' to First Nations literary circuits and their absorption into the self-reflexive moves of European *ego-histoire* critics, and there emerge scenes of reading

where ‘the ethical obligations to country and Indigeneity are far from being managed by the protocols of the Australia Council’—Indigenous writing in foreign country (186).

But going back to the figure of Nettie Palmer on the verandah at Caloundra, reading Proust in either French or Scott Moncrieff’s translation—she can’t remember (20). The scene is perhaps more complexly filiated than might appear. Dixon and Rooney acknowledge how Palmer’s article is very deliberately strategic, in other words, staged, for *The Times* readership of 31 July, 1928. Palmer’s anecdote illustrates

how the word ‘hatter,’ as used by Tom Collins in *Such is Life*, can evoke an entire world for Australian readers in the way that local idioms in Proust are so evocative to Parisians. . . . She reads both Furphy and Proust from a local perspective, but also in dialogue, as a lover of what she calls ‘overseas literature.’ (xxv)

The verandah and the world. In *Fourteen Years*, by contrast, there is no scene of reading Proust interrupted by the hatter (although the volume is *extracts* from a journal). The entries for the year 1928 are devoted to wondering what the fate of Richard Mahony will be—she has been sent a copy of *The Way Home* by HHR (March, 1928)—discussion with her uncle the High Court judge of Prichard’s fiction, a consideration of Randolph Bedford’s oeuvre and the idea of a national theatre, along with observations of local nature. Back in November 1926 she had written about reading Proust, but in a brief mention only, conveying her facility with French, and in amongst comments about Edwin and Willa Muir’s series of German novels in translation, and quickly counterpoised by readings of Shaw Neilson and Mary Gilmore. *Fourteen Years* is about presenting a personal narrative of the fortunes of a national literature, from a knowledgeably cosmopolitan perspective, and equally strategic and deliberate as the *Times* article. Indeed, one can’t help feeling, and this is strangely supported by the fact that Nettie Higgins and Ethel Richardson both started out at PLC Melbourne and remained literary colleagues throughout their lives, that Nettie Palmer’s *Fourteen Years* (shuttling back and forth between Caloundra, Melbourne, Green Island, Kalorama, Paris, London and Barcelona) should be subtitled *The Fortunes of Australian Literature*. Although a fascinating aspect of this nexus of the idiosyncratic nationalist (Furphy), European modernism (Proust) and the metonym of *Richard Mahony*, standing in for a newly transnational Australian-literature-in-progress is that, in 1928, Palmer cannot know that the latter is heading for madness and tragedy.

Proust, then, shifts in and out of Palmer’s scenes of reading according to the facets of the world she is addressing. And in this sense the world structures Palmer’s (and our) scenes of reading, as much as do the nation and the region; her strategies are in response to an already internalised sense of Australia’s (cultural) place in the world determined by internal history, but also importantly by Palmer’s experience of international writing networks, expatriate cultures, the economics of national publishing, translation regimes, etc. And it’s worth recalling that the morphology of these strategies of reading, just like HHR’s attraction to Ibsen and Jacobsen’s *Niels Lyhne*, has its origins in elite girls’ school proto-comp.lit and europhiliac humanist studies—Nettie Palmer isn’t fluent in Chinese. Like Palmer, the contributors to Dixon and Rooney’s volume look out to the world system of literary disciplinarity and wonder about the value of their readings in the face of the radial flows of globalisation from the intellectual capitals. As they look around and inward to literary works in their or other national traditions they recognise how their genetic makeup is frequently and constitutively transnational—think of



innovative poetry and poetics, or the border-crossing novel (Stead, Hazzard, Moorhouse, London, de Kretser), or popular crime writing. How to strategise, then, the relationship of critic and reader to the world and the text, when the cultural power blocs and flows are both so distant and so near?

Dixon and Rooney usefully point out the way in which for Nettie Palmer it is locality and language more than anything, and certainly more than nation, that actually structures the core of literary experience—Caloundra time and weather rather than Sydney time and weather; Tom Petrie's *Reminiscences* and Tom Welsby's *Schnappering* read alongside Chekhov, Cervantes, Furphy and Proust (May 3–December 3, 1926; 17–21). And they rightly emphasise the 'transnational scope' of Palmer's diary and literary journalism generally (xxv). But as Nettie's small story in *Fourteen Years* about Vance Palmer's task of abridging Furphy's *Such is Life* for an English publisher exemplifies, a text may be read from a certain perspective, because read in a specific place, but it is produced (or not) according to different sets of cultural imperatives, scenes of writing, and ones that are equally worldly and specific (June 6, 1936; 217). In other words, Dixon and Rooney's motivating concern with the problem confronted in *Scenes of Reading*—how to negotiate and construct a narrative about Australian literature's past and future from within the discipline of literary studies—is about more than just perspectival readings of Australian texts and publishing history. There is another half to the story. As my initial outline of some of the production aspects of world literature was meant to suggest, the current structures of 'world' literature and international literary studies have built into them an undifferentiated othering of Australia (and not only Australia) that produces problematic effects on negotiations for world recognition, or more properly as I argue, for recognisable worlding. Here I look briefly at two examples of world structures, the UN and the MLA, by way of illustration of the operations of the literary system, but there are other world systems that could equally well be examined in terms of local, national and regional negotiations for literary survival and profile: the economics of global publishing, copyright regimes, the prize and festival industries, the translation industry, curricular presence. The relation of these to disciplinarity is more mediated and in some ways more complex.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this is to underline the importance to any 'world-literary intercourse' of exploring exactly what constitutes 'a world'—at the theoretical level—and at the realistic level, how 'the world' is already constituted (Cheah 304).

