

**Reimagining the Antipodes: Voices,
Landscapes, and Identities in Australian
Literature and Culture**

Edited by

Rituparna Chakraborty
Shubham Bhattacharjee



Swami Vivekananda University

Published by

Penprints
India

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Published by Penprints

Official Address: P-925, Lake Town, Block A, Kolkata-700089,
West Bengal, India.

Phone no-8697875467

Website - www.penprints.in

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Cover - ©PENPRINTS

Price: INR 500 | \$22

First Edition - 2025

ISBN: 978-81-993920-2-1

ISBN 10 : 81-993920-2-9

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Printer: S. P. Communications Pvt. Ltd. 1st Floor, Merlin Marigold, 31B, Raja
Dinendra St, Yogi Para, Garpar, Machuabazar, Kolkata, West Bengal 700009

Acknowledgement

For the successful completion of this edited volume, we are most indebted to the vision of our Hon'ble Chancellor, Dr. Nandan Gupta, the inspiration of our Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor Professor (Dr.) Subrata Kumar Dey, the support of our Chief Operating Officer, Shri Saurabh Adhikari, the guidance of our Chief Executive Director (Academics), Professor (Dr.) Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, and the co-operation of our Registrar, Professor (Dr.) Pinak Pani Nath.

We would also like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the concerned faculty members of Swami Vivekananda University, the contributors and collaborators, who have played an active part in the realization of this book.

Preface

Australian Studies occupies a distinctive and evolving place within the humanities, emerging as a field that continuously interrogates questions of identity, belonging, and representation in the context of one of the world's most complex cultural geographies. Its intellectual terrain extends beyond the borders of the nation-state, encompassing the multiplicity of voices, landscapes, and histories that shape the Australian experience. From the earliest colonial encounters to the postcolonial reconfigurations of the present, Australia has served as both a site of displacement and discovery — a space where the meanings of home, nation, and humanity itself are ceaselessly negotiated.

The study of Australia is necessarily the study of paradox. The continent's vastness evokes both isolation and interconnectedness; its history is marked by both erasure and endurance; its imagination oscillates between the local and the global. In tracing these tensions, Australian Studies refuses to be confined within disciplinary or geographic boundaries. It seeks instead to understand the many layers of the Australian condition — the interwoven narratives of land and people, the enduring shadows of colonization, the creative responses to displacement, and the ongoing dialogues between Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies.

Central to any exploration of Australian culture is the recognition of the land itself — not merely as backdrop or resource, but as a living archive of memory and meaning. The Australian landscape, whether conceived as desert, bush, coast, or city, has long functioned as an active participant in the national imagination. Its contours shape identity, dictate survival, and inspire art. The land has been represented in myriad ways: as forbidding wilderness, as pastoral promise, as ecological warning, and as sacred ground. Yet these representations are never neutral. They are inscribed with histories of settlement, dispossession, and resistance that continue to reverberate through the cultural consciousness of the nation.

Indigenous perspectives form the moral and intellectual core of contemporary Australian Studies. The First Nations peoples, whose custodianship of the continent predates colonial contact by tens of thousands of years, bring to the discourse an understanding of land, time, and community that transcends Western epistemological categories. Their songlines, oral traditions, and cosmologies articulate relationships with Country that are spiritual, ecological, and communal. The increasing visibility of Indigenous writers, artists, and scholars has transformed the field, compelling it to confront its colonial inheritances and to engage with forms of knowledge grounded in reciprocity and responsibility. Through Indigenous storytelling — in literature, performance, and visual art — Australia comes to see itself anew: not as a postcolonial nation seeking identity, but as a shared space still in the process of ethical and historical reckoning.

The postcolonial turn in Australian scholarship has provided a critical framework for examining the enduring legacies of empire and the tensions of national formation. Postcolonial inquiry, however, extends beyond critique; it encompasses the creation of new narratives of hybridity, belonging, and self-representation. Australian writing reflects this dynamic interplay of forces — the struggle to reconcile British inheritance with local experience, the challenge of articulating identity in a settler-colonial context, and the ongoing negotiation between memory and modernity. From Patrick White's metaphysical landscapes to Alexis Wright's mythic re-imaginings, Australian literature continues to engage with the question of how a nation might narrate itself without silencing the multiplicity within.

Migration, displacement, and diaspora have further expanded the field's conceptual boundaries. Australia's history as a destination for immigrants and refugees has generated a rich body of work that complicates the notion of a singular national identity. The voices of migrants from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have contributed to a polyphonic cultural archive that reflects the realities of a globalized nation. These narratives of arrival and adaptation challenge the binaries of insider and outsider, homeland and exile,

suggesting instead a fluidity of belonging that characterizes the modern Australian experience. The cosmopolitan cities of Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth have become emblematic of this cultural plurality, while regional and rural spaces continue to represent the persistence of other, often overlooked, identities and traditions.

Ecocritical and environmental perspectives have also become integral to the study of Australian literature and culture. The continent's unique biodiversity and vulnerability to climate change have rendered it a vital site for ecological reflection. The devastating bushfires of recent years, recurrent droughts, and the degradation of coral reefs have foregrounded the fragility of Australia's ecosystems and the urgency of environmental consciousness. In this context, literature and art have assumed an ethical function — bearing witness to ecological crisis while imagining forms of coexistence that transcend anthropocentric paradigms. The environmental humanities in Australia thus bridge Indigenous ecological knowledge with contemporary global discourse, emphasizing the need for sustainability and respect for the interdependence of all living systems.

Memory and history remain persistent themes in the Australian imagination. The process of national remembrance — from the celebration of the Anzac legend to the recognition of the Stolen Generations — reveals the selective ways in which collective identity has been constructed and contested. Literature and the arts serve as counter-archives, offering narratives that challenge official histories and recover silenced voices. The engagement with memory in Australian culture is not merely commemorative but transformative; it demands a confrontation with the moral responsibilities of the past and a commitment to imagining more inclusive futures. Through such acts of remembering, the nation continues to grapple with the questions of guilt, reconciliation, and renewal that lie at the heart of its historical consciousness.

The relationship between the local and the global has increasingly defined the intellectual direction of Australian Studies. As the world becomes more interconnected, Australian culture participates in transnational dialogues

that transcend national boundaries. Writers, artists, and scholars engage with global issues — climate change, migration, digital transformation, and social justice — through distinctly Australian lenses. This global perspective does not dilute national specificity; rather, it amplifies it by situating Australian experience within the shared challenges of humanity. The transnational orientation of the field thus signals both an openness to the world and a critical awareness of the global structures that shape local realities.

Gender, sexuality, and identity politics form another significant dimension of Australian cultural discourse. Feminist criticism has long interrogated the patriarchal foundations of the national narrative, recovering the contributions of women writers and re-evaluating representations of femininity and power. More recently, queer and intersectional approaches have expanded the inclusivity of the field, revealing the multiplicity of identities that constitute contemporary Australian society. The negotiation of gendered and sexual subjectivities in Australian writing mirrors broader global movements for equality and recognition, while also reflecting uniquely local histories of struggle, activism, and transformation.

Urban and regional imaginaries continue to structure the symbolic geography of Australian literature. The city, with its multicultural dynamism and social complexity, often serves as a site of modernity and change, while the Outback retains its mythic resonance as a space of endurance, isolation, and revelation. Yet contemporary writers frequently blur these distinctions, portraying space as relational and fluid rather than fixed. The shifting spatial imagination in Australian writing parallels the broader rethinking of identity as mobile, contingent, and performative — shaped as much by memory and imagination as by physical geography.

A defining feature of current Australian scholarship is its interdisciplinarity. The integration of literary criticism, cultural studies, anthropology, environmental science, and digital humanities reflects a recognition that no single lens can capture the richness of Australia's cultural experience. The dialogue between these disciplines fosters new methodologies

that bridge the creative and the critical, the local and the planetary. Such approaches also signal a move toward the decolonization of knowledge — an acknowledgment that epistemic justice is inseparable from cultural and ecological justice.

