



THE SYNTAX OF RESISTANCE: THE USE OF LANGUAGE AND GENRE TO ASSERT INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AND INCLUSION IN AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

This paper will explore the use of language as a form of resistance among the indigenous writers of Australia. My plan is to examine how altering English syntax and modifying the conventions of narrative genre create layers of resistance to literary conventions to assert indigenous identity and belonging. Syntax is a path of disclosure that reaches deep into the matrix of indigenous literature and, just as paganism embraces a spirituality free of dogma, this body of literature pursues a voice, a syntax free of the language structures of the Invader. Paradoxically, indigenous writers seek a language independent of colonial influences, while knowing this may not be possible, except through the reanimation of the Dreamtime, that primordial state of the beginning.

Keywords

Syntax of Resistance, Indigenous Writers, Paganism

“Poetry”

When I asked
why he was shot
on the street by a cop
they counterasked:
What does that have to do
with poetry?

—Uche Nduka

This paper will explore the use of language as a form of resistance among the indigenous writers of Australia. My plan is to examine how altering English syntax and modifying the conventions of narrative genre create layers of resistance to literary conventions to assert indigenous identity and belonging. Syntax is a path of disclosure that reaches deep into the matrix of indigenous literature and, just as paganism embraces a spirituality free of dogma, this body of literature pursues a voice, a syntax free of the language structures of the Invader. Paradoxically, indigenous writers seek a language independent of colonial influences, while knowing this may not be possible, except through the reanimation of the Dreamtime, that primordial state of the beginning.

For the indigenous writers, the challenge was to do battle with what Frederic Jamison’s called Strategies of containment.” The indigenous people has faced various strangers of containment from the mission schools that prohibited the speaking of indigenous languages so that the process of social assimilation would include religious and linguistic eradication. To assimilate meant losing one’s history, culture, beliefs and language. The other piece of a strategy of containment is what Geoff Rodoreda in *The Mabo Turn in Australian Fiction*, has brilliantly analyzed which involved the creation of the *terra nullius* as the historical strategy of containment for removing any claim to land that the indigenous people may have had. By asserting *terra nullius* the English created a strategy to contain any local or global objections to colonizing this land. Rodoreda studies this history and how literary figures post Mabo confronted this position. Like the attempt to abolish the indigenous languages and substitute English, this strategy of containment has met with resistance. To substitute one language for another can, within a colonial context, contain the thoughts and expressions of the original people. It is, in reality, taking the position of *lingua*

nullius. When Fogarty says “To write is to use /a medium/ that is not mine, he opens a vista on the use of linguistic oppression to contain the expression and hence the independence of indigenous thinkers. To use another language, means, de facto within the colonial context, to filter in all of the cultural and historical messages embedded that language. It is a form of linguistic appropriation and containment to use the language of the invader, since that language contains the very ethos that has attempted to destroy the indigenous ethos. It can be a form of suicide as Fogarty says in “Kitchens OF THE KETCH UPS.”

For the purposes of this paper, *I am defining syntax both as a characteristic of the poetic line and as the path of narrative disclosure. Syntax here means more than word order; it mean how the poetry is written and how novels pursue narrative. My definition encompasses how language organized either a line, stanza, chapter or novel has been reworked by indigenous writers both as a means of resistance to euro-center stylistic models and as the means of recovering a voice in a language other than the original indigenous versions.* This syntactic and generic resistance shapes the major work of Sally Morgan, Alexis Wright, Kath Walker (Oodgeroo) and Lionel G. Fogarty. Each of these writers uses genre and syntax to affirm the identity of the original people. Linear narrative is replaced by dream or yarn narrative in which chronology and polyphonic voices lead to a non-temporal reality, the reality of *dreaming*, which connects all storytelling to the past, the present, the earth, and the ancestors. Wright especially follows this pattern in *Carpentaria*. Morgan redefines the search for identity of the *bildungsroman*, not as an individual quest but as a communal one. Oodgeroo (formerly Kath Walker) tells the story of her people in the 1960's with a powerful voice, addressing white Australian as well as the Noonuccal people and herself. In the poetry of Oodgeroo and Lionel Fogarty, a strategic redefinition of poetic syntax and subject matter appropriate English to the indigenous voice. For Fogarty, syntactic and semantic resistance dominates his work; for Oodgeroo, a subject matter unfamiliar to Australian readers shapes her vision.

