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# Fluid Borders: Translational Readings of Transnational Literature

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## Abstract

In this article I analyze two short stories, one by Nam Le, the other by Janette Turner Hospital, via the relationship between the translational and the transnational. Le's "Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice" (*The Boat*, 2008) and Hospital's "Litany for the Homeland" (*North of Nowhere South of Loss*, 2003) both explore individual transnational journeys that are based on the personal background of their authors. Their protagonists reflect upon what it means in their day-to-day lives to identify with multiple national entities at the same time as they engage self-reflexively with language as a means of expressing this experience. The result is an exploration of the fluidity of national and linguistic "borderlines", or of what scholars have referred to as the "translational" present *within* as well as *between* cultures and languages (Bhabha 10; Gentzler 347; Wolf; Tymoczko). By drawing specifically on the role and various manifestations of the "borderline", I illustrate how these stories can be understood as literary representations not only of the transnational, but of its relation to the translational.

Theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Edwin Gentzler have utilized – and called into question – the concept of the borderline as a way of presenting *non-binary* conceptions of translation, that is, those that occur "within" as well as "between". However, Naoki Sakai draws more comprehensively on the theory of "bordering" to outline the relation between non-binary translation and transnationalism. He explains, "only when people react to one another does a border come into being", so it follows that a borderline is always "posterior to social relations" or to a process of social negotiation that he calls the "act of bordering". Transnationalism and translation, respectively, are the very acts of bordering that must negotiate the borders around a nation and a language. Thus for Sakai they are not just processes in themselves but they are broad "schema[s] [...] against the background of which our sense of nationality [and of language] is apprehended".

This broad, parallel relation that Sakai sets up between transnationalism and translation forms the basis of my analysis of "Love and Honour" and "Litany for the Homeland", and I explore it through two narrative figures that the stories share. First, each protagonist's engagement with story-telling demonstrates how language can mediate the borderlines within and between national and linguistic entities. Second, the recurring use of waterway imagery in the form of rivers, creeks and ditches draws attention to the fluidity of these borderlines. Both of these figures emerge at points in the narratives when national and linguistic negotiations are taking place, and thus they can be understood as representing the parallel acts of transnational and translational bordering. While on the one hand this reading presents us with a means of exploring Sakai's approach via contemporary literature, on the other it allows us to extend the discussion of transnationalism that has been focused upon in previous criticism of both Le's and Hospital's writing.

## Two transnational/translational writers

Nam Le's transnational background has attracted various labels from critics and scholars who have described him as "Asian-Australian" (Massola), "Asian-American" (Lee) and just plain "Australian" (Ommundsen 2). This lack of a single, defined nationality has been reflected in

the critical attention paid to his debut collection of short stories, *The Boat*. For example, Ken Gelder notes how each story is set in a different country but that Australia “is a kind of trace woven into a larger, often incongruous transnational fabric” (9). This observation portrays transnationalism as a state or condition under which national borders and identities, while no longer acting as a mode of differentiation, are still present and significant (Trousdale 3). Using a slightly different approach, Goellnicht explores how Le creates a model of “ethnic literature for a transnational or global community”; that is, one that “emphasizes the complexities at the meeting points of different ethnicities rather than [attempting] to sell an exotic commodity from a minority culture to a dominant majority” (211). This conception of transnationalism focuses more on the interplay that occurs where those national borders lie (Ashcroft 73).

Here, it should also be noted that the discourse of “ethnic” or “migrant” literature has proven popular in critical approaches to Le’s work, fuelled on the one hand by his personal background of migration and diaspora and on the other by his explicit use of the narrative of the Vietnamese “boat people” in the opening and closing stories of his collection (Lee 35). This focus on migration is important to acknowledge, as the discourse lends itself particularly well to transnational readings. In fact, in Rebecca Walkowitz’s view, migration literature *demands* a “transnational perspective” (530) and an acknowledgement of a “transnational model” (533) within literary criticism. Ashcroft also notes how the notion of a “transnation” “begins within the nation” and is *enacted* in a “migratory [...] aggregation of flows and convergences” (73). In other words, the migration narrative is mediated via a transnational perspective and the transnation is mediated through the act of migration. While this article is not concerned with this particular conceptual overlap, it is worth noting because it constitutes an important part of the contrast between Le’s and Hospital’s stories.