This intellectual pluralism is matched by a deep ethical engagement. Australian Studies today is not only a field of analysis but also a field of responsibility. It asks how scholarship might contribute to reconciliation, how creative expression might foster empathy across difference, and how cultural memory might serve as a guide to sustainable futures. The questions posed by Australian thinkers and writers are thus both national and universal: How does one belong to place without possessing it? How can history be remembered without perpetuating its violence? What forms of storytelling might enable communities to imagine new ways of living together on a fragile planet?

In tracing the development of Australian Studies, one observes a movement from nationalism to transnationalism, from colonial narrative to plural consciousness, from description to dialogue. The field's vitality lies in its refusal to settle — its constant re-examination of the meanings of Australia in changing times. The postcolonial critique, the ecological imagination, the Indigenous resurgence, and the cosmopolitan exchange are not separate strands but interwoven currents that shape the intellectual map of the discipline. Through them, Australia becomes not simply a place but a perspective — a way of seeing the world through the prism of difference, resilience, and renewal.

Australian literature, as a central component of this discourse, continues to provide a mirror to the nation's evolving self-understanding. It encompasses the epic and the intimate, the mythic and the mundane, the local and the universal. Whether in the haunting landscapes of Judith Wright's poetry, the moral complexities of Tim Winton's prose, or the visionary storytelling of Kim Scott and Alexis Wright, Australian writing remains committed to the exploration of what it means to live ethically and imaginatively within history and place. It is through these creative acts that Australia articulates its most profound dialogues with the world.

In the broader cultural sphere, Australian Studies contributes to global conversations about identity, ecology, and justice. It challenges Eurocentric models of knowledge by demonstrating how a settler-colonial society can engage critically with its own foundations, acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty, and participate meaningfully in planetary debates on sustainability. The field's evolution exemplifies the power of the humanities to foster understanding across difference and to imagine alternatives to inherited systems of thought. It reveals how literature and culture can serve as instruments of both critique and hope — articulating the wounds of the past while envisioning paths toward reconciliation and renewal.

Ultimately, Australian Studies stands as a testament to the transformative power of cultural inquiry. It invites continual reflection on the intersections of history, environment, and imagination, encouraging scholars and readers alike to see Australia not as a static entity but as an ever-unfolding conversation between its diverse peoples, landscapes, and stories. In engaging with this conversation, one encounters not only the specificity of Australian experience but also the shared dilemmas of humanity — the search for belonging, the need for justice, and the imperative to sustain the fragile ecologies of life.

This volume, therefore, seeks to offer a comprehensive and reflective engagement with the multiplicity of Australian voices, experiences, and visions. It gathers contributions that traverse historical periods, cultural forms, and critical methodologies, unified by the conviction that the study of Australia is inseparable from the study of the world itself. The chapters within explore how the Australian imagination continues to evolve — grounded in its landscapes, enriched by its diversities, and oriented toward an ethical future that values inclusivity, sustainability, and creative dialogue.

Australian Studies, in its most expansive sense, is an ongoing act of redefinition — a field that thrives on its capacity to listen, adapt, and imagine. It affirms that culture is not a fixed inheritance but a living process through which societies understand themselves and their place in the world. In this spirit, the present volume contributes to the continuing effort

to read, write, and rethink Australia — as story, as space, and as shared human endeavour.

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Music be the food of protest: Indigenous Australian music as a form of protest

Rituparna Chakraborty

Abstract:

Music has always been an integral part of culture. Anthropologists have pointed out that music is one of the “universal constants” that all cultures have in common. Music, throughout history, has proven to be a tool for protest, outshining cultural and geo-political boundaries. Artists fetter the emotive power of melodies and lyrics to articulate resistance, challenge social stereotypes and advocate for change. Whether in form of folk or hip-hop music can act as a universal language which can mobilize communities and promote collective consciousness. Music has served several times as a catalyst for social and political movements, empowering individuals to voice protest. The proposed paper seeks to portray how indigenous Australian music has become a powerful tool of protest time and again, voicing resistance against historical injustices. Rooted in cultural traditions, these songs convey powerful messages of struggle against racial, class and gender discriminations imposed on the aboriginals for centuries. At the same time, these songs speak of their ongoing struggle for land rights. The songs are often testaments of their struggle against colonial oppression. From ancient didgeridoo performances to contemporary genres like hip-hop, the artists use their music as a powerful weapon to amplify indigenous voices, challenge societal norms and generate social awareness. This paper seeks to explore the multifaceted role of indigenous Australian music in articulating identity and protest against oppression.

Keywords: *Australian music, Indigenous, Collective consciousness, Identity, Protest*

Music, with its enchanting melodies and rhythmic cadences, has been an integral part of human civilization from time immemorial. From the primal beats of ancient drums to the complexities of contemporary compositions, the evolution of music mirrors the journey of humanity itself. This article embarks on a historical odyssey, tracing the roots of music through the ages, unraveling its cultural significance and celebrating the perennial threads that connect us through melodies.

Even before the advent of written history, our ancestors discovered the primal temptation of rhythm and sound. The beating of drums, the chanting of voices and the resonance of rudimentary instruments formed the primitive expression of music. Religious rituals, rooted in the mysteries of life and nature, laid the foundation of folk music.

As human societies evolved, so did the sophistication of musical instruments and compositions. The ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Chinese civilization each contributed to unique musical tradition. Whether in the form of haunting melodies of Greek lyres or the intricate pentatonic scales of Chinese instruments, music became intertwined with religious ceremonies, storytelling and celebrations of people.

The medieval age witnessed the fusion of diverse music influences. Georgian chants echoed through European cathedrals, while troubadours and minstrels brought sagas of chivalry to life through songs. The advent of musical notation brought the scope for the preservation and transmission of complex compositions, shaping the musical landscape of the time.

The renaissance era ushered in an explosion of creativity in music. Composers like Josquin des Prez and Claudio Monteverdi experimented with polyphony and vocal expression. The Baroque period, led by stalwarts like Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel, introduced ornate compositions, operas and the flourishing of instrumental music.

The classical era, epitomized by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven, emphasized clarity, harmony and formal structures.

The romantic period embraced emotional intensity and individuality, with composers like Franz Schubert and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky crafting symphonies and operas that spoke to the human soul.

The 20th century witnessed unprecedented innovation in music. Jazz emerged as a revolutionary genre, synthesizing diverse influences and challenging traditional norms. The birth of Blues, Rock and electronic music transformed the global musical landscape. Legends like Miles Davis, the Beatles and electronic harbingers pushed boundaries, reflecting the dynamic nature of contemporary society.

In the 21st century, music stands out as a global discourse, transcending borders and genres. The digital era facilitates the exchange of different musical tradition, creating a rich fabric of global music. Hip-hop, pop and electronic genres dominate the airwaves, while artists experiment with fusion, creating unique amalgamations of cultural influences.

Music has always been a powerful medium for expressing emotion, conveying messages and inculcating change. Throughout the history, music has rendered the universal language to voice dissent, challenge authority and ignite social movements. The roots of music as a tool of protest can be traced back through the annals of history. From folk songs addressing social inequalities to spirituals expressing the struggles of the oppressed, music has served as a vehicle for marginalized communities to voice their grievances and aspirations. The Civil Rights Movements in the United States, for instance, found a powerful anthem in songs like “We shall Overcome”, fostering solidarity and inspiring perseverance.

Music becomes a significant tool for protest when it channels dissent and challenges the status quo. Artists often use their lyrics to question power, advocating for people’s rights and confront political injustices. Genres like punk, rap and folk have been very effective in expressing discontent and rebellion against authority, reflecting the vibe of social unrest.