In examining Fogarty's poetry, critics have been quick to recognize that he has altered the conventional use of English. In a wonderful article, “Naming the Voids of Multiculturalism in “Biral Biral”: A new reading of the Poetry of Lionel Fogarty,” Ali Alizadeh makes it clear how critical responses to Fogarty observed his linguistic style. Quoting from Colin Johnson, Alizadeh focuses on the implications of the title, “Guerilla Poetry: Lionel Fogarty's Response to Language Genocide.” His characterization of Fogarty's poetry as ‘guerilla’ captures the essence of his poetic practice and “of his staunchly decolonized, aboriginal identity.” (129)

In his poem, “Bam Gayandi,” Fogarty makes it clear that his language needs to overcome any structures imposed by the Invaders:

Trundling rhythms vibes gammon love
 Thing in melodrama Anglo-Celtic
 Sink in a dishearten nostalgia
 Thinking negative Murri sound a word
 Are not continues
 Cos no love in a go dam school
 The white man society won't ever mould
 Me writing or saying...

The voice, the syntax, the grammar, and the lexicon all push against “The white man's society” and resist the stylized and conventional structure of their language, characterized by the ‘trundling rhythms’ of awkward and foreign meters. What are we to make of “Trundling rhythms vibes gammon love” other than the use of ‘guerilla’ syntax to de-structure the line. The use of ‘vibes’ as the central verb transforms the semantic reality of the line into a mocking of the ‘melodrama Anglo-Celtic.’ The subsequent lines, “Thinking negative Murri sound a word/Are not continues,” uses an infinitive to stand in for a verb and then reverses what could be “murri sounds are not words” into ‘Murri sound a word/are not continues.’ Suggesting that the Murri sounds are not really words in the world of the invader and that ‘thinking negative Murri words’ should the poet accept the idea that his language doesn't meet the standards of ‘Anglo-Celtic’ linguistic, resists the assault and asserts that his writing will assert its identity through its own form, “The white an society won't ever mold, Me writing or saying...” which blatantly uses “me writing or saying’ instead of the more correct Anglo-Celtic “my writing. This shift of the possessive pronoun from the correct ‘my writing’ to the grammatically incorrect ‘me writing’ asserts the poet's right to his own language in the face of another tradition, loudly proclaiming that ‘no school’ will alter his voice. School here becomes the instrument of the ‘correctness’ of the invader's language; yet the poet rejects the ‘school’ and its attempt to ‘normalize and therefore evaporate his voice. The grammatical misuse of “Me writing or saying’ stands as an act of syntactic and grammatical resistance to artistic and linguistic assimilation. The voice, the syntax, the grammar, and the lexicon all push against “The white man's society” and resist the stylized and conventional structure of their language, characterized by the ‘trundling rhythms’ of awkward and foreign meters. When we read the line, “Trundling rhythms vibes gammon love,” the syntactic structure and the grammar move away from the conventional. With ‘vibes’ as a singular verb form following ‘rhythms,’ which is plural, the assertion that the conventional ‘Anglo-Celtic’ rules of grammar do not apply to this poem. To use a single verb with a plural subject

illustrates his point a few lines later that “The white man society won’t ever mound/Me writing or saying.” The simple act of violating the subject-verb number rule articulates how Fogarty’s voice asserts itself into a Murri grammar of identity. “Thinking negative Murri sound a word/Are not continues” supports his point that his ancestral language of the Murri people had their ‘words’ that cannot be negated by the Anglo-Celtic melodrama of warring against a language to reshape identity. The risk is self-hatred, captured by the ‘dishearten nostalgia’ that can sink into the language of the poet because it ‘are not continues.’ The rejection of this ‘white man society’ that will never ‘mound/Me writing’ energizes the anti-grammar of his poetic utterance and fuses a more ancestral sense of syntax with this medium that has coerced his expression.

