

Question 1 (25 marks)

Read Text 1 on page 3.

Compose a discursive response in which you extend the ideas in Text 1. In your response, articulate your insights into how texts make meaning through the crafting of literary worlds.

The Translator's Paradox

“Every act of communication is a miracle of translation.”

The text speaks to me in blue boxes, its highlighted fragments suspended like prayer flags across a page I cannot touch. Six words. Seven if you count the conjunction. I am reading Ken Liu through a screen through someone else’s camera through pixels that pretend to be paper, and already we are three translations deep before meaning even attempts to leap across the synapse-gap between writer and reader.

But let me tell you about a different kind of translation.

Fragment 67A: The Great Western Highway Codex

Josh’s Honda Civic idles outside Wentworthville Maccas at 2:17 AM, its bonnet warm enough to sit on despite the September cold. The metal dimples slightly under our weight, six bodies arranged like a constellation nobody’s named yet. Seven if you count the ghost of whoever we’re waiting for, that perpetual maybe-person who might still show up, might still change everything.

[Editor’s note: The following section appears to be graffitied directly onto the original manuscript in purple Posca pen]

HERE’S WHAT THE NARRATOR WON’T TELL YOU: Every Maccas carpark after midnight becomes a portal. The fluorescent arch translates. Your ordinary Wednesday-night-self becomes something liminal, something that exists only between the heat of factory-farmed nuggets and the cold of an early Spring that Western Sydney wears like borrowed clothes.

[End graffiti]

Sienna balances her acai bowl on her knee, the purple flesh of it looking suspiciously like the universe between stars. “You know what’s fucked?” she says, though none of us asked. “In Mandarin, the word for ‘world’ literally means ‘under heaven.’ But in English, it comes from ‘were-ald’ – the age of man. Same reality, completely different metaphor.”

I think about this as I watch the Great Western Highway stretch into darkness, its painted lines forming a barcode that, if scanned, would probably ring up as \$6.70 worth of existential dread at any cosmic 7-Eleven or Costco.

The Author Interjects

You're thinking I'm reaching with the metaphors. Fair. But right now, your neurons are translating these symbols into meaning, these meanings into images, these images into something that feels like memory but isn't. Liu is right, it is science fiction, this whole enterprise of consciousness brushing against consciousness through squiggles on screens.

When I was sixteen, or seventeen, I wrote "TRANSLATE THIS" on the bathroom stall door at Hurstville Library. Someone wrote underneath: "Into what?" Someone else: "It already is."

Fragmented 67B: The Ms Sweeties Variations

Version 1 (as remembered): The Lebanese man at Ms Sweeties in Greystanes doesn't look up when we order. His hands know the choreography of acai preparation by touch alone. The purple-pink swirl becomes a mandala, becoming the exact shade of my grandmother's wrist the week before she forgot my name.

Version 2 (as recorded on Sienna's phone): "Bro did you see how much Biscoff he put on yours?" *Laughter. The scrape of plastic spoons. Someone humming what might be Surely Worthy by Common Gathering.*

Version 3 (as it actually happened): [This page has been torn out]

Version 4 (as translated through metaphor): We eat purple snow in September while the Southern Cross rotates above Greystanes, and every spoonful tastes like a different future we're probably not going to have.

A Brief Dictionary of Western Sydney Midnight

Bonnet (n.): A confession booth made of still-warm metal

Sixty-seven dollars (n.): The exact price of staying out past when the T1 stops.

Translation (n.): What happens when her hand finds yours reaching for the same chip

World-building (v.): What six [or seven] people do in a Maccas carpark when they can't afford anywhere else

The Narrator Attempts Honesty

Derrida said "there is nothing outside the text," but he never sat in a Civic outside Maccas watching someone's breath fog the window while Common Gathering plays through blown speakers. Here's what TEXT 1 doesn't say but implies: every story we tell ourselves is both true and not true, the same way Schrodinger's cat is both alive and dead until observed. The miracle isn't that translation happens, it's that we keep attempting it, keep building these bridges of meaning across the void, even knowing that something always gets lost in the crossing.

Josh plays at Hardstyle track again, the one that sounds like anxiety through a blender. But at this hour, in this specific geography of Greater Western Sydney, it becomes something else. A map to somewhere that doesn't exist yet.

"You know what's fucked?" Sienna says again, though sixty-seven minutes have passed. Time moves differently in carparks. Augustine knew this – "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know."

She continues: "In quantum physics, particles don't have positions until they're observed. So this moment doesn't exist until someone tells it."

The way she tilts her head when she says this. The particular quality of streetlight through her hair. These details matter more than they should.

Fragment 67C: The Unreliable Narrator Admits Something

I've been lying. There were only five of us that night. The sixth person died two years before on the M4, somewhere between Prospect and nowhere. But we still set aside space, still order an extra soft-serve that melts untouched, still translate absence into presence.

Or maybe that's a lie too. Maybe there were seven. Maybe you're the seventh, reading this now, completing the circuit.

Borges wrote about labyrinths where all paths lead to the same center. The M4 at night is like that. Every exit promises difference but delivers the same servo, same neighbourhood, the same hope that this time will be different.

The Paradox of Literary Worlds

Liu's text suggests fiction "prizes the logic of metaphors over reality." But sitting on the bonnet at 2-something AM, watching Parramatta skyscraper lights pulse like synapses, I realise we're already living in that metaphor. The M4 isn't asphalt. It's a sentence that won't end. The acai isn't just food. It's the Amazon translated for Western Sydney. We aren't just six kids (or seven, or five) killing time. We're characters in a story simultaneously writing and reading.

There's a moment when Sienna's shoulder touches mine and suddenly I understand what Levinas meant by "the face of the other" – that ethics begins in the encounter with another consciousness, untranslatable yet demanding translation.

Every text makes meaning by acknowledging that meaning is made, not found. The world-building happens in the gap between what's said and what's meant, between the me writing this and the you reading it, between the M4 at 2 AM and the M4 at 2 AM.

Epilogue. North Parramatta, 2:67 AM

The sermon ends where it began: with translation. Josh's Honda finally gives up the ghost near North Parramatta, that liminal zone where the city forgets what it's supposed to be. We sit on the curb waiting for the NRMA, watching the traffic lights perform their colour-changes for no one.

"Tell me something true," Sienna says to no one in particular.

“Every story is a ghost story,” I reply, though I’m not sure why.

“That’s not true,”

“Exactly.”

Walter Benjamin wrote that “every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.” But here, now, with the taste of artificial acai still purple on our tongues, with the specific weight of her hand finding my shoulder, with the night refusing to end nor begin – here the past and present collapse into something neither memory nor experience.

Above us, a billboard advertises something in a language I don’t recognise. Or maybe I do. Maybe it’s the same language we’ve been speaking all night. The dialect of liminality, the grammar of spaces between. Every word is a translation of silence. Every silence is a translation of what we’re too young to say.

The text makes meaning the way we make meaning: provisional, fragmented, stubbornly attempting connection despite the impossibility of it all. We build our literary worlds from the debris of the real one, then insist they’re more true than truth.

Sixty-seven minutes until sunrise. Or was it six? Seven?

The translation continues.