One of the unique strengths of music as a form of protest is its ability to amplify the voices of the subaltern, who cannot speak. Artists can bring attention to social injustice through lyrics resonating shared experience, fostering empathy and understanding. This amplification extends beyond geopolitical boundaries, uniting people across the globe in solidarity against injustice. Certain artists have become iconic figures in the realm of musical protest, using their songs to champion social causes. Bob Dylan's songs like "The Times they are A-changing", "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall", "Talkin' World War III Blues" have become universal songs for protest. *Bella ciao* (Italian pronunciation: ['bella 'tʃa:ɔ]; "Goodbye beautiful"), an Italian protest folk song from the late 19th century, originally sung by the *mondina* workers in protest against the harsh working conditions in the paddy fields of Northern Italy, has become a song of protest for people across the globe. Salil Choudhury created his first song for people in 1945. He wrote a number of songs in the context of Tebhaga movement. He called these songs "the mass songs of Consciousness and Awakening" His song

হেই সামালো হেই সামালো
হেই সামালো ধান হো, কাস্টেটা দাও শান হো
জান কবুল আর মান কবুল
আর দেব না আর দেব না
রক্তে বোনা ধান মোদের প্রাণ হো...

became a universal one for working people across the globe.

The anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa found a strong support in the songs of musicians like Miria Makeba, Hugh Masekela et al.

The indigenous Australian music serves as a powerful tool for protest and cultural resurgence. For centuries, the diverse Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander communities have harnessed the rhythmic beats, traditional instruments and lyrical narratives to their music to articulate grievances, amplify their voices and challenge the historical injustices faced by Australia's First Nations people.

Indigenous Australian music has a deep connection to cultural identity and resistance against colonization. From the sounds of didgeridoo to the rhythmic beats of clapsticks, traditional instruments have been used in ceremonies and storytelling to preserve cultural heritage. With the arrival of European colonizers, these musical traditions became a vehicle for expressing resistance against dispossession, violence and cultural erasure.

The concept of “Songlines” plays a pivotal role in indigenous Australian music. These are intricate musical maps that traverse the landscape, preserving folktales, cultural knowledge and connections to the land. Songlines not only serve as a form of cultural protest against the impact of colonization but also reinforce a sense of identity, belonging and continuity.

In more recent times, Indigenous Australian music has embraced contemporary music genres to address ongoing social issues and advocate for justice. Artists like Archie Roach, Kev Carmody and Christine Anu have crafted powerful protest songs that delve deep into the historical trauma of the Stolen Generations, land right struggles and systematic inequalities faced by Indigenous communities.

Hip-Hop, with its powerful blend of rhythm and politically conscious lyrics, has become a dynamic platform for indigenous Australian activism. Artists like Briggs, Baker Boy and A.B. Original use hip-hop to speak out against racism, gender discrimination and class inequalities and the enduring effects of colonial policies. The music has become a call to action, challenging listeners to confront uncomfortable truths about Australia’s past and present.

Warumpi Band’s *Blackfella/Whitefella* (1985)

Indigenous issues, probably starting with the land rights movement and the establishment of the Tent Embassy in 1972, are arguably the most prominent topics in the story of Australia’s dissenting rock culture. The shift from fairly saccharine lullabies like Jimmy Little’s 1963 chart-topper *Royal Telephone* or Lionel Rose’s tokenistic *I Thank You* (1970) — both of which songs rather underplayed

the activism of the singers themselves — rode on the back of a gaggle of more out-spoken indigenous acts like Coloured Stone, Us Mob and No Fixed Address. Out of this fertile red earth came my first suggestion, the Warumpi Band's *Blackfella/Whitefella*. Coming out of the Papunya region in Arnhem Land, birthplace of Australia's most recognised visual art movement, the Warumpis tacked onto a feeling for country few could match. Many in the big cities down south were cottoning on to just what kind of magic existed within the shores of their country and driven by co-founder Neil Murray, the band's only non-indigenous member, and enigmatic vocalist, the late George Burarrwanga, *Blackfella/Whitefella* (1985) became a bouncy, dusty, back-of-a-flatbed anthem for fusion, both artistic and political. Picked up Midnight Oil's Powderworks label, the Warumpis co-headlined with them on the ground-breaking Blackfella/Whitefella tour of outback Australia in 1986.

Many white Australians were first musically introduced to black Australia's story through fellow whites. In rock music, the best known song of this genre is my second candidate, Goanna's *Solid Rock* (1982).

Yothu Yindi's *Treaty* (1991), Cold Chisel's *Khe Sahn* (1978), Archie Roach's *They Took The Children Away* (1990) are some of the most famous Australian protest songs.

Indigenous Australian music serves as a vehicle to amplify marginalized voices. Through festivals like the Yabun festival and platforms like the National Indigenous Music Awards, emerging artists find spaces to contribute to a broader discourse about Indigenous rights and recognitions.

Indigenous Australian music also plays a pivotal role in cultural resurgence and healing. Artists engage in collaborative projects that blend traditional music with contemporary songs, fostering a sense of pride and resilience within indigenous communities. These initiatives contribute to the revitalization of language, custom and social practices that have endured social challenges.

Indigenous Australian music, with its root embedded in cultural tradition, has evolved into a potent tool of protest

and resilience. From the traditional sounds that resisted colonization to contemporary genres challenging power hegemony. The music of Australia's First Nation people echoes a story of survival, strength and cultural pride. As indigenous voices continue to rise through the chords and beats of their music, they carry a powerful message, a call for justice, recognition, and a renewed commitment to the rich cultural heritage that defines Australia.

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Reimagining Nationhood: The Politics of Identity and Multiculturalism in Contemporary Australian Fiction

Shubham Bhattacharjee

Abstract

Contemporary Australian fiction offers a powerful re-examination of nationhood in an age marked by migration, globalization, and reconciliation. This paper explores how writers such as Christos Tsiolkas, Nam Le, Michelle de Kretser, Alexis Wright, and Tim Winton reconfigure the concept of Australia as a multicultural, postcolonial space shaped by contested identities and hybrid experiences. Drawing on theories of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and postcolonial identity, it argues that recent Australian narratives reject singular notions of national belonging in favour of plural, intersectional models rooted in empathy and difference. Through a close reading of selected novels and short stories, the paper demonstrates how contemporary writers negotiate tensions between the local and the global, the settler and the migrant, and the Indigenous and the diasporic – constructing a new literary cartography of belonging.

Keywords *Australian Fiction, Multiculturalism, Postcolonial Identity, Cosmopolitanism, Christos Tsiolkas, Nam Le, Alexis Wright, Michelle de Kretser*

1. Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, Australian literature has undergone a profound transformation. Once centred on themes of the bush, mateship, and Anglo-Celtic nationalism, it now embodies a complex, multicultural, and postcolonial mosaic. This shift reflects the broader sociopolitical evolution of Australia – from the “White Australia” policy to a globalized, pluralistic democracy grappling with issues of immigration, Indigenous reconciliation, and cultural diversity.

Contemporary Australian fiction questions the very notion of what constitutes “Australianness.” No longer confined to settler narratives or masculinist myths, it has become a platform for reimagining national identity through multiple voices and experiences. Writers from migrant and Indigenous backgrounds have particularly contributed to this process by exposing historical silences and reframing national memory.

As Sneja Gunew argues in *Haunted Nations* (2004), multicultural writing “creates an alternative archive of belonging,” one that unsettles the boundaries between insider and outsider. This paper investigates how recent authors perform this act of redefinition—how literature becomes both a critique and a reconstitution of nationhood.

Through an analysis of selected works by Christos Tsiolkas, Nam Le, Michelle de Kretser, Alexis Wright, and Tim Winton, the discussion highlights how Australian fiction envisions identity as fluid, relational, and ethically grounded rather than territorially fixed. The paper situates these texts within key theoretical frameworks—postcolonialism, cosmopolitanism, and multiculturalism—to show how they narrate Australia not as a homogeneous nation-state but as a “network of stories,” to borrow Wright’s own metaphor.

2. Theoretical Framework: Nation, Multiculturalism, and Postcolonial Identity

Benedict Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community” has long framed discussions of nationalism, emphasizing that nations are cultural constructions sustained by shared narratives. In the Australian context, however, this imagination has historically been exclusionary—privileging white, male, Anglo identities while marginalizing Indigenous, migrant, and female voices.