In another poem, “KITCHENS OF THE KETCH UPS,” Fogarty conducts his ‘guerilla’ poetry war with the same level of syntactic resistance. When I first presented “Kitchens of the Ketch Ups” to a class of undergraduate at City University of New York, they asked me what does this poem mean; it makes no sense. Their response was based on their expectation that they could unpack the poem by following a basic convention syntax, in which the pattern of subject-verb-object with some variation and the semantic acceptance of fundamental meaning would guide them through. Fogarty words choice and word order ‘prevented’ these readers from entering into the poem’s narrative in the way that they had been accustomed to doing. Fogarty required them to readjust their linguistic expectations to a version of ‘English’ they hadn’t seen before. Once they accepted that invitation to read and hear from his perspective, then the poem began to reveal itself to them. When they read Hayden’s “Those Winter Sundays,” for example, they encountered a syntax and semantic structure within the conventions of Anglo-Celtic language in which Hayden’s narrative was their narrative: “Sundays too my father got up early.” Here the order of the words fits the pattern of spoken English. Even the special emphasis on a seemingly unimportant word, ‘too,’ was clear to them that the father did something special for his children despite the day of rest. When they read Cummings’ “in Just,” a revolutionary poem in its time, the syntax, despite the rejection of capital letter and spacing was clear: “in Just spring when the world is mud-luscious the little lame balloon man whistles..” I have run the lines together to demonstrate that while the poem has a visual audacity, the syntax and the semantic base remain fairly conventional and comprehensible. This is not the case in Fogarty’s “KITCHENS OF THE KETCH UPS,” whose title with its use of kitchens, typically places of preparation, and ketch ups, playing on the tomato sauce products whose spelling suggests but doesn’t state the embedded sense of ‘catch up,’ with its political and social ramifications. The substitution of ‘ketch ups’ as both noun and verb for ‘catch ups’ focuses on the social, political and economic position of indigenous people as being behind in their society, and that that society, which functions as a kitchen, a place of preparation or formation (much in the way New Yorker refer to the area on the west side known from spawning criminals as “Hells Kitchen,” has not and is not planning to sustain the ‘KETCH UPS’ in any way. There doesn’t seem to be any catching up for the indigenous people in this culture, since their kitchen has been stolen from them.

I press my words in no mind
Just their injustices
We evaporate cloths from the 1960’s
So circuits can see how we were naked
Nails in socks, hawks in jeans, dry sweat in noses.

His assertion that word and reality may not or need not correspond suggests that these words are far removed from his ancestral language, and this resistance pushes his poetry into almost incomprehensible realms if one reads with the mind of the invader. Fogarty demands that his ‘unconventional and revolutionary style’ be heard less with the euro-australian sense of decorum and more with the rhythms of the ancient language that this syntactic resistance attempts to recreate. Johnson makes an insightful point about his style in a section passage quoted by Alizadeh: “Fogarty writes in a manner of an aboriginal songman against the genocide inflicted on his language and the tyranny imposed on him by a foreign language” (129;48); Fogarty practices what Barbara Harlow called “resistance literature” in taking on the voice of the ancient songman.

When Fogarty writes lines such as

I swallow the unused nerves for my room’s snapping
Bed click go the button shoes up the roof drop dresses.
We stomach a lean on cushioned leg stand up belly beer mans
As his next to slow kiss he gave.

We, as readers, know that we cannot offer a narrative paraphrase as we can with other poems. For example, we can paragraph in narrative form the content of e.e. Cummings’ “in Just” without much difficulty. It is a poetic narrative about children beginning to approach adolescent as the goat-footed balloon man,” in a reference to Pan, begins to call them to the new role. Yet here, what paragon can unpack “I swallow the unused nerves for my room’s snapping.” What exactly does the line suggest? What does ‘swallow’ mean and what are “unused nerves”?

