



**To cite this article:**

Jacomard, H el ene. "Introduction." *The AALITRA Review: A Journal of Literary Translation* 20, (December 2024): 7-8.

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Australian Association for Literary Translation

## Introduction

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This 2024 issue of *The AALITRA Review* is thematic, as is the *Review*'s practice every second year.

This year's theme is *Exploring Indigenous Australian literature in other languages*. It attracted a translator's interview, articles and Translations & Commentaries from Japanese, French, Chinese and Italian translators of works in English by Australia's and New-Zealand's Indigenous authors of novels, poems and songs.

*Our heart-felt thanks go to our Indigenous consultant, who kindly reviewed all the thematic contributions. Authors were asked to consider their comments in line with the Indigenous code of ethics, but any final decisions on specific wording was the choice of individual contributors.*

The authors translated here in other languages than English belong to the pantheon of Australia's and New Zealand's modern classics: Kim Scott, Tony Birch, Keri Hulme (first Māori writer to win the Booker Prize), Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Ali Cobby Eckermann, Evelyn Araluen, Bruce Pascoe, without forgetting *Blackfella Whitefella*'s song writer George Rrurrambu Burarrwanga. Some of the translations have been commissioned by a publisher (for instance Nadine Gassie's translation into French of Tony Birch' *The White Girl*), while others are considering their publication options.

This literature presents many challenges, the first being its reception in cultures with little knowledge of Australian and New Zealand First Nation people. At one level, how do you reproduce the *sound* of Indigenous words or names in other languages: Masaya Shimokusu interviewed by Sonia Broad on translating Kim Scott for Japanese readers, learned the Noongar language so as to accurately transliterate the name of the protagonist and other Noongar words that 'popped up' in *That Deadman Dance*.

The gap between source and target cultures is addressed by Tiziana Borgese-Flocca and Anna Gadd in their exegesis of Borgese-Flocca's translation of Bruce Pascoe's *Young Dark Emu*, a 'work of counter-memory', for an Italian audience of young readers 'far removed from the source context, geographically and experientially'. The translator's task raises ethical issues which are discussed in depth by Borgese-Flocca and Gadd. Although not mentioned by our translators and commentators, they abide by the AIATSIS code of ethics of 'Engaging with Indigenous research and literature, both academic and community', as well as contributing to 'developing community educational resources' that contribute to Indigenous knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Reception of those texts *by the translators* is also discussed since the encounter with such foreign and yet familiar texts<sup>2</sup> was often a decisive moment in the intellectual and emotional journey of the literary translators, a conscious gesture of jolting the hegemon and working towards decolonising. Francesca Benocci writes: "The linguistic structure and cultural context of te reo Māori offered a unique challenge and insight into Keri Hulme's *The Bone*

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies ([AIATSIS](#)), p. 18 and 20.

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous authors also comment on their encounters with their own country's literature. See for instance Alice Te Punga Somerville, 'The Indigenous backstage pass', *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, Volume 14, Number 2, 2021, 65-79.

*People*, a novel that deeply impacted me and inspired my move to Aotearoa New Zealand.” And if Benocci is the only one to mention her position as a ‘translation activist’, most of the translators here point to a sense of commitment towards their source texts.

This is why they are keen to tackle the unique challenges of a lexical, semantic, ethical and cultural nature posed by Indigenous literature. Figurative speech for instance is notoriously difficult to translate, bordering on issues of untranslatability, even more so when it comes to poetry. The translation process is in this case highly interpretative, as demonstrated by Margherita Zanoletti translating into Italian First Nations’ poets Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Ali Cobby Eckermann, and Evelyn Araluen. Zanoletti is attune to assonance and allusions in the source texts that might need explicitation in the target language.

And yet, such a domestication strategy is only applied on occasions. Most translators in this issue adopted a foreignizing strategy. Benocci for instance respected the ‘linguistic-cultural continuum’ of Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People* by choosing to keep in her Italian translation the bilingualism inherent to Indigenous texts replete with words unique to their language groups or even coinages.

Amongst the approaches translators discuss, there is the highly structured ‘Action research design guid[ing] action and reflection’ (Borgese-Flocca & Gadd), aimed at ‘preserving the finesse of *Young Dark Emu*’. Nadine Gassie for her part embraces Henri Meschonnic’s ‘pratique-théorique’ which accounts for her narrative approach to her Translation & Commentary. Her in-depth understanding of Tony Birch’s oeuvre leads Gassie to use a concrete metaphor, that of the language of ‘boxing’, using jabs, hooks and uppercuts in her rendition of the novel. According to her, this allows her to avoid Antoine Berman’s deforming tendencies of *Rationalisation* and *Expansion*. She lists her eleven precepts or strategies which will resonate with many translators.

Shan Ma’s conceptual framework is different yet again, as his corpus is the 1985 icon of Australian culture, the song *Blackfella Whitefella* written by Neil James Murray and George Djilaynga (aka George Rurrumbu Burarrwanga). Translation of lyrics requires a unique purpose: making it singable. Ma is inspired by Peter Low’s model to take into consideration singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm, and rhyme. Ma focusses on specific elements of the song, starting with its title, and going through thought processes, hesitations, changes of mind, and most importantly, awareness that ‘translation blind spots [...] exist beyond the vocabulary or language domains’.

Whatever the genres of their source texts and the language groups of their authors, the translators contributing to this issue undoubtedly furthered the cross-cultural understanding of First Nation people’s literary output and its dissemination beyond our shores.

The issue also includes non-thematic contributions: one theoretical article, translation & Commentary of a Chinese chronicle, a Russian autobiographical prose, a French poem, two book reviews and, for the first time, a Translator’s Diary, which is a new type of submissions we called for this year. The inaugural diary is by eminent French into English literary translator, Emeritus Professor Brian Nelson.

We are also very pleased to publish two of this year’s winning AALITRA translation awards: a poem in French by Marilyne Bertoncini translated by Heidi Bula and Shiva Motlagh-Elbakri into English.