The post-White Australia era (after the 1970s) marked a significant ideological shift. The adoption of multiculturalism as state policy recognized Australia’s ethnic diversity, yet literary responses have often revealed its contradictions. As Ien Ang notes in *On Not Speaking Chinese* (2001), multiculturalism sometimes functions as a “celebration of difference without power”—a discourse that tolerates diversity but resists structural change.

Postcolonial and cosmopolitan theories extend this critique. Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space" and Stuart Hall's articulation of cultural identity as "becoming rather than being" provide frameworks to understand hybridity and transformation within Australian narratives. The negotiation between rootedness and displacement—between Indigenous sovereignty and diasporic fluidity—defines the ethical core of contemporary Australian writing.

This theoretical grounding underscores how literature becomes a site where the politics of identity and the poetics of belonging intersect, allowing writers to reclaim marginalized voices and reimagine the nation as a dynamic, dialogic space.

3. Christos Tsiolkas: Suburbia, Desire, and the Ethics of Otherness

Christos Tsiolkas, an Australian writer of Greek heritage, embodies the tensions of a multicultural, secular, and class-divided society. His novels—*Loaded* (1995), *The Slap* (2008), and *Barracuda* (2013)—interrogate middle-class morality, ethnicity, and masculinity within suburban Australia.

In *The Slap*, a child being slapped at a barbecue triggers a cascade of conflicts across gender, class, and race lines. The narrative unfolds through multiple perspectives, each voice reflecting a different facet of Australian society—immigrant anxieties, Indigenous displacement, and suburban conformity. The novel critiques the moral fractures beneath the surface of multicultural tolerance.

Tsiolkas's characters often inhabit liminal spaces—between acceptance and exclusion, desire and shame. Danny in *Barracuda* experiences both racial and class alienation, his obsession with success mirroring a nation's struggle with identity and aspiration.

Through blunt realism and moral ambiguity, Tsiolkas exposes the fragile ethics of multiculturalism—where coexistence does not necessarily mean understanding. Yet his polyphonic style allows for empathy: no single narrative dominates, mirroring Australia's own cacophonous pluralism.

4. Nam Le: Diaspora, Transnationalism, and the Art of Multiplicity

Nam Le's celebrated collection *The Boat* (2008) exemplifies the global reach of contemporary Australian writing. Born in Vietnam and raised in Melbourne, Le situates his fiction within the transnational imagination, where identity is both migratory and multiple.

In the titular story "The Boat," Vietnamese refugees drift between hope and despair on a perilous sea journey. The narrative resonates with Australia's fraught politics of asylum and border control, yet it also universalizes displacement as a condition of modern existence.

Le's decision to write stories set across the globe—Tehran, Hiroshima, Colombia—challenges nationalist expectations of what "Australian literature" should be. As critics have noted, his work enacts a literary cosmopolitanism that refuses confinement to geographical or cultural boundaries.

However, Le's self-referential opening story, "Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice," acknowledges the burden of ethnic representation. His narrator—a Vietnamese-Australian writer—struggles against the expectation to produce "ethnic stories." This metafictional tension dramatizes the paradox of multicultural authorship: how to assert individuality without being tokenized.

Nam Le's fiction thus articulates a transnational Australian identity, where belonging is defined less by location than by moral and imaginative engagement with difference.

5. Michelle de Kretser: Cosmopolitanism, Mobility, and Fragile Belongings

Michelle de Kretser, born in Sri Lanka and based in Australia, explores displacement, travel, and memory with lyrical precision. Her novels—*The Hamilton Case* (2003), *Questions of Travel* (2012), and *The Life to Come* (2017)—question what it means to be at home in a globalized world.

In *Questions of Travel*, de Kretser juxtaposes two trajectories: Laura, a privileged Australian tourist, and Ravi, a Sri Lankan

refugee. Their intersecting narratives expose the moral geography of mobility – where the freedom to travel contrasts with the desperation to escape. The novel critiques Western cosmopolitanism, showing how global mobility often masks inequality and displacement.

De Kretser's stylistic elegance conceals a sharp political consciousness. Her Australia is both destination and dislocation—a place where migration reshapes the contours of everyday life. She redefines belonging as an act of empathy and attention rather than ownership or origin.

In *The Life to Come*, she extends this critique, portraying urban Australia as haunted by global histories of migration and colonization. Through irony and compassion, de Kretser crafts a vision of cosmopolitan ethics grounded in vulnerability – the recognition that identity is always provisional and relational.

6. Alexis Wright: Indigenous Sovereignty and the Nation Reimagined

Alexis Wright, a Waanyi author and activist, offers one of the most radical reconfigurations of Australian nationhood through Indigenous worldviews. Her novels—*Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013)—merge myth, ecology, and politics in visionary narratives that resist colonial temporality.

In *Carpentaria*, Wright creates the fictional town of Desperance, located in northern Queensland, where Indigenous cosmology collides with mining capitalism and bureaucratic control. The novel's non-linear, oral style enacts a decolonial epistemology: time, space, and identity flow according to ancestral rhythms rather than European logic.

Wright's female protagonists, particularly Oblivia in *The Swan Book*, embody the trauma of colonization and the endurance of spirit. The narrative weaves dystopian futurism with Dreaming mythology, suggesting that Indigenous survival itself is an act of resistance and imagination.

By grounding national identity in Indigenous sovereignty, Wright dismantles the myth of multicultural harmony built upon unacknowledged dispossession. Her fiction replaces the modernist ideal of progress with an ethics of Country, kinship,

and storytelling – asserting that the future of Australia must begin with Indigenous justice.

7. Tim Winton: The Local, the Spiritual, and the Ethics of Connection

Tim Winton, though not a writer of migrant background, plays a crucial role in the conversation on contemporary Australian identity. His novels – *Cloudstreet* (1991), *Dirt Music* (2001), and *Breath* (2008) – reimagine nationhood through environmental and spiritual dimensions.

In *Cloudstreet*, two working-class families, one devoutly religious and the other irreverent, share a sprawling Perth house that becomes a microcosm of postwar Australia. The narrative celebrates community, reconciliation, and the redemptive power of storytelling.

Dirt Music shifts focus to Western Australia's remote coastlines, where the protagonist's journey toward love and self-discovery parallels a reconnection with land and spirit. Winton's ecological sensibility aligns with the broader postcolonial and spiritual reclamation of belonging.

While his work does not directly address multiculturalism, Winton's emphasis on humility, ecological awareness, and redemption through connection complements the more overtly political works of Tsiolkas, Le, and Wright. His fiction suggests that national renewal requires spiritual as well as cultural inclusion.

8. Thematic Synthesis: Reimagining the Nation

Across these authors, a coherent vision emerges: Australian nationhood is not a fixed identity but an ongoing negotiation among diverse narratives. Three thematic strands unify their work:

- 1. Plural Identity and Ethical Belonging:** Contemporary fiction rejects essentialist nationalism, favouring flexible, dialogic identities. Belonging becomes an ethical relationship rather than a territorial claim.

- 2. Memory, Trauma, and Historical Reckoning:** From Wright's Indigenous resistance to Tsiolkas's suburban

alienation, these writers expose the historical wounds of colonization, migration, and class disparity – transforming memory into moral consciousness.

3. Transnational and Cosmopolitan Imaginations: Writers like de Kretser and Nam Le locate Australia within global currents of migration and exile, constructing literature as a transnational conversation rather than a national enclosure.

Together, these trends constitute what might be called a “cosmopolitan nationalism” – a form of identity that honours local histories while embracing global interconnectedness.

9. Conclusion

Contemporary Australian fiction reimagines the nation not as a singular narrative but as a polyphonic text – a tapestry woven from Indigenous wisdom, migrant memory, and ecological awareness. Writers such as Tsiolkas, Le, de Kretser, Wright, and Winton expand the moral and imaginative boundaries of Australian identity, transforming literature into a space of ethical encounter.

Their works collectively dismantle the binaries of settler versus migrant, insider versus outsider, and local versus global. In their place, they offer a relational model of belonging – one rooted in empathy, history, and responsibility.

