

**“*The Sopranos* Meets *The Real Housewives of Orange County*”: The Publishing of Christos Tsiolkas’s *The Slap* in the United States**

I was recently FaceTiming with a friend, and I was telling him about the questionable behavior of some of the parents at my son’s school. We discussed the problems inherent in evaluating anyone else’s parenting choices, especially when there are cultural differences involved. My friend lives on the West Coast of the United States, but he and I met when we attended the same college on the East Coast. I now call Australia home, but he has never lived here. So it surprised me when, in the context of this conversation, my friend said, “I recently watched a miniseries called *The Slap* that did a really good job of portraying this issue—the different perspectives on what it means to do the right thing as a parent.” I immediately asked him if he knew that this television show was based on a book by an Australian author, but he did not even know that it was based on a book, much less one by an Australian author.

Christos Tsiolkas’s *The Slap* was first published in 2008. Tsiolkas is an award-winning Australian author best known for his novels, and *The Slap* was his fourth novel. His first novel, *Loaded*, was published in 1995, and it was later adapted into the film *Head On* (1998). His third novel, *Dead Europe*, published in 2006, had already had its film rights optioned by the time *The Slap* was published. Therefore, it was not terribly surprising when, in late 2011, three years after its initial publication, an eight-episode miniseries based on *The Slap* premiered on the Australian public television network ABC. (The film *Dead Europe* did not premiere until 2012, but the two projects had begun filming around the same time, in early 2011 [Sherman and Fox 496].)

In the years between the initial publication of *The Slap* and the release of the Australian television miniseries, the novel won the ALS Gold Medal, the Australian Book of the Year in the Australian Book Industry Awards, the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction in the Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards, and the Commonwealth Writers Prize—all in 2009. In 2010, an American edition of *The Slap* was published by Penguin.

When the Australian television miniseries premiered in 2011, *The Slap*’s original publisher, Allen & Unwin, released a television tie-in edition of the book. In 2015, the American commercial broadcast network NBC premiered its own eight-episode miniseries based on the novel. Remarkably, NBC aired a trailer for the miniseries during the Super Bowl—one of the most notoriously expensive advertising spots on television. Penguin released its television tie-in edition that same year (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The release dates of the Australian and American versions of Christos Tsiolkas’s *The Slap*.

The quote that forms this article's title is taken from a promotional blurb that is prominently displayed on the back of Penguin's television tie-in edition: "*The Slap* tells a layered, briskly paced story about complex people. Think Tom Wolfe meets Philip Roth. Or *The Sopranos* meets *The Real Housewives of Orange County*." This blurb comes from a *Los Angeles Times* review published one month after the first American edition of *The Slap* was released (Villalon). Notably, both *The Sopranos* and *The Real Housewives of Orange County* explore the tensions that can arise when the needs of one's immediate biological family come into conflict with the desires of one's chosen family—a curated network of extended family and friends.

*The Slap* explores similar territory, which is perhaps what made it especially well-suited to television adaptation. It is told from the points of view of eight people. Hector, the character at the center of the group, is a Greek-Australian man whose fortieth birthday party in suburban Melbourne is the setting for the titular slap. Hugo, the spoiled three-year-old son of family friends, throws a tantrum during a game of backyard cricket. He is about to hit another child with his bat when the father of that child rushes to Hugo and lifts him into the air. Hugo kicks the man in the shin, and the man slaps Hugo. Subsequent chapters are related from the perspectives of (among others) Hector's wife, a veterinarian who is best friends with Hugo's mother; a teenage girl who works weekends at the veterinary clinic and is having an affair with Hector (as it happens, Hector's wife is also unfaithful); Hector's cousin, who slapped Hugo; Hugo's free-spirited, indulgent mother; and the shy, gay best friend of the teenager who is having an affair with Hector. While all the characters can be described as "middle class," the cast is overtly multicultural and multi-ethnic: Anglo-Celtic Australians are in the minority, while "the

ethnic and religious identities of other characters include Greek, Indian, Serb, Aboriginal, Jewish, and Muslim” (Goldsworthy). As reviewer Kerry Goldsworthy notes, “One implication of this is that Australian society has now progressed beyond self-conscious multiculturalism, and that multi-ethnicity, with all its complications, is now the norm and a true cosmopolitanism the ideal.” Despite Goldsworthy’s lofty rhetoric, the slap has the effect of destabilizing the lives of all eight main characters.