Like Le, Hospital has attracted several different labels as a result of her background, from the “Australian writer” (Jorgensen 1) to the “expatriate Australian” (Petter 210) to the writer of multiple national identities who holds a significant place in the Canadian literary heritage (Cameron 126). In comparison to Le’s work, hers presents a much broader oeuvre developed over more than thirty years. It has, however, received a comparable amount of critical attention for its transnational explorations. Russell West-Pavlov has stated that she foregrounds a “process of disorientation and reorientation [...] going beyond the traditional geographical parameters of nation-state” (145); in other words, she seeks to transcend accepted notions of borderlines. Thea Astley shows that she simultaneously *retains* the notion of borderlines, because for her they are “dynamic zones of contact” (7). Thus although national borders are present in her writing, they are not necessarily a means of differentiation. Selina Samuels also discusses how her characters experience that borderline interplay, showing in particular how their identities are explored through feelings of “isolation, transitoriness and dislocation” (88). Finally, in a similar observation to that of Goellnicht in relation to Le’s work, West-Pavlov suggests that Hospital’s writing could be seen to offer a “tentative model for (inter-) or (trans)national identities” (144, 155). While there are evident parallels between these transnational approaches to both Le and Hospital, the latter has been associated more frequently with the experience of the expatriate rather than with that of the migrant.<sup>1</sup> Again, for the purposes of this article, it is simply worth acknowledging that the exploration of borders and national identities within the discourse of transnationalism can be related to different *types* of movement, including migrational, diasporic or expatriate, and that this does not necessarily take away from those aspects common to transnational worldviews.

In comparison to the number of scholars who have taken a transnational approach, relatively few have acknowledged the importance of language or translation in the work of either author. In relation to Le’s collection, there have been a couple of extended discussions about the role of language (Goellnicht, Lee) and a passing comment or two on how it engages with translation (Jose). In relation to Hospital’s writing, there have been some brief references to language use (Davis, Greiner), while very little has been said about it from the perspective of

<sup>1</sup> For expatriate readings see Petter, Samuels. Helga Ramsey-Kurz presents a migrant reading of one short story by Hospital that draws upon a broader understanding of the notion of a migrant.

translation studies (see Trevitt). As Michael Cronin has noted, the concepts of transnationalism and translation are intimately related, to the point where he views transnationalism as the “intense traffic of influences from elsewhere through the medium of translation” (274); it could be argued then that where one concept is present, it is likely that the other can be found. By drawing on Sakai’s application of the theory of bordering, we can extend the above discussions by using the transnational elements of these stories to uncover their embedded translational elements. I use the term “embedded” because, as the lack of critical attention will highlight, these stories do not explicitly engage with traditional processes of translation. Rather, as we will see in the discussion below, they engage with non-binary conceptions. Le’s story utilizes a multilingual space where Vietnamese is scattered amongst his English, offering an example of what Meylaerts and D’hulst have referred to as an “ongoing process of translation” (10, my translation).<sup>2</sup> Hospital’s story, on the other hand, relies almost entirely on the English language, which offers an example of what Gentzler refers to as “‘monolingual’ original writing” that “contain[s] many translational elements” (347). Thus both stories have the potential for readings which illustrate the transnational *and* the translational.

### **Transnational story-telling**

“Love and Honour” and “Litany for the Homeland” are set in explicitly transnational environments illustrated not only through their narrative content, but through their structure and their use of particular narrative techniques. As noted above, the transnational borderline is simultaneously present and yet negated as a mode of differentiation; this is represented in these stories through their explicitly nation-based locations that exert a strong influence on the protagonists’ identities, and yet whose definitive boundaries are transcended and thus negated. Looking first at Le’s story, his protagonist Nam was born in Vietnam, moved to Australia as a child and then to the US as an adult. Each of these nations are related to a separate narrative within the story and yet there are strong parallels between them. Vietnam is associated with his parents’ past, where at the age of fourteen his father first encountered an American soldier who “looked nothing like the Viet Cong” (15), where he survived mass murder, was imprisoned and at the age of twenty-five brought his family to Australia. Australia is associated with Nam’s own past, where at the age of fourteen he heard his father telling the local Vietnamese community about his war experience, where the community used “words [Nam] didn’t understand” (16), where Nam ended up working as a lawyer and at the age of twenty-five left for the US. Finally, the US is associated with Nam’s present, where he is struggling with his identity as a perceived ethnic writer in a commercially-driven environment, where he is negotiating his father’s presence, where the two of them begin a new dialogue and where the father helps Nam to write about their past. To do so he tells Nam the full story of his war experience, filling in the gaps of the earlier narrative, and when he falls asleep afterwards Nam watches him, feeling that he has become his father “watching his sleeping son” (28).