By redefining what it means to be Australian in the twenty-first century, these authors assert that national identity is not inherited but continually created – through dialogue, memory, and imagination.

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An Ecocritical Reading of Banjo Paterson's Bush Ballad The Man from Snowy River

Bisweswar Biswas & Dr. Madhumita Roy

Abstract

Literature and nature have always shared an intimate correlation across cultures and throughout the ages. The world of literature reflects the beauty of nature, while ecological concerns and the continuous degradation of the environment have given rise to a new branch of literary theory: ecocriticism. This paper argues that the Australian bush ballads of A. B. "Banjo" Paterson embody the essence of ecocritical thinking. The poet emphasizes the vital relationship between living beings and the natural world, while also revealing how nature is endangered by human activity. The Australian bush ballad, with its cultural heritage, fauna, flora, and landscapes, has played a crucial role in shaping cultural identity. Paterson highlights the Australian poetic tradition, expressing his concern for both national identity and global ecological development. In almost every bush ballad, he foregrounds natural elements as central to his vision and demonstrates the interconnection between humans and nature. Therefore, this paper examines how *The Man from Snowy River* manifests an underlying ecocritical awareness. As an eco-conscious poet, Paterson metaphorically sheds light on the urgency of preserving nature from continuous devastation through his bush ballads.

Keywords: *Ecocriticism, human-nature relationship, Banjo Paterson, Australian bush ballads*

Ecocriticism is one of the most significant critical movements of recent decades, as it concentrates on the relationship between humans and nature. In the present era,

the world faces ecological crises, and the environment is at high risk. The relevance of ecocriticism lies in its capacity to address these concerns, helping to preserve the planet and safeguard the existence of living beings. The term “ecocriticism” was first coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Derived from the Greek word *oikos* (house or earth) and *logos* (discourse), the term literally means “the criticism of the house” – the environment as represented in literature. Rueckert defines ecocriticism as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world” (Rueckert 107). Lawrence Buell similarly defines ecocriticism as “a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (Buell 430).

Poetry has played a crucial role in shaping Australian literature. Ironically, the earliest writers in Australia were not native-born Australians but prisoners, convicts, and soldiers from the British settlement in New South Wales in 1788. As Judith Wright notes in *The Generations of Men* (1959): “If there were men of a poetic turn among the convicts and soldiers of the first settlement, they had probably no time or inclination to exercise the gift. Mere survival and a fair share of the rum perhaps filled the early ambitions of most” (Wright 58). From these beginnings, the bush ballad emerged as a poetic tradition that reflected the lives of soldiers, farmers, horsemen, and convicts. Mary E. Fullerton in *The Australian Bush* observes that “All of Australia that is not city, town or suburb, is loosely referred to as ‘the bush’ by most people” (Fullerton 36). Bush poetry captures vivid descriptions of rivers, flora, fauna, and the countryside, while also reflecting the everyday struggles and resilience of people rooted in the Australian landscape and culture. Among its most celebrated exponents was Andrew Barton “Banjo” Paterson (1864–1941), whose works popularized and immortalized the bush ballad tradition.

A. B. Banjo Paterson (1864-1941) was a widely known Australian bush poet, author and journalist. He was born on 17th February, 1864 at Narambla station near Orange in rural New South Wales. Until he was five, he spent his life in the bush on Buckinbah Station near Yeoval in New South Wales. In his early childhood, he delighted in watching horsemen who came from Murrumbidgee River region and picnic races and polo matches which were held near Snowy Mountains. These led to his attraction to horses and inspired him to write abundantly. He joined Sydney Grammar School near Gladesville near Paramatta River. There he dwelled with his grandmother who was also a ballad poetess. He obtained his literary inspiration from his grandmother. He immensely liked to enjoy his leisure time with the associations of bush life. His early ballads appeared from 1880s in *The Bulletin* under the enthusiastic editorship of Mr. J. F. Archibalds who encouraged him to write about the working class people and the life of bush in Australia. He wrote the ballads with the pen name 'The Banjo' which is the name of the racehorse in his station. He published the collected form of ballad entitled *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses* in 1895. The collection of ballads was a huge success. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, he has renowned for his poems and ballads about the rural life in Australia. His work emphasizes on the themes of companionship, bushman, flexibility and the natural beauty of Australian landscape. As an eco-conscious poet, he works on the preservation of wildlife. He reveals the inseparable interrelation between living and nonliving beings in his bush ballads. He denotes nature as a living whole that can help the human being as a source of aspiration. Through his ballads, he portrays about rivers, lands, trees, birds and wild animals and how natural world is affected by the living beings.

Banjo Paterson's bush ballad *The Man from Snowy River* narrates the bush as the place of exciting adventure, valour and freedom. In his poetic masterpiece, he represents the adventurous pastoral lives and agony and resilience of bush people who are deprived of opportunities and freedom. He portrays the outback of Australia which is very resourceful and extremely attached with the land. Bush is concerned as

the source of national pride. As he had the direct connection 'bushrangers', it supported him to compose the bush poetry. His ballads show the profound affection for the ecological landscape and Bushmen who have been living for some time. The landscape in Paterson's ballad is not only a backdrop but also an active power that shapes the destiny of living beings. He sketches his real love of countryside with the natural background of the ballad. He uses 'the horse' metaphorically to express the state of intensity and speed of Australian bush people by using a reckless but brave horseman. The bravery of horseman encourages to Australian to ride horses fearlessly. The ballad portrays the life of "the early Australians, their dare-devilry, extraordinary feats of their courage and their readiness to face the challenges of life" (Gullybaba, 63).

Paterson successfully captures the natural beauty of countryside in Australia and the unconquerable spirit of Bushmen for survival. The ballad opens with the portrayal of gathering of well-skilled and brave horsemen for searching the lost colt across wild bushes. The lost colt is not a normal horse but the prizewinning racehorse that flees from its stable and dwells with wild horses in the mountain. Its owner declares that who can bring him back his horse would be able to give his reward. For that purpose, a large number of well-trained riders have gathered to win the offered prize. The love and fondness of Australians for nonhuman living being like horse is displayed here. His engagement with bush people may describe his tendency to highlight its heroic perspectives. He describes the style and nature of Australian wildlife and the flora and fauna in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The word 'horse' is used repeatedly to focus the attention to the horse imagery against the hilly background. The poet presents the stockmen to take part in the hard expedition to bring back the lost horse. Harrison and Clancy are the two brave and courageous riders in the Snowy River region. They are the brave heroes of Paterson's remarkable poems *Clancy of the Overflow* and *Old Pardon, Son of Reprieve* that are also included in the collected ballads *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*. The poet sketches the theme of bravery, hard laboring, courage, valor and fearlessness of Australian bush

people with the description of Harrison by telling, "But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up," and the representation of Clancy by saying, "No better horseman ever held the reins." Such men prove to be stronger like the rough rocky nature of bush who have the power to save the other horsemen. The youngster rider enters with a weedy little horse but he has the courage in quick impatient tread. His self-confidence makes him strong, courageous, proud and lofty. Though he was "a stripling on a small and weedy beast," he bore "the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye, / And the proud and lofty carriage of his head" (Paterson, 4).

The bravery of the horseman from Snowy River proves his valor to climb on that bad road in the high mountain. Here the poet skillfully describes the nature which is the primary concern of the present study. From the very beginning to the end of his ballad, he represents the rugged mountainous province. He "keeps the image of the mountains in the background, never concentrating his descriptive focus on any particular aspect of it till he reaches the last stanza of the poem" (Gullybaba, 63-64). The nature of Mountain is vividly shown in such lines as "Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough, / Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride" (Paterson, 5). The speaker informs that the other riders who dwell in Snowy River region are regarded the best horsemen ever "And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home, / where the river runs those giant hills between; / I have seen full many horsemen since I first commenced to roam." (Paterson, 5) The riders have followed the wild horses that have climbed up the mountainside. After many hardships, the riders have finally found the escaped colt in the rugged mountain region. Paterson's ballads deal with the place of hardship and the resource of national pride. He also shows the importance of multi-aspects of the cultural narratives that make our understanding of the landscape and the Australian people who belong to the bush region.