Now that this article has completed its rambling introduction to *The Slap*—which included a plot summary, as well as an overview of significant moments in the novel’s publication and adaptation—it is finally time to consider the various factors that might have shaped my friend’s response to the American television miniseries. It is also time to consider those factors that will shape his response to the American edition of the novel that I purchased and had shipped to him from Barnes & Noble. Drawing upon theories and methodologies associated with the field of textual criticism and scholarly editing, as well as those associated with the field of book history, this article examines the publishing of *The Slap* in the United States. All aspects of the publication process are surveyed, but this article devotes its greatest critical attention to the editorial process. In particular, it examines the sorts of editorial accommodations that occur when translating a book that was hailed as one of the “10 Aussie Books to Read Before You Die”—an honor voted on by the Australian public in a competition administered by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation—for an American audience, which is to say the largest identifiable market segment in the English-language book-publishing industry.

Notably, the fields of adaptation and translation studies are not mentioned among those that this article draws upon. That is not to say they are irrelevant—to the contrary,

they are so relevant that other scholars have already detailed some of their most notable contributions to understanding *The Slap*. For example, Glyn Davis's 2012 scholarly journal article "*The Slap's* Resonances: Multiculturalism and Adolescence in Tsiolkas's Australia" discusses

Tsiolkas's novel *The Slap* (2008) and its television adaptation (2011). The latter is situated in relation to Television Studies debates relating to "quality," with elements of the adaptation that enable its categorisation as "quality TV" highlighted. (173)

Constantine Verevis's 2015 scholarly journal article "'Whose side are you on?' *The Slap*" would appear to explore similar territory:

This essay engages critical frameworks of adaptation and translation studies to interrogate various formats of *The Slap*. It considers not only the cross-cultural remaking of the Australian miniseries for US television, but also the adaptation of Tsiolkas's high-profile novel to "quality TV." (769)

However, the two articles aren't as similar as they first appear. Specifically, Davis's earlier article is typical of what Simone Murray has labelled "new-wave adaptation studies" (4). Murray describes this "new wave," which she says was inaugurated in 2005, in the following manner:

Adaptation studies discourse has moved on from its previously core business of comparative aesthetic evaluation (in which screen adaptations were, predictably, usually found wanting) to that of ideologically alert deconstruction—scrutinising adapted texts for their critical reworking of power structures often only covertly registered in source texts. ... But

overwhelmingly, the intellectual project which new-wave adaptation studies sets itself takes, paradoxically, a tamely familiar methodological guise: namely, textual analysis. (4)

Davis “compares and contrasts the two versions of *The Slap*, [and] situates the novel in relation to Tsiolkas’s other writings,” which is typical of a textual analysis methodology (173). However, Verevis takes an even newer, more novel approach to adaptation studies. Murray describes this approach (which she clearly hopes will supplant “new-wave adaptation studies”) in the following manner:

The upshot of this under-examined preference for scrutinising nuances of texts is a curious and troubling disinterest in how adaptations come to be, specifically how the various institutional, commercial and legal frameworks surrounding adaptations profoundly influence the number and the character of adaptations in cultural circulation. Nudging adaptation studies beyond its intellectual comfort zone of textual analysis and closely related questions of medium specificity allows us to conceive of something often heralded in adaptation studies but not, to date, fully realised: namely, a sociology of adaptation. (4)

A sociology of adaptation is exactly what Verevis achieves when he writes, for example, “Unlike its commercial competitors ... the ABC does not accept advertising on any of its channels, allowing programmes to be watched without interruption and with longer running times in scheduled slots” (771-72). So, while this article will not draw upon the fields of adaptation and translation studies, it is undoubtedly following in the footsteps of the very latest methodological trends in these fields. After all, this article surveys all

aspects of the publication process, similar to how Murray calls for adaptation studies to survey “the various institutional, commercial and legal frameworks surrounding adaptations” (4). At the end of the day, however, this article is primarily concerned with the publication of books in different editions—Australian and American—which is not the same as adaptation (which is typically concerned with a transformation across different media) or translation (which is typically concerned with a transformation across languages).