Thus the three national entities that have delineated three aspects or stages of the story are bound together through the recurring act of story-telling. The US is the site of Nam’s act of story-telling for us the readers, as well as his father’s most recent act of story-telling for Nam; Australia is the setting for Nam’s story as well as the site of his father’s original act of story-telling; Vietnam is the setting for his father’s stories and ultimately for Nam’s written story. Furthermore, it is this written story, or more precisely, it is the father’s burning of this written story that merges the US, Australia and Vietnam as three simultaneous sites and settings. As outlined by Goellnicht, the scene in which the father allows the ashes of the story to be “given body by the wind” (Le 29-30) carries connotations of the ritual of burning the dead, suggesting a sense of ultimate merging and closure (Goellnicht 203). In this way, the three national entities and all the demarcations that they have represented are present and significant but ultimately they are reconciled and transcended through the creation and destruction of a story, rendering the narrative transnational.

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<sup>2</sup> “Les processus d’écriture et de lecture de textes littéraires plurilingues sont à comprendre comme des processus de ‘traduction’ continue”.

A similar transnational structure can be discerned in Hospital's story. Her unnamed protagonist was born in Australia, moving from Melbourne to Brisbane as a child and then to the US and Canada as an adult. Again, each of these national entities is clearly demarcated and is related to the act of story-telling. In Australia as a girl she meets Paddy, a young Irish-Australian boy who lives on a houseboat and who inspires her to "reinvent herself" as Stella, the girl "from the moon" who "had the stars at her fingertips" (260). As a local outcast, Paddy epitomizes for her the experience of living in the margins or borderlines of society and she is the only person in their small country town who pays any attention to his story. As an adult she remembers him fondly, having lost contact with him years earlier. She is reminded of him when she travels through the US and Canada: in each country she meets a character who, like Paddy, lives on the margins and has found no one apart from her who will listen to their story.

In the US she works as a creative writing teacher at MIT, where Lincoln D, an African-American ex-marine struggling to fit back into mainstream society, writes stories that "frighten" her (267). He relates two of them to her face to illustrate how he fits "*nowhere*" in society (268) and finally he asks if he can send her letters as a means of letting out the "clamour" in his head (269). This encounter contrasts with the next in Canada, where she is on a reading tour and a young Cree man gives her a ride into town. Although it is a ride "long enough for two entire life histories to be exchanged", it remains relatively quiet because "the bridge which divides strangers from kin had been crossed" even before leaving the parking lot (269). With the one simple question: "Were you born here?", she stimulates a response as if she "were Aladdin and had suddenly touched the magic spot on a lamp" (269). Rather than explaining himself fully in words, however, the man drives her to a frozen lake that only exists for part of the year, upon which his grandmother had helped his mother give birth. By indicating his birth place as one that is naturally unfixed he recalls Stella's encounter with Paddy's houseboat as "something that can move away" (263). Thus the Cree man becomes yet another character who lives on the margins of society. These two North American encounters, the first overflowing with the need to use words and the second supremely minimal in its story-telling capacity, represent for the protagonist two evocations of Paddy who is "like some ancient but ageless mariner" and who "keeps seeking [her] out to finish his tale [...] setting his compass for [her] shores" (266). Significantly, whenever his story is told again, she finds she has "the mud of a Queensland creekbed under [her] feet" (269). Thus while the Australian, US and Canadian settings are differentiated in order to represent the stages of her journey, their national borders are reconciled and transcended through the re-surfacing of the Australian landscape with each act of story-telling.

### Transnational waterways

In both Le and Hospital's narratives, a transnational structure is presented, in which the protagonists' identification with different national spaces and the simultaneous transcendence of their borders is mediated through the act of writing or listening to personal stories. Another point of comparison is the recurring image of the waterway, used to represent and explore the fluidity inherent in these borders. Whether a creekbed, a river, or a ditch, these images appear at least twice in each narrative at moments when the protagonist is experiencing a transnational exchange, and each time the writers approach them by describing their temperature, colour, consistency and action. Le's narrative moves from a "cold and black" river that is "slowing in sections" (11) to a "muddy" ditch that is "dark and wet and warm and sweet" (16), then back to a "black and braided" river that is "on the brink of freezing" (30). Hospital's narrative moves from a creek of "warm water [that] sucks at mangrove roots" (262) to a river that "slash[es] the white surface of March [...] still mostly skating rink but part flow" and that "sucks away at the base of [the] limestone cliffs [...] plucks and thaws, plucks and thaws, subtracting from Canada there, depositing American silt there" (271). The comparisons are palpable: while Le's images fluctuate between a river on the brink of freezing and a ditch made warm and sweet in its tropical environment, Hospital's move from a warm tropical setting to a frozen one in the process of thawing out. Thus in both narratives, the flowing water on the North American

continent is in the process of a seasonal change, while the water in Australasia is thicker, slower and almost stagnant.