Fogarty pushes this semantic liminal structure into another ‘language,’ that conveys the depth of the indigenous loss both historically and linguistically. “Bed click” suggests a sound, but what sound? The sound of the bed; the sound of the fastening shoes, the sound of nerves ‘snapping’ into his being. Does snapping mean surprise, does it mean to have a mental episode as it “I snapped” and lost my mind? Does it suggest that his room, the stanza of his mind, has ‘snapped’ but in that act of breaking has found itself? Fogarty pushes us to understand that when one writes in a language that does not belong to the poet and is, in fact, the language of those who attempted to destroy his language, then the linguistic centers of the brain snap as a new language forces its way in. The guerrilla nature of Fogarty’s poetry then uses that language against the enemy. As the poem continues with “Bed click go the button shoes up the roof drop dresses,” the read needs to move from the click of the shoes being fastened, however, with a bed click and culminating in “roof drop dresses,” meaning what. What are ‘roof drop dresses’? Is this a twist on ‘roof-top’ or ‘drop-dead dresses’? We must remember that the ‘dresses’ come from outside the indigenous community as a sign of forced assimilation.

As the poem begins to move toward its ending, Fogarty uses verb forms such as “I field the space of the sweaters,” and “I suicide all my hands to the indistinguishable strange chewed ultimate/ nightmare.” Here the use of suicide can mean submit to the world of the invaders; it can mean losing the indigenous use of the hands and subverting them to manufacturing; it also suggests by using the phrase, ‘ultimate nightmare,’ that the Dreamtime has been damaged and replaced by nightmare. A few lines later, he writes that “I murdered the dreaming with a white apron so can eat in / the massage soap cupped up stumbling palms,” the introduction of suicide then becomes murder, the murder of the dream out of the necessity to live. The conventional meaning of suicide is to kill oneself; here the persona says that a part of his body, his hands have been suicided in a brilliant and unconventional synecdoche of self-multinational. “He continues the twisting of conventional syntax with lines such as “We no in take vanity of other.” Conventional syntax would have it “We do not take in the vanity of others,” but this embodies resistance to the ease and submission to the conventional. In the final line of the poem, “I press a barber’s world for the new hairs to grow we pails of/suspended bodies minds,’ all syntactic regularity fades away. The semantic ‘meaning’ of “I press a barber’s world,” suggests limiting growth, for that is what barbers do: they limit growth and reshape the natural condition of hair. The poet presses the idea of shaping like a barber to find ‘new hairs,’ I.e. new words, new patterns that reflect more accurately the condition of the ‘suspended bodies minds;’ her he crushes body and mind together in flux of the possessive and the plural to portray the indigenous mind-set as in a state of suspension until a voice is found.

In “Tired of Writing, from “Yoogum Yoogum, “ (1982) Fogarty declares his starting point in this process of resistance writing:

To write is to use
a medium
that is not mine.
If I don’t succeed, bear with me.
I see words beyond any acceptable meaning
And this is how I express my dreaming.

The poem is clear: writing is not his ancestral medium, and he sees beyond the acceptable or conventional use of language to the point that this ‘dreaming’ inspires the alterations he makes in English. His poetic difficulty is not the cultivated obscurity of modernist poets; instead, it emerges from his attempt to reveal the ancestral dreaming, which creates an authenticity that challenges the language of the invader. This resistance can also include those technological elements that accompanied the imposition of an alien language. In a poem, “Aint No Abo Way of Communication,” Fogarty shifts the focus of struggle for authenticity within the aberrations created by technology and the grammar of this new world. “Me don’t want a have any to do you no more” alters the conventional English syntax, which would read “I don’t want to have anything to do with you any more” into an assertion of independent statement in a resistant syntax. We know what he means; he says it his way not in a medium that isn’t his:

Godfather, do you remember?
Ring, ring, the phone calls for you
come grab, it’s Yubba, for you
Hello, hello, who’s this?
You know who.
Look, Yubba, me don’t like your attitude or your ways

Me don’t want a have any to do you no more.
Well, get ruced. Bang, down it went...