Thus, this article begins its close examination of the publishing of *The Slap* in the United States with the part of the publication process known as design. Book covers have played a significant role in publishing and bookselling since at least the 1940s, when publishers pressured booksellers to display their books face out (Matthews xi). Book covers were first widely reproduced in the popular press to accompany book reviews in the 1950s (Matthews xi). The cover of a book is, of course, often the first point of contact a potential reader has with the book. According to Cat Yampbell,

The materiality of a text is often taken for granted. A common assumption is that the inner text is the kernel of value and significance while the rest is merely a protective husk. ... [However,] D. F. McKenzie acknowledges the impossibility of divorcing “the substance of the text on the one hand from the physical form of its presentation on the other” and has defined “a text as a complex structure of meanings which embraces every detail of its formal and physical presentation in a specific historical context” (qtd. in Marotti xi). The paratext is the text. (348)

Clearly, the longstanding tradition in the publishing industry of seeing book covers as a particularly valuable asset, combined with the theoretical consensus that paratext (such as book covers) significantly affect a text's meaning, would suggest that it is important to carefully consider the cover designs of the American editions of *The Slap*.

The aforementioned blurb that was prominently displayed on the American television tie-in edition of *The Slap*—comparing it to two popular American television shows, *The Sopranos* and *The Real Housewives of Orange County*—is evidence of Penguin's attempt to reposition the book for an American audience. This effort began with the first American edition, released five years earlier than the American television tie-in edition. On the front cover of the first American edition, a blurb by Colm Tóibín compares *The Slap* to “Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*.” Even more dramatically, the book's tagline changes between the two editions. The first American edition contains the following tagline: “At a suburban barbecue, a man slaps a child who is not his own.” This is, in fact, the same tagline used for the original Australian edition. However, the American television tie-in edition uses the tagline, “One moment will change a family forever.” Much is lost in the rewrite, but what is most remarkable for the purposes of this article is the loss of the culturally specific phrase “suburban barbecue.” There is not a perfect American equivalent of this iconic Australian setting. As one critic of *The Slap*'s American television miniseries noted,

Many things have changed in the move from Australia to the US. The first major one is moving the action from suburban Melbourne to Brooklyn, New York, which clouds the fact that the opening environment where the



slap itself occurs is quintessentially Australian. The barbecue, the backyard cricket, the extensive alcohol and the simplicity of an outdoor summer birthday are lost in translation when the setting is moved to Brooklyn, with the replacements being a baseball bat and some all-American wine—not exactly the best American equivalent of an Aussie BBQ. (Caceda)

While the American television tie-in edition of *The Slap* does not take the dramatic liberties of the American television miniseries, the new tagline has a similar effect of obscuring the book's origins by erasing the culturally specific phrase “suburban barbecue.”

For an Australian reader, “suburban” is a vague (but nonetheless culturally significant) term, while “barbecue” is a much more precise term. For an American reader, it is exactly the opposite—“suburban” is more precise, while “barbecue” is vague. The term “suburb” in the United States refers to a residential area that is within the metropolitan area but remote from a city's business district, while in Australia a “suburb” can be literally across the street from a high-rise office building in the business district—or it can be on the edge of the bush, 80 kilometers/50 miles from the city center.

Nathanael O'Reilly describes this Australian sense of the “suburb”:

There are many different kinds of suburb, such as inner, outer, working-class, middle-class, homogenous, multicultural, established, newly developed, low-density, high-density, etc. The term “suburbia” is usually used to describe all of the suburbs as a whole, erasing difference. (10)

In Australia, everything in a metropolitan area that is not the central business district (CBD) is a “suburb,” while Americans make additional distinctions, such as “urban neighborhoods.” Thus, the “suburb” in the phrase “suburban barbecue” is a more precisely located concept for the American reader as compared to the Australian reader.

Meanwhile, the term “barbecue” for an Australian reader clearly signals sausages, lamb chops, and so forth—or, as it is technically known, “grilling”: cooking over high heat for a short period of time. However, for an American reader, the term “barbecue” can mean either cooking over high heat for a short period of time, or cooking over low heat for a long period of time. The former meaning is identical to the Australian definition of “barbecue” (although it is more likely to feature burgers, for example, than lamb chops), while the latter meaning applies to brisket, pulled pork, and so forth. The simultaneous existence of these two definitions in the United States means that the term “barbecue” in the phrase “suburban barbecue” is a more precisely located concept for the Australian reader as compared to the American reader. Of course, the culturally specific connotations of the phrase “suburban barbecue” go much deeper than even this superficial analysis would suggest.