The courage and valour of the man who have come from Snowy River arrives to the zenith of the mountain. The horsemen who reach the summit have no choice except

descent down the other side. In fact, any small slip means devastating death. All the riders "even Clancy took a pull/ It well might make the boldest hold their breath." (Paterson, 7) Only the rider from Snowy River has returned in the land safely. He goes carefully on the racing place until he arrives to the bottom of the mountain. The horsemen have observed him running at a distant mountainside. He has brought all the wild horses back "like a bloodhound on their track...../But his Pluck was still undaunted and his courage fiery hot, / For never yet was mountain horse a cur." (Paterson, 9) Then, the man from Snowy River comes back his home in Kosciusko. At the beginning of the ballad the other riders have mocked him; he has proved himself as a legend in front of them. The concluding portion of the ballad presents how notable the ballad is- "The man from Snowy River is a household word today/ And the stockmen tell the story of his ride." (Paterson,9)

Paterson shows his passionate love for Australia and Australian bush region. He chooses to employ the simple language used by Australian bush people. Paterson has used pastoral settings to narrate the poem. In this context Tom Wilson tells: "Banjo Paterson's poem *The Man from Snowy River* is a nationally celebrated pastoral which narrates the horse-back pursuit of an escaped colt through mountainous terrain. It is presumed to be so quintessentially Australian's verse that the federal government has seen fit to have the text printed on each and every Australian ten dollar note in micro script, viewable using a magnifying glass." (Wilson, 5) Paterson is an incredible ballad poet who has written about the horse and horsemanship. In bushman fashion, he presents horse as an animal that has been trained for specific tasks like racing. The need for racing is the speed, indomitable courage and endurance and a lot of human drama is involved with it. The poet expresses the cultural landscape of Australia, fauna and flora, the convicts, the horses and the mountains etc.

The sketch of the bush in the ballads of Banjo Paterson represents the expensive insights into the cultural significance of landscape and the perplexities of Australian identity. His work celebrates the myth of the bush that is accepted

as the Australian spirit, focusing its excitement, beauty, heroism and solidarities of its dwellers. The representation of Australian 'bushman' signifies the emerging national identity of the real Australian character and resilience. As the essence of eco-conscious poet, he portrays natural objectives like mountain, trees, lands and horses and sketches his close relationship and deep love for nature. He displays how human beings are dominating and demolishing the non-human natural objectives very casually in the world. He wants to draw the attention that human world needs to be very pure and simple to life and be friendly and sympathetic to wildlife. Therefore, this analysis is an attempt to tell that the poet intimately attaches nature with human being in his bush ballads demanding that those ballads are the epitome of his Eco-consciousness for "Ecocriticism analyzes the ways in which literature represents the human relations to nature." (Alam, 13)

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Gender, Sexuality, and the Australian Landscape in the Works of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers: Representation of Intersectionality in Australian Literature

Shreyoshi Dhar

Abstract:

The exploration of gender and sexuality in Australian literature offers a rich tapestry of narratives that reflect the evolving cultural, social, and political landscapes of the nation. This examination spans various genres and time periods, highlighting how authors have grappled with themes of identity, power, and societal norms. The research paper delves into the representation of gender and sexuality in Australian fiction, the historical context of these themes, and the intersectionality of gender and sexuality. It further explores how Indigenous writers are reclaiming traditional understandings of gender and sexuality, challenging colonial representations, and asserting their own narratives.

Keywords: *gender, landscapes, Indigenous, intersectionality, sexuality*

Gender and sexuality are significant themes in Australian literature, shaping characters, narratives, and the portrayal of identity. Australian writers often explore how these aspects intersect with cultural, historical, and social contexts, providing insight into how gender and sexuality are experienced in diverse and complex ways across time and place. Gender and sexuality in Australian literature reflect a complex history of colonialism, resistance, social change, and the ongoing search for identity. From early colonial depictions to the rich tapestry of contemporary queer, feminist, and Indigenous voices, these themes offer profound insights into the evolving cultural landscape of Australia. Literature serves as both a mirror and a challenge to societal norms, pushing boundaries and offering new possibilities for understanding how gender and sexuality shape human experience in Australia.

The historical portrayal of gender and sexuality in Australian literature is deeply intertwined with the country's colonial past. The male-dominated culture of early Australian society, as depicted in novels from 1917 to 1956, often reinforced gender stereotypes and sexism. Authors like Miriam Dixson and Anne Summers have analyzed the impact of this male dominance, linking it to the disproportionate number of male convicts and the subsequent marginalization of women (Butler, 1990). This historical context provides a backdrop for understanding the persistent gender inequalities depicted in Australian fiction. The intersection of gender and genre in Australian literature is particularly evident in historical biofictions. Novels such as Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites* and Sarah Schmidt's *See What I Have Done* focus on figures who transcend normative gender boundaries through their actions or identities. These works employ indeterminacy and multiplicity as formal techniques, reflecting a commitment to feminist and revisionist narratives that challenge traditional gender roles (Padmore & Gardiner, 2022).

Early Australian literature, particularly from the 19th century, often reflects the colonial experience and the gendered roles of settler societies. Women were often depicted in domestic, supportive roles, while men were seen as adventurers, soldiers, or landowners. These depictions often reinforced gender norms and the rigid social roles of the time. Female writers, such as Miles Franklin with her novel *My Brilliant Career*, challenged these gender norms by portraying women who sought independence and resisted traditional roles. Franklin's works explore women's agency in a patriarchal society. Indigenous perspectives on gender and sexuality are frequently marginalized in early Australian literature, but recent works have brought attention to Indigenous gender identities, such as those recognized in some Aboriginal cultures where gender roles could be more fluid and diverse.

Australian feminist writers emerged in the 20th century, responding to both global and local movements. Authors such as Judith Wright, Barbara Baynton, and Thea Astley examined women's experiences with power, inequality, and social structures. The 1970s and 1980s saw a surge of feminist

literary criticism and writing. Writers like Kate Grenville, in her novel *The Secret River*, explore the impact of gender and sexuality on relationships and colonial violence, while also engaging with feminist themes of power and autonomy. Germaine Greer, one of the most famous Australian feminists, published *The Female Eunuch* in 1970, critiquing the societal expectations of women. Her work is foundational in feminist thought in Australia and internationally.

Queer writers and narratives in Australian literature have gained increasing prominence since the late 20th century. Authors like David Malouf, Helen Garner, and Tony Birch explore themes of sexuality, love, and identity within the context of broader social changes, including the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights. David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* and *The Conversations at Curlow Creek* touch on themes of intimacy and same-sex desire, exploring human vulnerability, and often portraying characters whose sexuality does not conform to societal norms. David Williamson's play *The Club* (1977) addresses male identity and sexuality in a satirical context, often critiquing the masculinity associated with Australian sports culture. More recently, writers such as Christos Tsiolkas, author of *The Slap*, examine the complexities of sexual orientation, relationships, and queer identity within contemporary Australian society.

Contemporary Australian literature is increasingly diverse in its exploration of gender and sexuality, reflecting broader shifts in social attitudes. This includes the visibility of non-binary, transgender, and queer experiences. Writers like Maxine Beneba Clarke and Queenie Van De Zandt incorporate diverse gender and sexual identities into their stories, moving beyond traditional binaries. In addition to individual gender and sexual identities, issues of intersectionality are key points. Writers are focusing on how gender and sexuality intersect with race, class, and cultural heritage. For instance, Melina Marchetta in her novel *Looking for Alibrandi* provides a nuanced portrayal of how gender expectations intersect with cultural identity. Contemporary Australian fiction often challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes, offering nuanced portrayals of masculinity and femininity. Works

such as *The Mint Lawn* by Gillian Mears and *Praise* by Andrew McGahan explore the construction of gender in relation to character development and narrative structure. These texts often subvert conventional gender norms, particularly in their depiction of sexuality, thereby critiquing the power dynamics inherent in gender relations (Almond, 2015).