Yubba, whoever you are, ring me no more
 But see me, feel one.
 Don't use their phones, be a real murrrie.

To be authentic, 'a real murrrie,' demands a poetics of personal encounter that reflects the dreaming inherent in the indigenous people through a connection to the oral tradition that allows for multi-voices and linguistic freedom. When Roderada wrote about the Mabo decision and how important this way to reclaiming and asserting the ancestral connection to the land, he indirectly supports the idea that the connection to language, which cannot be decided by the court, has to be reclaimed if the dreaming can recur. For Fogarty, reclaiming language creates the dreaming, the primordial ontology of his poetry.

Fogarty benefits from Kath Walker' (Oodgeroo) publication of "We are going" in 1965, which was the first book of poems by an Indigenous Australian to be published. Walker defines the subjects of poetry somewhat differently from the literary establishment in Australia at the time, and her work was attacked for not really being poetry. Her method of combining the esthetic with the harsh political life of black Australian gives her poetry incredible strength and clarity as resistance poetry. From the opening lines of this first collection, "We want hope, not radicalism/Brotherhood, not ostracism," she defines the poem as a public, communal, and individual utterance. The title of this poem, "Aboriginal charter of rights," suggests that poetry has the obligation to fuse the communal with the personal. As she concludes another poem, "A Song of Hope," she demonstrates that her work strives for both present and past modalities:

See plain the promise,
 Dark freedom-lover!
 Night's nearly over,
 And though long the climb,
 New rights will greet us,
 New mate ship meet us,
 And joy complete us
 In our new Dream Time.

Here Walker has fused the multi-emotional experiences of the past, present and future with the communal and individual spirit as she envisions recreating the New Dream Time, that connective grammar, linking earth and humanity into a singularity, reflective of the essence of black life. The Dream Time is the ultimate consciousness of identity.

When these poems first appeared and were followed by a second volume, "The Dawn is at Hand," there was some strongly negative reaction. Wrote critic Andrew Taylor in 1967 that "She is not a poet, and her verse is not poetry in any true sense." The idea that these pieces are not poems results from applying a standard for evaluation that comes from another culture, another world. Marginalization is a 'strategy of containment.'" Penny Van Toorn took on this attitude in her contributions to *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*. In her article, "Indigenous texts and narratives," she engages with this type of argument and indeed expectation:

The Aboriginal writers knew their work would be evaluated according to whether it demonstrated not only their mastery of the craft of writing, but also their correct reading and internalization of European cultural values and Christian beliefs. This kind of writing Mudrooroo has called "writing for the governor's pleasure", and the governor often quite literally had a hand in producing these tests. (pp23-24)

That 'governor's hand' can be heard in Taylor's statement that "her verse is not poetry in any true sense," the true sense being the degree to which the indigenous poet internalized European cultural and literary standards. This is not Walker's idea of what her poetry is and should be. Fogarty building on Walker's work can say that "to write is to use/a medium/ that is not mine" because years earlier Walker has asserted that she will make this European cultural medium into an instrument of the indigenous voice. Walker's poems stress the importance of making speech true in ways that may or may not resemble establishment taste; yet her words project the truth for indigenous people; her voice, her semantic choices and the syntax of her authenticity assert the poetics of liberation:

To our father's fathers
 The pain, the sorrow;
 To our children's children
 The glad tomorrow.