As an aid to the process of getting books in the hands of readers, book covers are, of course, one among a myriad of marketing tools at the disposal of publishers. Therefore, this article continues its close examination of the publishing of *The Slap* in the United States by combining its discussion of cover design with the part of the publication process known as marketing. Giles Clark and Angus Phillips, in their classic textbook titled *Inside Book Publishing*, have described this part of the process in the following manner: “Marketing activities can be placed under the four general headings of what is

known as the marketing mix: product, price, place, and promotion”—the four P’s (248). It is no accident that the category that includes book cover design—that is, the category of “product”—appears first in this list. Clark and Phillips write,

Covers can give off messages about a book’s target audience, and they help to position the book in the mind of the consumer. [For example,] research carried out for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2000 found that the front cover and title of a book are taken by readers to be strong indicators of the kind of fiction, and whether the book is intended to be a male or female read. . . . A good cover will encourage the consumer to pick up a book, and the consumer is then five times more likely to buy (Phillips 28).  
(252)

In the case of the American editions of Tsiolkas’s *The Slap*, the American publisher is looking to encourage a particular type of consumer to pick up the book—in the first place, an *American* consumer.

This emphasis on repositioning the book for an American audience continued with Penguin’s other marketing efforts. On the popular social networking platform Twitter, Penguin Books USA—a very active account that posts multiples times per day and has nearly 4 million followers—posted only twice about *The Slap* (see Figure 2).

Nonetheless, these two tweets provide a glimpse into the publisher’s positioning of this book; indeed, Twitter’s 140-character limit (at the time—it has since increased to 280 characters) means these tweets operate almost like a distilled version of the publisher’s larger marketing plan. The emphasis on “spanking” and “abuse”—neither of which is a wholly accurate depiction of the novel’s titular slap—is evocative of an issue raised by

Melbourne-based freelance arts and culture writer Genevieve Wood in her review of *The Slap*'s American television miniseries:

The cultural differences that were central to the structure of Tsiolkas's story (and to a broader commentary of the divisions in Australian society in general) are overlooked, replaced with a new discrepancy: one between class and parenting styles. The focus changes to the moral dilemma the slap presents—whether or not Harry was right to slap Hugo.

Once again, while the American editions of the novel *The Slap* do not take the dramatic liberties of the American television miniseries, the marketing of these American editions via Twitter has a similar effect of obscuring the book's origins by emphasizing those themes that will most readily resonate with American audiences and downplaying others. In the second tweet, in particular, the emphasis on "race" represents a distinctly American investment in this topic, as explained by Tsiolkas in an author interview included as part of Penguin's online "Reader's Guide" for the novel:

The fact that Australia was never a slave colony means that we have subtly different ways of understanding race and racial oppression from the Americans. African Australians are people who have come from Africa or whose parents were migrants or refugees from Africa, largely over the last two decades. We did not have the tragedy of the Atlantic slave trade and so "color" is not as much an issue in terms of Australian racism as is the question of "ethnicity," i.e. cultural background.

Nowhere in the marketing for the Australian editions of *The Slap*, nor in Australian reviewers' responses to the novel, does the concept of "race" get discussed. Ethnicity,

yes—and, with even greater frequency, “multiculturalism”—but not race. Again, this is a subtle attempt to reframe the novel for American audiences.

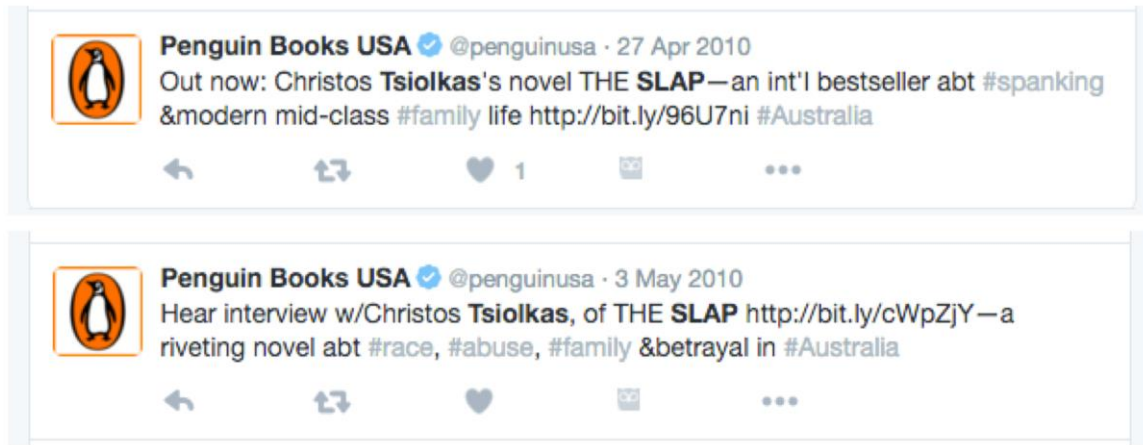


Figure 2. The only two tweets about Christos Tsiolkas's *The Slap* by the publisher of the American edition.