The intersectionality of race and gender is a critical theme in Australian literature, particularly in the context of colonialism. Works like Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* address the sexual violence perpetrated against Indigenous women, highlighting the colonial anxieties surrounding masculinity and power. These narratives reveal how sexual violence was both a tool of colonial domination and a reflection of the racial and gender hierarchies of the time (Smith, 2020).

Indigenous perspectives on gender and sexuality in Australian literature offer a complex and multifaceted view that challenges colonial notions of identity, gender roles, and sexuality. These perspectives are rooted in traditional Indigenous cultures, which often have more fluid and diverse understandings of gender and sexual identities compared to Western binary models. Indigenous writers are increasingly exploring and reclaiming these aspects in their works, challenging historical erasure and colonial impositions on their cultures. The representation of Indigenous gender and sexuality in Australian literature is an emerging area of interest. Online platforms and digital spaces have become vital for Indigenous Australians to express diverse gender and sexual identities. The blog "Archiving the Aboriginal Rainbow" is one such example, providing a space for Indigenous voices to challenge ongoing colonization and assert their identities (Coe, 2022).

In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, gender roles were historically more fluid than the rigid binary of male and female seen in Western cultures. There are multiple examples of non-binary gender identities and roles that exist within Indigenous communities, such as the concept of 'Two-Spirit' or 'Brother-Brother' relationships, which recognize a person who embodies both masculine and feminine qualities, or occupies a gendered space outside the

male/female binary. Some Indigenous cultures recognized more than two genders. For example, in certain Aboriginal societies, there were roles for people who didn't fit into the typical male or female categories. These people might have taken on specific spiritual or cultural roles, and their identities were integral to the community's understanding of gender and sexuality. 'Tjanpi' (women's ceremonial dancing) and 'male-male relations', for example, challenge Western norms about what constitutes gender identity or sexual orientation.

Indigenous women's roles are central in many works, and their experiences often reflect the interconnections between colonial violence, cultural loss, and the resistance to patriarchal structures. Female protagonists in these narratives frequently struggle with the violence and discrimination of both the settler and patriarchal systems. However, Indigenous women in literature also embody strength, resilience, and cultural continuity. Writers like Kimberley Moulton and Ellen van Neerven focus on the reclamation of cultural knowledge, including women's traditional roles and the diverse ways they navigate their gender identities. In recent years, there has been an increasing representation of Indigenous LGBTQI+ voices in Australian literature. Authors such as Ellen van Neerven (a Goorie writer of queer identity) have written works that directly challenge traditional gender and sexuality norms while highlighting the intersectional experience of being both Indigenous and queer. Yvette Holt, a poet and activist, challenges colonial and patriarchal narratives about women and sexuality, centering the experience of Indigenous women and addressing the complexity of Indigenous sexual identities. Her work has brought attention to issues of sexual violence, gender fluidity, and reclamation of cultural identities. The work of Jolene and Matthew Cummings also explores same-sex Indigenous relationships, helping to break down taboos about sexual diversity in both Indigenous and mainstream cultures.

Many Indigenous writers aim to reclaim traditional knowledge about gender and sexuality that was suppressed by colonial forces. This reclamation is often linked to the broader movement for cultural renewal and the healing of trauma

caused by colonization, genocide, and displacement. Writers challenge stereotypes and demonstrate that Indigenous communities possess rich, diverse, and ongoing traditions surrounding gender and sexuality. They also explore the role of storytelling and oral traditions in the preservation and transmission of these cultural understandings. Melissa Lucashenko, in novels like *Killing Darcy*, delves into the experiences of Indigenous women, particularly in terms of love, sexuality, and the struggles against the colonial patriarchy that continues to shape their lives.

Indigenous literature often highlights the intersectionality of gender and sexuality with race, class, and colonial history. Writers explore how Indigenous gender and sexual identities are shaped by historical and contemporary oppression, but also focus on the agency and resilience of Indigenous peoples in resisting and overcoming these struggles. Themes of decolonization and cultural revival are prominent, as Indigenous writers assert that gender and sexuality cannot be understood outside the context of colonial history. This involves both confronting the ongoing impacts of colonization and looking to the future for justice, healing, and cultural regeneration.

Indigenous perspectives on gender and sexuality in Australian literature offer a rich, diverse, and complex view of identity that resists colonial categorization. By exploring both historical and contemporary expressions of gender and sexual diversity, Indigenous authors are reclaiming cultural narratives and challenging the dominant, often oppressive, Western models of gender and sexuality. These works provide a counter-narrative to colonialism, highlighting the resilience of Indigenous cultures and the ongoing process of cultural renewal. Through literature, Indigenous voices are asserting the right to define and express gender and sexuality on their own terms.

The political landscape of Australia has also influenced literary representations of gender. The tenure of Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister, sparked significant discourse on gender politics. The media's portrayal of Gillard's leadership was often marred by sexism and misogyny, which

was later contested by women writers in long-form literary journalism. This period highlighted the pervasive nature of gender bias in both political and literary spheres (Joseph, 2015).

Australian literature offers a complex and multifaceted exploration of gender and sexuality, reflecting the nation's diverse cultural and historical contexts. From challenging traditional gender roles to addressing the intersectionality of race and gender, these narratives provide critical insights into the ongoing dialogues surrounding identity and power in Australia. As the literary landscape continues to evolve, these themes remain central to understanding the broader social and cultural dynamics at play.

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Climate Crisis and Narrative Repair: Eco-Critical Perspectives in Contemporary Australian Writing

Dr. Tirna Sadhu

Abstract

This abstract examines the role of contemporary Australian literature in addressing the climate crisis through the lens of “narrative repair,” an eco-critical framework focused on healing the broken relationship between humans and the non-human world. It argues that Australian writers, uniquely positioned within a continent experiencing acute climate impacts and possessing deep Indigenous ecological knowledge, are crafting narratives that actively challenge anthropocentrism, colonial legacies of extraction, and the pervasive sense of eco-anxiety. By analyzing key texts – Tony Birch’s *The White Girl* (2019), Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013), and Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish* (2001) – this study explores diverse strategies of narrative repair. Birch’s novel centres Indigenous sovereignty and care for Country as fundamental to climate justice, offering a model of relationality. Wright employs magical realism and cyclical time to disrupt linear, progress-driven narratives that fuel environmental destruction, emphasizing interconnectedness and resilience. Flanagan’s historical fiction exposes the deep roots of ecological exploitation in Tasmania’s colonial past, linking the violence against humans and nature. Collectively, these texts demonstrate how narrative repair operates by: centring marginalized voices and knowledge systems; reconfiguring narrative form and temporality to reflect ecological complexity; fostering empathy for non-human entities; and imagining alternative, sustainable futures grounded in responsibility and reciprocity. This eco-critical analysis reveals contemporary Australian writing as a vital site for cultural and ecological reparation, offering not just

critique of the climate crisis but active pathways towards healing and renewed kinship with the living world.

Keywords: *Anthropocentrism, Colonialism, Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Sovereignty, Relationality, Magical Realism*

Introduction

The climate crisis represents not merely an environmental catastrophe but a profound crisis of narrative. The dominant Western narratives of progress, unlimited growth, human exceptionalism (anthropocentrism), and colonial exploitation have directly fueled the ecological unraveling we witness globally. These narratives, deeply embedded in cultural consciousness, justify the extraction of resources, the displacement of Indigenous peoples, and the commodification of nature, rendering the planet a collection of resources for human consumption. Australia, a continent experiencing acute climate impacts – intensifying bushfires, devastating floods, coral bleaching, and species extinction – while simultaneously grappling with the violent legacy of British colonization, presents a uniquely potent site for examining the intersections of ecological and cultural crisis. This paper argues that contemporary Australian literature is emerging as a vital space for “narrative repair,” an eco-critical framework focused on healing the broken relationship between humans and the non-human world. Narrative repair involves actively dismantling destructive anthropocentric and colonial narratives, centering marginalized voices and knowledge systems (particularly Indigenous knowledges), reconfiguring narrative forms to reflect ecological complexity, and fostering new stories of kinship, responsibility, and reciprocity essential for a sustainable future.