This poetic voice cannot submit to what Federic Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, called the “strategies of containment.” Walker, like other black Australian writers, rejects containment and sets out to co-mingle the ancient and the modern voice into an emblem of the Dreamtime. Oodgeroo has transformed the lyric into a communal voice that recognizes how them ko0. 9o ent has been altered by the brutality of the past and how even though these poems resonate with the pain of the loss through invasion, violence, rape, racism and the appropriation of territory, poetry must acknowledge and renew. Just as rock and roll, rap and hip hop have faced ‘containment’ by being characterized as non-music or even anti-music, Oodgeroo’s poetry rejected the attempt to limit or contain its voice with the syntax of western conventionality. When Oodgeroo writes in “Leave Straddle Unabridged,” that

The Rainbow Serpent sighs
Meditating
The folly of man.

we experience the recognition that runs through the poem’s vision that the past cannot be restored, and that the Invasion of 1788 has created an historical barrier that language may not have the power to eradicate. Yet Oodgeroo pushes the orality of the yarn to offer a contemporary vision of that first world, and through her syntax of resistance recreates a New Dreamtime. First comes the recognition of loss in “Then and Now”:

I have seen corroboree
Where that factory belches smoke;
Here, where they have memorial park
One time Lubra’s dug for yams...
No more woomera, no more boomerang,
Children of nature we were then,
No clocks hurrying crowds to toil.
Now I am civilized and work in the white way,
Now I have dress, now I have shoes:
‘Isn’t she lucky to have a good job!’
Better when I had only a dillybag.

However, Oodgeroo will not remain trapped within the self-destructive delusions of nostalgia; her poetry pushes toward an alternative. Critic Ruth Dooboy offers an insight into the apocalyptic nature of Oodgeroo’s vision when she says, “Now is the time Kath Walker calls the New Dreamtime,” which both recognizes the loss of the past and the promise of the present. (52). This New Dreamtime makes its appearance throughout Oodgeroo’s work, nowhere more direct and beautiful than in “A Song of Hope:”

Look up, my people,
The dawn is breaking.
The world is waking
To a new bright day.

Asserting a grammar of identity becomes central in Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, in which the character, Sally, sets out on a quest to discover her identity, which has been obscured by her family and her society. She searches for her place in The Dreaming, essentially her DNA, that internal, imprinted grammar and syntax responsible for her being. Morgan follows the ancestral practice that a story needs to be told by many voices, recreating the yarning of the ancients. Sally has very little success in finding her way as an individual. She flounders in school, argues with her mother, Gladys, battles with her grandmother, Daisy, and is frustrated by her Uncle Arthur’s refusal to talk about his past. In fact, Sally finds herself trapped within the singularity of her voice. Unlike the traditional *bildungsroman*, Sally’s journey to identity requires a communal effort. The recovery of identity and of the dream requires a dialogic interaction, a conversation with her family and her long dead ancestors. Lizzy Finn writes about how Morgan has “three transcribed oral narrative {one by Arthurs, Gladys and finally Diasy}, which creates three ”different levels, different competing representations, that reveal more complex and problematic versions of indigenous identity that are not immediately recognizable. These levels of orality blend with the written autobiography (Sally’s direct narrative) and create what Finn calls “postnational hybridization.” She refers to Bakhtin’s ideas that dybridisation is “the mixing of two social language in one utterance. It is the meeting of two different linguistic consciousnesses.” (14) Without this communal dialogue, “this polyvocal text” identity would be eiusive. any chance for understanding of the self will fade into the obscurity of contemporary life, which would prefer to see aboriginal identity disappear with the past and ultimately obliterated by the

government's proposed assimilation plans. This syntactic hybrid separate this novel of the search for identity from the conventional European models.

Morgan establishes the disconnect with Sally's world in the opening paragraph of *My Place*:

The hospital again, and the echo of my reluctant feet through the long empty corridors. I hated hospitals and hospital smells. I hated the bare boards that gleamed with newly applied polish, the dust-free window-sills, and the flashes of shiny chrome that snatched my distorted shape as we hurried past. I was a grubby five-year-old in an alien environment. (1)

At the beginning of her story, Sally feels alienated from the world around her, from the sterile atmosphere of the hospital, with its antiseptic smell, polished floors, and gleaming surfaces that distort her shape. This is not Sally's world; she, like indigenous people throughout Australia, have become strangers in their own land and, more dangerously, within their own minds.