These parallels become particularly relevant to this discussion when we note that Sakai uses the river to illustrate the man-made nature of the borderline; he writes that “physical markers such as a river, a mountain range, a wall and even a line on the ground become a border only when made to represent a certain pattern of social action”. Considered in this framework, the waterways of these narratives hold the potential to act as a borderline at the same time as they resist the role. Instead, they are constantly participating in the “act of bordering”, which can be seen in the above descriptions of them “sucking” and “plucking” and “freezing” and “thawing”, being *active*, in other words, and in a state of constant change. In addition, these images occur at particular moments in the narratives when the borders between national entities are being transcended, which again suggests their engagement with the act of national bordering. For example, Nam and his father first discuss their family, opening up their transnational history, on a bridge overlooking the Iowa river, where the traffic makes a sound like “chopping wind” and “the east bank of the river glow[s] wanly in the afternoon light” (11-12). This scene parallels his father’s story, told when they were in Australia, of being saved by his mother near the bridge of a ditch in Vietnam. By that waterway, which was “on the east side of the village”, there were “helicopters everywhere” (16), recalling the sound of chopping wind. The Iowa river then returns as the resting place of Nam’s – and his father’s – written story, where Nam stands on the bridge watching its ashes drift away over the water. This final image unites the act of story-telling with the image of the waterway by noting how “it took hours, sometimes days, for the surface of a river to freeze over – to hold in its skin the perfect and crystalline world – and how that world could be shattered by a small stone dropped like a single syllable” (30). If the waterway is understood to be a representation of a borderline, related as it is to the meeting of Nam’s various national affiliations, here the act of story-telling is shown to be capable of breaking or negating that borderline, reminding us of its fluidity and its transnationality.

The fluidity of borderlines is similarly explored in Hospital’s narrative via her use of the waterway image. Her protagonist closely associates Paddy with the creekbed in her Australian hometown, which represents “no-mans-land” not only because of its position beyond the fence (261), but because the idea of living on it “suggests that seemingly immutable laws can be called into question” (263). In other words, it is an entity that may appear as a borderline but in fact, it simultaneously undermines the notion of clear differentiation. It is thus a place where Paddy and Stella can reinvent themselves because its “mirrored corridor of *why nots*” suggests that anything is possible (263). When she is a grown adult and has heard the stories of Lincoln D and the Cree man, the protagonist then finds the Australian creek paralleled with the St Lawrence river, where she sits and is reminded of Australia. In this moment “Queensland itself is fluid [...] and refuses to be anchored in space”, merging with the physical borders of the US and Canada either side of the St Lawrence in a new form of no-mans-land, where she can “see orchids in snowdrifts” and where “along the bare knotted trunks of maples and hickory trees, epiphytes and creepers have run rampant” (271). Again, it is the act of story-telling, that is, her reflection on her encounters with Paddy, Lincoln and the Cree man, that allows these national entities to flow into one another. The result is a waterway scene that is reminiscent of Le’s in its sense of merging and closure.

### **Story-telling, waterways and translation**

Having established how the act of story-telling supports the transnational structure of these narratives and how the recurring image of the waterway represents the fluid borders implied within this structure, I will now use these same narrative features to explore the translational elements of the texts. Beginning with Le’s story, we can see that at those points where story-telling is breaking in upon national borders, located each time at a waterway, we also discover an interplay that calls into question the borders between Vietnamese and English. For example, on the first appearance of the bridge over the Iowa river Nam’s father reverts to a “formal Vietnamese” in order to discuss their family. Rather than represent this in Vietnamese or

literary English, Le chooses to reimagine it for the Anglophone reader, which results in a foreignized form of English: “How is the mother of Nam?” (12). Nam’s reply, “she is good” is said “too loudly” as he tries “to make [himself] heard over the groans and clanks of a passing truck” (12); this establishes a juxtaposition between the formal linguistic register used in Vietnamese for family references<sup>3</sup> and the lack of formality and resultant awkwardness of setting it within the American context. Thus Nam and his father’s first attempt to return to their past in order to understand their different views is mediated or *translated* for the reader in such a way that the foreignized structure is retained, illustrating Meylaerts’ and D’hulst’s concept of the multilingual text as an ongoing process of translation (10).