*Scenes of Reading* as well as Robert Dixon's current ARC-funded project about Australian Literature and the Republic of Letters, are both focused around the problem (challenge?) of the post-nationalist narrative of Australian literature. These constellations of criticism and research are structured as addresses to the disciplinary and institutional strata of world literature and international literary studies. Rather than relying on a narrative of nation (however unsettled) as the groundwork of literary history and production, at the core of their methods they draw on the 'homogenizing powers' of globalising theory (subset world literature) for its enabling of translation between 'heterogeneous, politically unequal, and conflicting knowledges' of bodies and works of literature (Morris, in Dixon and Rooney xxiii). They rightly recognise the simultaneously idealist and uncontrollable aspects of these research and writing projects, engaged as they are with hemisphere-wide discourses that barely recognise their existence. These are not projects in international relations, per se, but they share with the liberal internationalist strand within the Australian polity, since World War II, a structural dynamic of national negotiation with *pre-existing* architectures of world governance and within which Australia has an ambivalent role. This ambivalence is characterised by an awareness of Australia's relatively

minor role in world affairs, together with its historical and contemporary alliances with major powers, and the historical contingencies of having a presence on the large stage of definition and construction of world governance, pre-eminently the UN—H.V. Evatt, the post-war Labor Leader had helped to draft the UN Charter and was President of the General Assembly from 1948–49; Australia has held a seat on the UN Security Council on four occasions before 2009–12.<sup>3</sup> This history reflects Australia's strong desire for a role in international forums like the UN but also in other multilateral organisations like APEC and the G-20 (Fullilove 2).<sup>4</sup> At least in these public terms Australia sees itself, as a former Minister for Foreign Affairs said, as a 'creative middle power' (Gareth Evans, in Cave 3). Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, as Foreign Minister, expressed the personally invested view that the mission of Australian diplomacy was to 'win a future for Australia in the world' (Rudd 1). It's not fanciful then to notice that the shaping of these (Sydney-based) critical and research projects is roughly synchronous with the larger diplomatic effort of Australia's bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council which was launched in 2008 and which was successful at the UN vote in late October 2012. *Scenes of Reading* asks 'how and in what ways Australian literature is connected to the world literary system,' a question motivated by a similar psycho-dynamics of positionality within the world cultural field (x). The homology between civic and cultural desires that I am suggesting here may only be loose but it points, nevertheless, to the powerful negotiative dynamics of national and global, and is crucially dependent on the structures of world governance to allow the opening up and creation of the space of a creative middle power.<sup>5</sup> These structures determine the terms and fate of the negotiations. As with the transnational turn in literary studies, world governance has undergone an analogous pivotal change: the old paradigm 'held international politics to be an unrelenting struggle for power among states, in the new world order a multitude of state and non-state actors . . . compete for ascendancy of their preferred normative architectures' (Thakur 1). Given its 'population base, economic size and geographical location' Australia is always 'reliant on a rules-based order to ensure its security and underpin its prosperity' and the UN system is the 'biggest incubator bar none of global norms, rules and regulations,' in other words of a global or planetary system of governance (Thakur 1). By analogy, it is only a rules-based discourse of world literature that can underwrite and empower negotiations about the worldliness of Australian literature, which otherwise would simply be subject to the power struggles of individual texts and authors for world recognition.