Sally's character will not submit to the strategies of containment. It is only when Gladys, Daisy and Uncle Arthur agree to tell their stories, their yarns, that Sally's world begins to coalesce into her new Dreamtime. In the chapter, "Return to Corunna," Sally meets members of her family. However, that night, she has a vision, which her mother has shared, of her dead relatives and thus of her identity:

Suddenly, it was as if a window in heaven had been opened and I saw a group of Aboriginal women standing together. They were all looking at me. I knew instinctively it was them. Three adults and a child. Why, that's Rosie, I thought. And then the tears came. As I cried, a voice gently said, "Stop worrying, they're with me now." Within minutes, I was asleep." (286)

At this moment, Sally has felt her identity because of these interactions with other storytellers and ancestors; she has had a glimpse of the Dreamtime and her place within it. She now knows who she is and what is the source her origin. Here identity comes from the assimilation but not disappearance of the individual into the community. Her search for identity has not followed a linear path of conventional narrative episodic structure but has wandered through a complex dreamtime experience of polyphonic narratives, of yarns, and of connections with her own dreamtime. Until Arthur, Nan and Gladys begin telling their stories, Sally search for identity remains an isolated and individual quest. Once the others join in the "yarning," then the truth begins to be revealed. This goes against the conventional structure of *bildungs roman* narrative style; Morgan uses the indigenous method of the yarn, in which a story being told by an individual and then other voices join in. It is only once those other voices begin that the story takes on a profound reality. Some critics (Higgins, Johnson and Muecke) see the quest for identity in a more individualistic sense. The European-American *bildungs roman* stresses how the individual must escape form societal 'nets' (Joyce in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) Morgan has blended these polyvocal narratives into a single communal story of identity. My argument here is that in *My Place*, success in the quest for identity depends on the embracing and the osmosis into the community, the tribe.

Alexis Wright brings the discussion of syntax and generic resistance to another plane in her amazing novel, *Carpentaria* (2006). Wright follows Morgan in that there are multiple storytellers in her book, following the idea of the narrative of 'yarning' to create authentic version of the Dream, which expresses the truth when the voice of the ancestors joins with current voices. *Carpentaria* wanders through the genealogy of creation and the Dreamtime with a series of interconnected stories about characters from the northern region of Australia. No story as a singular narrative can complete the yarn; all four or five strains of storytelling need to be woven together by the collective understanding that life, time, and history function communally. As she said in an interview in 2013:

The world I try to inhabit in my writing is like looking at the ancestral tracks spanning our traditional county, which, if I look at the land, combines all stories, all realities from the ancient to the new and makes it one—like all the strands on a long rope.

Unlike Morgan, Wright's story doesn't revolve around a single character's search for personal identity but around an entire region's struggle for identity in the midst of a destructive mining project that has maimed the land as well as the lives of those indigenous people for whom this region was the connection to the Dreamtime. When Rodoreda writes about how the Mabo decision conveyed and enhanced the idea of 'Indigenous Sovereignty,' and how writers such as Wright, Scott and Morgan embedded this independence in their fiction, it also leads to the idea that the assertion of 'political' or 'historical' sovereignty encompasses the sovereignty of the literary act. That sovereignty emerges from the 'syntax' of the narrative that enfolds in *Carpentaria*. Just as "an Indigenous character is represented as being or becoming a sovereign custodian of land" (Rodoreda, page 163, footnote 3), Wright and the other writers we have examined have become the 'sovereign custodian' of language, fiction and

syntax. My argument posits that just as the Mabo decision supported the idea of Indigenous rights to land, essentially a spatial reality, but also led to the assertion of the sovereignty of time (Dreamtime) and language. Ascroft argues that