This foreignizing approach contrasts, however, with the following scene where the father and son begin talking with a homeless man standing by an oil drum on the riverbank. From the point of view of the reader, this is the only conversation during which the two engage with a third speaker. The dialogue is relevant to this discussion because it presents three distinctly different linguistic situations. The homeless man, as far as the reader is able to understand, is American-born and his first language is English; Nam’s father was born and grew up in Vietnam, moved to Australia as an adult and is currently visiting America, fluent in Vietnamese but speaking also a “lilting English” (12); Nam was born in Vietnam, moved to Australia as a child and now resides in America, speaking fluent Vietnamese and English. These three situations result in differing levels of conversational understanding: the homeless man is cut off from the interaction between Nam and his father which takes place in Vietnamese; the father addresses the homeless man in his “lilting English”, but while addressing his son in Vietnamese, he appears to miss the homeless man’s comment under his breath – “Welcome to America” (12); the son doesn’t *say* anything throughout the interaction, but he is equally privy to each of these communications. Interestingly, rather than present his reader with a lilting or foreignized form of English as in the previous example, Le presents this entire dialogue in literary English, suggesting that the translation approach has now switched to domestication so that any nuances and differences present in the dialogue are hidden.

The process of translation is reflected upon again in a later multilingual scene where Nam recalls his father telling the story of his war experience in Vietnamese to a group of friends in Melbourne. Again, Nam creates a sense of awkwardness and presents an outsider’s perspective, sitting “on the perimeter of the circle” and listening to “words [he] doesn’t understand” (14-16). His outsider status could be due to his much younger age, but it could also draw upon the fact that he grew up in Melbourne and is listening to a group of men who grew up in Vietnam. There is a suggestion here of the complex intercultural and interlingual relations *within* perceived ethnic groups, particularly where “1.5” or second-generation migrants are simultaneously a part and not a part of both their home and ancestral communities.<sup>4</sup> We also have further examples of Le’s reimagined Vietnamese, where the men welcome the father with “Thanh! Fuck your mother! What took you so long – scared, no?” and the father begins his story with “you remember that sound, no?” (13-14). Thus, as in the above examples on the banks of the Iowa river, in this scene we have contrasting translation processes that have first hidden and then highlighted the foreign elements of the source text. This illustrates an interplay between English and Vietnamese where the language borders are not fixed, but where they exist in a state of fluidity to create a *translational* – as well as a transnational – act of bordering.

In Hospital’s narrative, multilingual spaces are much less utilized because in each of her encounters the protagonist interacts only in English. However, her use of story-telling and of the waterway helps to explore the negotiation present *within* language as a medium of

<sup>3</sup> Linguist Hy V. Luong explains that when common nouns such as “mother”, “father” and “child” are separated from their relation to the addresser and the addressee, their meaning is derived from their contrast with other family members rather than from their personal relation to those present (23).

<sup>4</sup> The 1.5 is a term given to young Vietnamese refugees who fled immediately after the American-Vietnam war. Critic Bunkong Tuon describes the 1.5 as existing “between the worlds of the first and the second generation” of refugees, and holding “the various forces of the past and present together in a delicate balance” (6).

communication; that is, they are concerned with translation in the Sakaian sense as a broad “schema” against which we understand language to be constantly in the process of bordering. For example, while the act of story-telling establishes a transnational structure, as discussed above, that same structure highlights an important parallel with language. This is clearest in the way that the protagonist’s narrative is *framed* by a broader one told by an omniscient narrator. Introducing the story with the inclusive pronoun “our”, this narrator sets a transnational scene, referring to Earth as “our neighbourhood” and “our homeland” (256). It then refers to Australia as “*Terra Australis*”, literally meaning “the land of the south”, which reminds us that Australia as a national entity did not always exist; that it was in fact “wished [...] into being and dreamed up” by European explorers (257). This provides an explicit illustration of Sakai’s theory of the national entity existing only *after* the act of bordering. Using the phrase a “Once upon a time”, the narrator goes on to remind us that before Europeans began this act of bordering, the land was “already home to Sam Woolagoodjah’s people” who “shifted from place to place” (emphasis in the original), not presuming to draw definitive borders as did the “latecomers” (257-8). Finally, with “And it came to pass [...]” (259), the narrator transitions into the central narrative. The form and language of this introduction present certain methods of Western and Indigenous Australian story-telling, as well as certain notions of “home” and “nation”. Furthermore, embedded within these are Western and Indigenous Australian views on religion and language. For example, a reference to the Indigenous “Dreaming” leads toward the Christian “*Amen*”, and Indigenous terms of reference such as “*bird Wandjinas, crab Wandjinas*” are drawn upon amongst the Anglophone “first ones” and “ancient ones” (258). These two perspectives are highlighted once more at the closing of the story when the narrator ends with the two words “*Milingimbi – Amen*” (272). By bringing together two cultures and languages and by drawing on them interchangeably, thereby resisting a clear differentiation, this framing narrative performs a parallel act of transnational and translational bordering.