Of course, Wood's observation that the American television miniseries changes the focus to “the moral dilemma the slap presents—whether or not Harry was right to slap Hugo”—is precisely what my friend was responding to when he said that it “did a really good job of portraying this issue—the different perspectives on what it means to do the right thing as a parent.” But readers of this article might by now be wondering to what degree any of this affects readers of the novel itself, rather than viewers of either television miniseries. After all, readers of *Antipodes*, the journal in which this article appears, are generally scholars of literary studies. So what of the text of the novel itself—that is, the aforementioned “kernel of value and significance”? Has this been altered in any way to reposition the book for an American audience? And, if not, is not all the other stuff just window dressing, which readers understand can be ignored or written off as the contributions of a mercenary publisher rather than an inspired author? First of all, I take exception to the idea that paratext is not influential, or that truly discerning readers can simply look past it. There is simply no evidence to support this claim and much to

support the opposite. Nonetheless, let us look to the text of the novel itself, and in so doing shift our attention from the part of the publication process known as marketing to the part known as editorial.

When discussing the text of the novel itself, it is important to understand that the first Australian edition and the Australian television tie-in edition have different covers, but they are not, in fact, different editions. Same goes for the first American edition and the American television tie-in edition: they have different covers, but they are not different editions. However, the Australian editions *are* different editions from the American editions. Noted bibliographer Philip Gaskell explains, “An *edition* ... is all the copies of a book printed at any time (or times) from substantially the same setting of type” (313). So the Australian editions are printed from the same setting of type, while the American editions are printed from a different setting of type. This is not necessarily the case with all international editions. For example, the British edition of *The Slap* uses the same setting of type as the Australian editions, in spite of the fact that it is issued by a different publishing house and uses a cover design that is virtually identical to the American editions. Of course, resetting the type in a book requires a greater financial investment on the part of the publisher, which has to pay a designer, a typesetter, and a proofreader for the labor involved. It is interesting to note, however, that Tsiolkas’s American publisher left unchanged almost all of the things one might expect an American publisher to change during the process of resetting type. For example, Penguin retained the British/Australian spellings and the use of single quotation marks, which is contrary to the American standard of using double quotation marks. But because Penguin reset the

type, which means they had to proofread the entire book in order to ferret out errors that might have been introduced in the typesetting process, things were changed.

On the subject of editorial variations between Australian and American editions of an Australian author's book, the following (rather lengthy) excerpt from a chapter by Carol Hetherington makes a singular contribution to this conversation:

Relatively little attention has been paid to variant texts of Australian literary works[,] and where that has occurred (in the work of the Scholarly Editions Centre and of individuals like the late Elizabeth Perkins) it has usually been for pre-twentieth and early twentieth-century literary works. There has been little awareness of textual variations in more contemporary literature; these are more common than is often supposed—for example, Christopher Koch has revised and rewritten parts of several of his earlier works, there are substantial differences between editions of Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* and between the American and British editions of [Katharine Susannah] Prichard's *Haxby's Circus*, and a chapter is missing from some editions of [Peter] Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*. (80)

So uncommon is the type of scholarly work described here that the above excerpt is one of only a handful of analyses of “variant texts of Australian literary works” published in the mid- to late twentieth century, much less the twenty-first century. (Notably, David Carter and Roger Osborne's authoritative book on the subject of Australian books in the American marketplace offers coverage only through the 1940s.) In Hetherington's book chapter, she implicitly creates a taxonomy with three categories describing the editorial variations between editions. The first category is editorial variations that are the result of

changes made freely by the author—in other words, the author changed their mind between editions (as exemplified by Koch). The second category is editorial variations that are the result of changes made by the author at the behest of the publisher of an alternate (e.g. American) edition (as exemplified by Grenville and Prichard). The third and final category in Hetherington’s taxonomy is editorial variations that are the result of accidental changes introduced by the publisher (as exemplified by Carey).

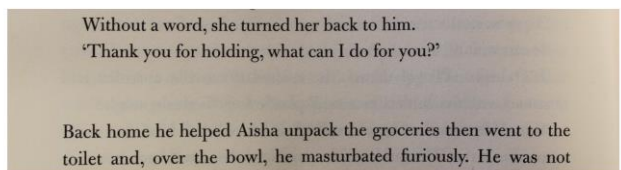
In Per Henningsgaard’s “The Editing and Publishing of Tim Winton in the United States,” he argues that Hetherington has overlooked a fourth category of editorial variation between editions. Henningsgaard writes, “These variations are ... intentional changes introduced by the publisher that are meant to either remedy perceived errors ... or failings ... in the first Australian edition, or translate a detail of the first Australian edition for an American audience” (143).