“In using the word *utopianism* [as opposed to ‘utopia’] we already make a distinction between the fantasy, the “placeless place” [...], and the irrepressible belief in a liberated future. The issue is not what is imagined, the *product* of utopia so to speak, but the *process* of imagining itself. (“Post -Colonial” 29) (164)

That “process of imagining itself” brings us back to how Wright approaches the ‘liberated’ future through the emergence of the Dreamtime as an active part of the narrative and how time becomes the primary force in ‘liberating’ space. In the relationship between space as a “product” and time as a “process” the new voice of the indigenous narrative replaces the historical-chronologically based western narrative. Colonial history manipulates the idea of the ownership of space, but it cannot slip away from the power of the time, as a fluid and dreamlike process of recovery. Utopia becomes as much of a *time* as it is a *place*.

Revolving around the lives of four characters, Norm Phantom, Joseph Midnight, Mozzie Fishman and Will Phantom, *Carpentaria* traces their interactions in the present and with the past. Each character has a special power, either to understand the sea, the land, the language of the ancestors, or the vitality of the earth. Adele Sefton-Rowston, in a wonderfully insightful article, “Creation Stories and Apocalypse in *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book*,” makes a significant connection between Wright’s style and the theme of syntax as resistance. She believes that “Wright’s strange semantics and textual themes become audible when aligned with the genre of dystopian fiction...” The transformation of the indigenous utopia from a state of oneness between human and nature into a dystopia, ravaged by the mining of sacred lands, isn’t self-created but comes from without, from the invaders, and will only be restored to the Dreamtime through the power of the yarn that reasserts the primordial consciousness in which the living and the dead, the human and the natural, exist together:

In this country, where legends and ghosts live side by side in the very air, inside the Pricklebush home no man, love-forlorn or not, sets to sea while the morning star shines about their fishing boats waiting for them. (94)

Earlier in Norm’s yarn, Wright stresses the duality of this state of mind: “He saw both these worlds whenever he looked at one” (247). This is not Gothic, which exists as a deviation from and an affirmation of the norm; this coeval state of legends and ghosts, of the living and the dead, existing side by side, reveals the presence of the dreamtime. Finally, as Mozzie Fishman surveys some of the damage caused by blowing up the accursed mine and begins speaking with the spirits from that Dreamtime:

And the walls, they screamed at you with the cryptic, painted spirits of the Dreamtime. And inside the walls was the was the movement of spirits, moving further forward....Old Fishman was in another world, crying and talking the dead language...(433)

At the ‘end’ of the novel, as Norm Phantom walks over flooded plains with his grandson, Bala, as his consciousness shifts to Bala and what will come next. He has navigated through danger, the past and the present and now his yarn moves freely in the ghost world and the present narrative:

The boy thought about all of those eventualities, where the enigma of time sidestepped desire and ran away from dreams. His face lit into a smile as he looked up at the big man surveying the flood plains. All dreams come true somehow, Norm murmured, sizing up the flattened landscape, already planning the home he would rebuild on the same piece of land where his old house has been, among the spirits in the remains of the ghost town, where the snake slept underneath. (515)

That snake, “the ancestral serpent,” from the first page of the novel, “came down those billions of years ago,’ and still lives underneath and within the fabric of existence. Norm can now feel its presence—he is in the Dreamtime.

Finally, precolonial space and time infuse energy in Morgan’s *My Place*, in Wright’s *Carpentaria*, and in Walker’s early poems and Fogarty’s body of work. The dialogic tension between the dreaming and the colonial present shapes the imaginative structure and the artistic resistance that rejects colonialism as a monologic entity

with one religion, one culture, one language, one past, one power and one race. Indigenous resistance and assertion of its culture creates a dialogic state in which past and present mingle within The Dreamtime. As Wally Caruana defines it in his study of Aboriginal Art: “This term does not refer to the state of dreams or unreality, but rather to a state of reality that is beyond the mundane...The dreaming provides the ideological framework by which human society retains a harmonious equilibrium with the universe—a charter and mandate that has been sanctified over time.” (10).

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