The omniscient narrator then interrupts at two points in the central story of the protagonist. As Stella follows Paddy into the no-mans-land of the creek, she is aware that her actions are synonymous with denying the values of her society and it is here that the narrator intervenes to reflect on how language also resists established borders: it “puts forth glowing tendrils” and “fingers its way past borders” to engage with some “shifting space” where those who meet one another “anchor themselves” in a “mysterious way” (262). This observation shows that it is language itself, rather than any interlingual interaction, that participates in translational bordering. At this point the narrator also describes language in words used earlier to describe Paddy, both of them “beckoning” with “glittering eyes” (259, 262); this links Stella’s transnational encounters with the Irish-Australian (and, by extension, with the African-American and with the Canadian Cree) to the narrator’s translational reflections on language. To strengthen this translational reading, it is helpful to draw on Bhabha’s discussion of border identities. He argued that it is *within* the “interstices” of subject positions – that is, those hyphenated identities of a postcolonial world – that the act of cultural translation takes place (10). Hospital’s protagonist engages through the act of story-telling with just such interstitial identities. Moreover, these identities are linked to language in the act of resisting established borderlines; thus, the story can be positioned within a broader schema of translation, against which language as a medium of communication is constantly participating in bordering.

The second time the omniscient narrator intervenes is in the time jump between Stella losing Paddy and the protagonist travelling to the US. Here an explicit link is drawn between the margins found in a “text” and those found in a “homeland”, where “absences and silences are potent” and where they “fissure any state more deeply than the moat [...] around [...] nationhood” (266). Again we have a parallel set up between linguistic and national entities which questions the established borders around them in contrast with the interstices within them; moreover, it is in these interstices that the notions of “absence” and “silence” suggest the need for negotiation and translation. This final point leads us to an important reiteration: it is in the very “absence” of multilingual processes that Hospital’s narrative engages with the act of bordering, or of translation. Her writing illustrates how *embedded* translational elements can be present in the “fissures” of language itself, that is, in the use of language to question established

borderlines and to express border identities. In this way, Hospital's story *performs* Sakai's attempt – amongst the many other recent attempts – to “reverse the conventional comprehension of translation that depends on the trope of translation as bridging or communication between two separate languages”. Indeed, we would be hard-pressed to present Hospital's story via a “conventional” translational understanding *precisely because* it does not presume to differentiate between languages, speaking instead from the fluid borders within them.

### Conclusion

This brief comparative study illustrates Sakai's parallel relation between translation and transnationalism in two short stories, which to date have only been discussed at length in relation to transnationalism. Both “Love and Honour” and “Litany for the Homeland” create a transnational setting where the act of story-telling and the image of the waterway are used to highlight the fluidity of relations between three different nations. In Le's story, the act of interlingual translation is then reflected in his multilingual spaces where a mediating process takes place between the narrative dialogue and the reader. This illustrates through its alternating foreignization and domestication how the border between Vietnamese and English is not defined and solid. Hospital's story on the other hand draws very little upon interlingual movement. Instead, it presents language itself as a subversive and instrumental means of entering and transcending borderlines, reflecting translation as a broad schema against which language is constantly in the act of bordering. As noted above, from the point of view of translation studies this conception rejects the well-worn metaphor of translation as a “bridge”, given this requires a definitive border between languages. Instead, these narrative illustrations of Sakai's theory can be contextualized within the broader shift toward a non-binary conception of translation. It could be offered in conclusion that just as Gentzler has observed the potential of migration studies to present a “set of new texts traditionally not included in the [translation] discipline to date” (347), so the same might be said of transnational studies that can be used to illustrate how narratives engage with translation beyond binary understandings.

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