In the case of the Australian and American editions of *The Slap*, there are no examples of the first two categories of editorial variations and only a few examples of the third category (i.e. editorial variations that are the result of accidental changes introduced by the publisher). However, there are many examples of the fourth category of editorial variation (i.e. intentional changes introduced by the publisher). For example, the Australian edition mentions the prescription medicine “valium” (8), and the American edition corrects this to “Valium” (8) because it is a proper noun. The Australian edition also mentions a “*Spiderman*” comic book (28), and the American edition corrects this to “*Spider-Man*” (27). A character’s name is misspelled once in the Australian edition (instead of “Manolis,” it is spelled “Monolis” [293]), and this is corrected in the American edition (292). One final example: As shown in Figure 3, there are two blank



lines representing a section break on page 14 of the Australian edition of *The Slap*. This is the only place in the entire novel where there are two blank lines; any other time there is a section break, it is represented by only one blank line, which is the correction the American proofreader later imposed on the text. There are lots of other changes like this—specifically, changes meant to correct minor but clear errors that were missed during the copyediting and proofreading of the Australian edition.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Australian edition



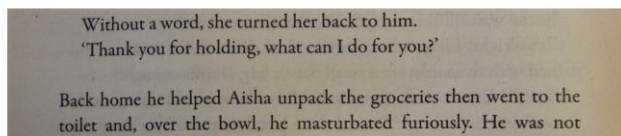
Without a word, she turned her back to him.  
'Thank you for holding, what can I do for you?'

Back home he helped Aisha unpack the groceries then went to the toilet and, over the bowl, he masturbated furiously. He was not

(14)

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### 1<sup>st</sup> American edition



Without a word, she turned her back to him.  
'Thank you for holding, what can I do for you?'

Back home he helped Aisha unpack the groceries then went to the toilet and, over the bowl, he masturbated furiously. He was not

(14)

Figure 3. The Australian edition of Christos Tsiolkas's *The Slap* contains a nonstandard section break that was later standardized for the American edition.

It may be tempting to dismiss these editorial variations as inconsequential. Even among textual critics and scholarly editors there is a tendency to dismiss such variations, as exemplified in the following excerpt from W. W. Greg's classic essay "The Rationale of Copy-text":

We need to draw a distinction between the significant, or as I shall call them "substantive," readings of the text, those namely that affect the author's meaning or the essence of his expression, and others, such in general as spelling, punctuation, word-division, and the like, affecting

mainly its formal presentation, which may be regarded as the accidents, or as I shall call them “accidentals,” of the text. (21)

The terms “substantives” and “accidentals” have been widely accepted and are regularly employed by textual critics and scholarly editors more than seventy years after Greg first coined them; they are a go-to concept for scholarly editors responsible for producing so-called “critical editions.” However, by labeling “spelling, punctuation, word-division, and the like” as “accidentals,” Greg is clearly dismissive of the (potential) meaningfulness of these editorial variations. In the aforementioned examples, it is easy to see why these sorts of editorial variations might be labeled “accidentals” and said to affect “mainly its formal presentation” rather than “the author’s meaning or the essence of his expression.”

However, there are other examples that begin to blur the line between accidentals and substantives because they doubtlessly affect “the author’s meaning,” however minor that effect might be. For example, the Australian edition reads (in a rather crude passage that is typical of Tsiolkas’s writing), “He came in a minute and he wiped the semen off the seat, chucked the toilet paper in the bowl, pissed, and flushed it all away” (14). The American edition deleted the Oxford/serial comma after “pissed,” so in the American edition it is unclear if he “pissed and flushed it all away” (14) as a single action, or if he pissed and *then* flushed it all away. Elsewhere in the Australian edition, a character asks, “What are you up tonight?” (231). In the American edition, this is changed to “What are you up to tonight?” (230). It is likely this change is correcting an error that was missed during the copyediting and proofreading of the Australian edition, but it is not certain; the character might just have a strange way of speaking. Either way, it is clear that this

change affects more than just “formal presentation”—it affects “meaning,” however slightly.