A crucial aspect of this story, though, is the fact that Australia's categorisation as belonging to the WEOG (Western European and Others Grouping) structure of the UN strangely reflects its conflicted settlement history, rather than its (aspirational) cultural or geographical reality.<sup>6</sup> In negotiating a role for itself within the UN, Australia is not what it is, or what it might want to be. Far from being an independent middle power within the global geopolitics of the UN's representative structures, Australia is an undifferentiated European 'Other,' in reality in the South-East Asian region, but grouped with Scandinavia and Canada in an entirely non-geopolitical category. Nettie Palmer would no doubt have recognised this powerful elision of the Australian local in a world governance structure. (Gillian Whitlock's reading of Australian Indigenous writing beyond this assumption of cultural hegemony and abstract national affiliation, underscores her reading of the divergent trajectories of the national and the Indigenous.) Synchronously then, Dixon and Rooney are negotiating the structures of the world republic of letters and its interdisciplinary organs, which group Australia—as the theoretical and anthologising arms of world literature clearly demonstrate—as undifferentiated European others within the South Pacific. The degree to which the world republic of letters is also a rules-based

network will be tested by the extent to which ‘scenes of reading,’ like the ones in *Scenes of Reading*, enable negotiations designed to alter the characterisation of Australia and Australian literature as either WEOG or Terra Australis Incognita.

Another way in which the world is already disciplinarily structured is exemplified by the Modern Language Association of North America, a representative structure with global reach (not to say unacknowledged imperialist mentality), in which Australian literary studies might negotiate the narrative of its global status. The MLA is the largest association of literary and language scholars in the world (30,000 members in 100 countries). Centred on North America, if not East-coast United States, the MLA is a professional association governed by an executive council, a delegate assembly and numerous committees and allied organisations. It publishes journals and scholarly works, holds annual conventions and is a powerful, multi-faceted hub for the profession of literary studies. The MLA’s divisions

encompass the primary scholarly and professional concerns of the association, with each division representing a major area of membership interest. . . . Discussion groups accommodate the scholarly and professional interests of constituencies within the association concerned with discrete literatures or with literary and linguistic concerns that are not encompassed by one of the divisions.

In 2014 the MLA instigated an inquiry into its own structures through the Working Group for the Revision of the MLA Divisions and Discussion Groups. This is the ‘first revision of the structure of the MLA’s divisions and discussion groups since 1974 (the previous revision occurred in the 1920s)’ (MLA policies).

The spur to this exercise in self-analysis was an awareness that:

The present structure is dominated by categories of nations and periods, mostly Eurocentric. To this map we have added new geographies and languages to reflect changes in curricula and scholarly commitments among our members. And we have tried to eliminate redundancies in group designations, creating a neater map, with no illusions of complete coverage or consistency across fields. The new map aims to provide various sites of intellectual engagement for each MLA member, whatever his or her area of specialization. (MLA policies)

This new map of the professional world, which the MLA states is a reflection of members’ interests only, is divided into 12 major divisions—American Literature, Comparative Studies, French Literature, Genre Studies, German Literature, Hispanic Literatures, Interdisciplinary Approaches, Italian Literature, Language Studies, Other Languages and Literatures, Teaching—all of which include sub-divisions. The study of a national literature, like Australian, falls under one of the sub-divisions of the English Literature division, ‘English Literature Other Than British and American’ (MLA divisions). It might appear that it would be appropriate to include a peripheral, if discrete national literature under the major division Other Languages & Literatures, but this is a group which includes only African Literatures, Arabic Literature and Culture, East Asian Languages and Literatures to 1900, East Asian Languages and Literatures after 1900, and Slavic and East European Literatures. Parts of the national literature might also fall under the sub-division of Postcolonial Studies in Literature and Culture, within the division

Interdisciplinary Approaches. The 50 discussion groups, representing perhaps a less survey-hegemonic version of the discipline than the divisions, are a mixture of national, thematic, generic and scholarly groupings where it is harder to see Australian literary studies as relevant—Present-day English Language is about the closest, but not South Asian Languages and Literatures or West Asian Languages and Literatures. So this institutional constitution of literary knowledge, one of the planes where Dixon and Rooney presumably wish to open up spaces of reading for Australian literature in negotiation with the world, is another first-world, northern hemisphere structure where Australia is grouped as an ‘other’—undifferentiated, and minor.

Of course this is not the only professional organisation relevant to Australian literary disciplinarity—ASAL, EASA, InASA, and journals like *ALS*, *Antipodes*, and *JASAL*, just to mention some of the main professional forums—are all closest to it as a national (if no longer nationalist) project, and all represent and shape work within the discipline that negotiates with world structures. And numerous Australian critics have worked and do work with the MLA, and research and critical work on Australian writers, or comparativist inclusion of Australian writing, does have a presence in convention, publishing and discussion group activities of the association. While the MLA and its main publication, *PMLA*, is a powerful structure of disciplinarity in literary studies that reflects and reinforces the paradigm of world literature Dixon and Rooney wish to address, the publication in 2015 of *Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature* in its Options for Teaching series, the first such high profile recognition of these literatures by the association, suggests that MLA perspectives on Australian literature don’t simply reflect its organisational structure. While the MLA is not linked formally to any of the publishing, translation and editing projects in world literature, the fact remains that the only anthologies of world literature are North American ones (D’haen 153). Relatedly, the intervention of the Macquarie/PEN/Norton anthology, *The Literature of Australia*, in the field of international literary and academic publishing is one sign of a ‘creative middle power’ but it has to be an intervention driven by W.W Norton & Company (New York/London).