Yet another example of an editorial variation between the Australian and American editions of *The Slap* that affects meaning can be found in the following sentence from the Australian edition: “She spoke firmly and he obediently took the CD. It was burnt and the words Broken Social Scene were scrawled in thick blue slashes of texta across the disc” (22). In the American edition, the word “texta” has been changed to “text” (21). This is an example of the American copyeditor or proofreader—thinking they were remedying “errors ... or failings ... in the first Australian edition”—actually introducing an error into the text. “Texta” is a word that is regularly used in Australia and nowhere else. Australians use it where Americans use the word “marker.” The American proofreader clearly did not know this and assumed “texta” was a typo that he or she then corrected to “text,” which makes sense in the context of this sentence, though it alters the meaning. This is, of course, an example of (unintentionally) repositioning the book for an American audience. Most examples of the fourth category of editorial variation between editions can be described as “intentional changes introduced by the publisher that are meant to ... remedy perceived errors ... or failings ... in the first Australian edition,” but the “texta” example represents “intentional changes introduced by the publisher that are meant to ... translate a detail of the first Australian edition for an American audience” (Henningsgaard 143). While there are not lots of examples like this, it is also not the only example of this phenomenon.

This type of example raises questions about textual authority—more specifically, about on what authority an editor intervenes in a text. The proofreader who changed

“texta” to “text” was ignorant of the former’s possible meanings and, therefore, concluded that it must be a mistake. If a variation from the norm does not appear to contain meaning, it is natural to assume that it is an error that needs to be remedied. But especially when editing texts from different cultures, how do we identify and discriminate between that which is meaningful and that which is not? If we start from an assumption of ignorance, how do we identify the appropriate source of authority that will enable us to take action?

Editors working in consumer publishing are in almost unanimous agreement on the subject of an “appropriate source of authority,” as evidenced by the following quote from Alan D. Williams’s classic essay “What Is an Editor?”:

Two basic questions the editor should be addressing to the author are: Are you saying what you want to say? And, Are you saying it as clearly and consistently as possible? ... All of this is of course subject to free and extended discussion [but] the author is the ultimate arbiter, as all responsible editors would agree. (6)

On this issue, editors working in consumer publishing are, perhaps surprisingly, in agreement with a long tradition of textual bibliographers: “Intention is the authority on which [the Anglo-American editorial tradition] bases its practice of assembling eclectic critical texts of literary works ... The work is a historical act of intention, an ideal and enduring configuration created by an author” (Cohen and Jackson 106). However, standing in stark contrast to both editors working in consumer publishing and a long tradition of textual bibliographers, late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century critics from a wide variety of theoretical orientations (most notably structuralists and poststructuralists)

have frequently seconded Morse Peckham's contention that "the notion of 'reconstructing the author's intention' is theoretically ridiculous. (1) It is doubtful if an 'intention' in the sense it is used ever existed. (2) Even if it did, its existence was 'subjective' or 'psychological' and is now historical, and thus doubly inaccessible. (3) An author's statement of intention is subject to modification in action, like everyone else's." (Cohen xi, quoting Peckham 403)

Given these attacks on the notion of "authorial intent" underpinning much of the Anglo-American tradition of textual criticism, even G. Thomas Tanselle, a staunch defender of this tradition, admits that "during the last part of the twentieth century ... a focus on texts as social products came to characterize the bulk of the discussion of textual theory" (1). The critical and theoretical consensus within the field of textual criticism has instead begun to focus on "the forms of texts that emerged from the social process leading to public distribution, forms that were therefore accessible to readers," rather than inaccessible notions of authorial intention (Tanselle 1).

Clearly, then, in the case of *The Slap*, since the "forms that were ... accessible to readers" differed in, for example, comma placement, capitalization, and "texta" vs. "text," this difference is significant in the eyes and minds of some more recent textual critics and scholarly editors. Furthermore, it is not hard to believe that it also matters to readers; while they may not notice the subtle difference in rhythm, tone, and style created by adding or deleting a single comma, readers generally assume the book they are reading is identical to the book read by their friend or relative, even if that person is on the other side of the world, as long as the two copies share an author and title.