These are just two slants on the complex strata of disciplinary history and development within literary studies in and out of Australia, and the case would need to be further developed and nuanced, but the basic point here is that all the critiques of centre-periphery models, all the discourse about extra-territoriality, deep time, translation zones etc, occurs within real-world disciplinary, publishing and institutional architectures that already shape the world in political and professional ways. That, indeed, define the world that actually excludes most of the real global south (as well as peripheral Europe). The scenes of reading so persuasively and knowledgeably represented in *Scenes of Reading*, in their various exemplifications of the ‘worldliness of the literary encounter,’ have to address the powerful centres of disciplinary institutionalisation, culture and power, like the North American ones, to structure their understandings and intentions. Meanwhile those centres are busily consuming, anthologising and distributing the world’s literature and, as theoretical accompaniment, extending the time and territory of a de-nationalised American literature into ‘far-flung temporal and spatial coordinates,’ overrunning the old Cold War areas with the now planetary scope of American literary studies, incorporating the duration of the human species as chronology, and translating the succession of the Old to the New World into a ‘cosmic’ world order.<sup>7</sup> The anxious, cultural-nationalist paradigm of Australian literary studies may have outlived its usefulness but today’s world literary space with which literary critics and historians are engaging is hardly a quiet verandah.

Spaces of reading then have to be examples of critical practice, mindful of the individual and communal localities of literary encounters, and expert at resisting and negotiating the coercions and categories of metropolitan disciplinarity. What's more, as Dixon and Rooney intuit, they need to be shaped by some kind of narrative, even if a contingent and inchoate one. How to narrate the story of the literary world from the Australian region of the globe, from the south of the Eastern hemisphere? How to populate the empty terra australis incognita of world literature's global south and escape or resist the categorisations of the northern hegemon? To put it in the positive: what contributions have Australian writers (for example) made to the morphology of the novel? What would an anthology of world literature edited and published from Australia look like? Probably the most realistic and viable options here will continue to be contrapuntal and bifocal, as Lars Jensen's example about Denmark exemplifies. Narratives of Australian literature's comparative worldliness will continue to be, in changing and complex ways, counter-narratives to its national and Indigenous streams. And vice versa. There is no resolution to the divided experience of the world here and the world elsewhere, as colonial literature knew from the beginning: Judith Wright returns to her family's property in New England, while Christina Stead sets off for England and Europe; Frank Moorhouse and Joan London imagine Australians in search of the story of their lives as wanderers in the Middle East; in the translation zone Alexis Wright's fiction is re-Indigenised by readers in Inner Mongolia; Michele de Kretser and Nam Le redefine contemporary Australian lifeworlds as violations of sovereign borders. Those few random pairings and the differing thematics of Australian worldliness they perhaps suggest are indicators of the extensive rereadings of Australian literature, literary institutions, publishing and literary history that the work of *Scenes of Reading* furthers.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> She adds: 'imagined communities,' 'the Americas,' 'the terraqueous globe,' 'Bandoon,' 'parastates,' 'translingualism,' 'diaspora,' 'majimboism,' 'silicon cities,' 'circum-Atlantic,' 'îles-refuges,' and so on' (42).

<sup>2</sup> My model here is Amitava Kumar's reading of world literature as 'world bank literature.'

<sup>3</sup> Evatt was also a family friend of Nettie Palmer's, and her interest in the highest legal jurisdiction, owing no doubt to her admiring relations with her uncle Henry Bournes Higgins, is evident throughout *Fourteen Years*.

<sup>4</sup> The psychoanalytics of international relations, expressed as an equation of ego and citizenship, is further evident in Foreign Minister Senator Bob Carr's comment about the UN Security Council bid, which he became involved with towards the beginning of 2012, that is was 'about Australia's ego, we've got a lot to be proud of . . . I think Australia is an exemplary global citizen. . . . Australia has got an ego, Australia has got national pride, we're entitled put our hand up having not served on the body since the mid-1980s' (Drummond 1).

<sup>5</sup> Australia had held a 'seat at the first Security Council of 1946–1947, then ten years later in 1956–1957, 16 years later in 1973–1974, and then 11 years later in 85–6' (Oliver 1).

<sup>6</sup> The WEOG 'comprises members of the European Union, non-EU Western European countries, Scandinavia, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Canada, Australia and NZ are the "others"' (Oliver 2).

<sup>7</sup> Jared Hickman's 'Cosmic American Studies' is to some extent tongue-in-cheek but the point is that its critique of American exceptionalism (from the Cold War American studies era) identifies the religious idealism of American self-historicisation as a trajectory from new world (1492) to global world to planet, to cosmos.

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