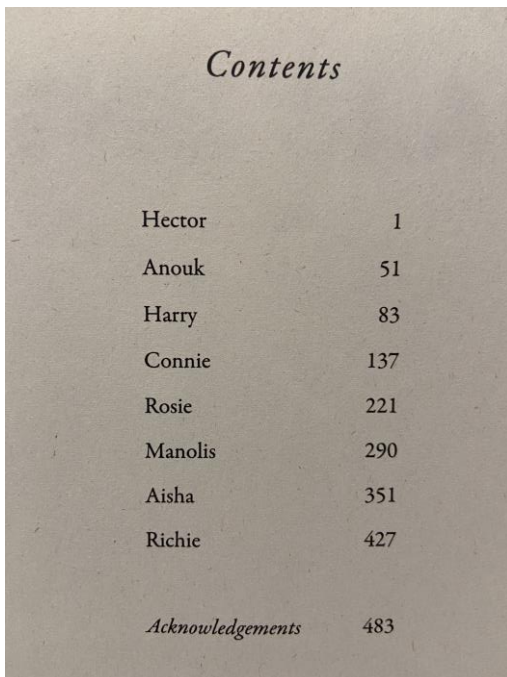
Of course, these editorial alterations in order to reposition the book for an American audience can hardly be compared to the alterations made to the television miniseries. Clearly, my friend's response to the American television miniseries was vastly different to what his response would be if he watched the Australian television miniseries. Can the same really be said for someone who reads the American edition of the novel (which my friend will read when he receives the copy I had shipped to him from Barnes & Noble) as compared to the Australian edition?

To insist that the experience is the same whether someone is reading an Australian edition or an American edition would require overlooking the influence of paratextual elements like cover design and social media marketing. It would also require the dismissal of "accidentals" as a source of meaning. Furthermore, where ostensibly meaningful or "substantive" variations have been identified, it would require the development of an argument that the effect of these variations is insignificant when measured against the vastness of the novel. To do so would be, at every turn, to consciously privilege outdated theories drawn from the fields of literary studies, textual criticism, and scholarly editing.

Nonetheless, perhaps one final example of a variation between the Australian and American editions of *The Slap* will convince any remaining sceptics. The Australian editions of *The Slap*, as is typical for a novel, have no table of contents. However, the American editions have a table of contents (see Figure 4). This table of contents contains a spoiler: it reveals to readers the novel's unique structure, which relies on each chapter being told from the point of view of a different character. Readers of an American edition begin the novel with this list of characters in mind, and they can refer back to it at any

time to see which character’s perspective they will be introduced to next. By way of contrast, readers of an Australian edition are greeted by an opening chapter titled “Hector,” but they do not know that each subsequent chapter is named after a different character. Indeed, they have to read 51 pages before they are greeted by a new chapter titled “Anouk” and a new point of view; by this time, they have likely forgotten entirely that the first chapter was titled “Hector,” so the new perspective is a surprise.

Interestingly, both the Australian and the American television miniseries adopted this structural approach, surprising viewers when the second episode is related from a new perspective. Of course, the nearest equivalent of a table of contents in a television production is the (infrequently consulted) list of episodes that is available during catch-up or on-demand viewing. It is also interesting to note that the experience of anyone reading Tsiolkas’s *The Slap* after having watched either miniseries is to have this same structural device spoiled for them—there is no longer an element of surprise.



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Figure 4. The table of contents found in the American editions of Christos Tsiolkas’s *The Slap*. The Australian editions do not contain a table of contents.

Clearly, this article contends that reading an American edition of *The Slap* is a substantially different experience to reading an Australian edition. What remains unknown, however, is how typical this is of American editions of contemporary books originally published in Australia. This article is unique, firstly, in the scope of its examination of the publishing of an Australian book in the United States—considering the influence of various parts of the publication process, including editorial, design, marketing, and screen adaptation. Secondly, it is rare for its close analysis of a previously overlooked fourth category of editorial variation between editions—“intentional changes introduced by the publisher that are meant to either remedy perceived errors ... or failings ... in the first Australian edition, or translate a detail of the first Australian edition for an American audience.” Finally, this article is uncommon because its analysis of editorial variation is focused on a book that is not known for having a particularly unusual editorial history. As Alice Grundy writes in her forthcoming book *Editing Fiction: Three Case Studies from Postwar Australia*, “Rather than looking only to outlier cases in the study of editing, such as Maxwell Perkins and Thomas Wolfe or Gordon Lish and Raymond Carver, it is important for students of editing and scholars alike to examine the contributions of editors operating within the standard range of intervention that most contemporary books receive.” With a total of three elements that distinguish this article as unique or rare, it is no wonder it remains unknown how typical Tsiolkas’s *The Slap* is of American editions of contemporary books originally published in Australia. Only more research—focused on books representing a variety of genres, degrees of commercial and critical success, and diverse authors—can answer this question. It will take time to



produce this research, so more immediately I am eagerly anticipating my friend's response to the American edition of *The Slap* that I purchased and had shipped to him.

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