This paper examines how three significant contemporary Australian novels – Tony Birch’s *The White Girl* (2019), Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013), and Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish* (2001) – employ diverse strategies of narrative repair. By analyzing these texts through an eco-critical lens, we explore how they challenge the foundational narratives underpinning the climate crisis: anthropocentrism,

colonialism, and the linear, progress-driven temporality that fuels environmental destruction. Ultimately, this paper contends that these novels do not merely reflect the climate crisis; they actively engage in the cultural work of repair, offering not just critique but pathways towards healing and renewed kinship with the living world.

Literature Review

Eco-criticism, broadly defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, has evolved significantly since its inception. Early eco-criticism, often termed “first wave,” focused primarily on the representation of nature in literature and the promotion of environmental consciousness (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*). While valuable, this approach was sometimes criticized for its universalizing tendencies and insufficient engagement with social justice issues, particularly race and colonialism. The development of “second wave” eco-criticism addressed these limitations, emphasizing the intrinsic links between environmental degradation and social oppression, particularly the exploitation of Indigenous lands and peoples (Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*). This shift recognized that the climate crisis is deeply entangled with histories and ongoing structures of colonialism and racism.

The concept of “narrative repair” emerges from this second-wave eco-critical and broader cultural context. It responds to what scholars like Timothy Morton call the “ecological thought” – the realization of the profound interconnectedness of all life – and the attendant “ecological grief” or “solastalgia” (Albrecht) experienced in the face of environmental loss. Narrative repair is fundamentally about healing the stories we tell ourselves about our place in the world. As Deborah Bird Rose argues, Western modernity is built on a “dualistic ontology” that separates humans from nature, culture from Country, leading to exploitative relationships (Rose, *Dying Makes Us Unavailable for Life*). Repairing this requires narratives that embody an “ecological ontology” of interconnectedness and responsibility. Ursula Heise emphasizes the role of literature in fostering a “sense of planet,” moving beyond local attachments to imagine global ecological community and

risk (*Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*). However, as Amitav Ghosh critiques in *The Great Derangement*, much conventional literary realism struggles to represent the non-human agency and temporal scale of the climate crisis, often rendering it “uncanny” or unspeakable within dominant narrative forms.

The Australian context is particularly crucial for this exploration. Australia is a continent of extreme biodiversity and fragility, experiencing climate impacts acutely and disproportionately. Simultaneously, it is a nation founded on the violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples, whose sophisticated ecological knowledge systems – developed over tens of thousands of years – were systematically suppressed and ignored. Indigenous Australian concepts like Country (not merely land, but a living, interconnected entity encompassing people, ancestors, plants, animals, spirits, and law) and Sovereignty (inherent rights to land, self-determination, and cultural continuity) offer fundamentally different, non-anthropocentric frameworks for understanding human-environment relationships. Scholars like Tony Birch, Alexis Wright, and Aileen Moreton-Robinson argue that Indigenous perspectives are not just “add-ons” but essential to any meaningful response to the climate crisis in Australia, as they embody the relationality and reciprocity missing from Western models (Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*). The concept of Narrative Repair in Australian literature, therefore, is inextricably linked to processes of decolonization and the recognition of Indigenous Sovereignty and Knowledge.

Magical Realism, as a narrative mode, becomes a significant strategy within this context. Often associated with postcolonial literature (as theorized by writers like Gabriel García Márquez and critics like Wendy B. Faris), magical realism disrupts the certainties of Western realist narrative by introducing elements of the fantastical or supernatural into an otherwise realistic setting without marking them as such. This disruption serves multiple purposes in an eco-critical context: it can challenge anthropocentric perceptions of reality, give voice to non-human perspectives, embody cyclical or non-linear Indigenous temporalities, and represent the uncanny or “unreal” experience of climate change impacts that defy

conventional description. Alexis Wright's work, in particular, demonstrates how magical realism can be a powerful tool for expressing Indigenous worldviews and enacting narrative repair.

This paper builds on this scholarship by analyzing how Birch, Wright, and Flanagan explicitly engage with these themes. Birch centers Indigenous Sovereignty and Relationality to Country as foundational to climate justice. Wright employs Magical Realism and cyclical temporality to disrupt linear narratives and express interconnectedness. Flanagan exposes the deep roots of Colonialism and Anthropocentrism in Tasmania's history, linking the violence against humans and nature. Collectively, their work demonstrates the multifaceted nature of narrative repair in contemporary Australian writing.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach, grounded in eco-critical literary theory and postcolonial studies. The primary data consists of the three novels: Tony Birch's *The White Girl* (2019), Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013), and Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001). These texts were selected based on their explicit engagement with environmental themes, their exploration of colonial history and its ongoing impacts, their significant critical and popular reception, and their representation of diverse narrative strategies relevant to the concept of repair.

Examining how the texts depict, challenge, or reinforce human-centered worldviews. This involves analyzing character perspectives, the portrayal of non-human entities (animals, plants, landforms), and the implicit or explicit values assigned to human versus non-human life. Investigating the representation of colonial history, its legacies of dispossession and exploitation, and its direct links to ecological destruction. This includes analyzing plotlines centered on land theft, violence against Indigenous people, and the establishment of extractive economies. Identifying how Indigenous ecological knowledge systems are represented, valued, or marginalized within the narratives. This involves looking for depictions of land management practices, cultural understanding

of species and ecosystems, and the transmission of this knowledge. Analyzing how the texts portray the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples to land, self-determination, and cultural continuity, and how this sovereignty is presented as essential to ecological well-being. Exploring the depiction of relationships – between humans and the non-human world, between different human communities (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), and within ecosystems. This focuses on narratives emphasizing interdependence, kinship, and responsibility over separation and domination. Specifically analyzing Wright's use of this narrative mode. This involves identifying instances where the boundaries between realism and fantasy blur, examining the function of these elements (e.g., giving voice to the land, expressing trauma, representing non-linear time), and assessing their effectiveness in conveying ecological and cultural themes.

Discussion and Findings

Set in 1960s rural Australia, *The White Girl* follows Odette Brown, an Aboriginal woman, and her light-skinned granddaughter Sissy. Living on the fringe of a predominantly white town, they navigate the pervasive racism of the era, particularly the threat of the Welfare authorities removing Sissy under the assimilation policy. When Sissy attracts unwanted attention, Odette flees with her towards the city, seeking refuge with her sister. The journey becomes a quest for safety and belonging, forcing Odette to confront the trauma of her past, including the loss of her own mother, while fiercely protecting Sissy's connection to her identity and heritage. The novel culminates in a tense standoff with authorities, resolved through the intervention of a sympathetic local policeman and the strength of Odette's unwavering love and determination.

Birch consistently decenters the human. Odette's world is not separate from the non-human; it is deeply relational. The river is not just water; it's a source of food, a place of reflection, a witness to history, and a character in its own right. The bush is not wilderness; it's a familiar, sustaining home. Odette teaches Sissy to read the signs of the land, the behavior of birds, the changing seasons – knowledge passed down through generations. This is Indigenous Knowledge

in action, demonstrating a worldview where humans are part of, not masters of, the ecosystem. As Odette reflects, "The land doesn't belong to us. We belong to the land." This simple statement dismantles the anthropocentric, possessive logic of colonialism. The novel shows that respecting the land is inseparable from respecting Indigenous Sovereignty – the inherent right to care for and belong to Country.

Birch makes explicit the link between the violence of colonialism (dispossession, forced removal of children, racism) and the potential for ecological violence. The Welfare agents represent a system that seeks to sever Indigenous children from their land, culture, and family – a severing that fundamentally damages their relationship with Country. The threat to Sissy is simultaneously a threat to the continuation of Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable relationships with the environment. The town's white inhabitants often view the land purely as a resource (e.g., farming, timber), contrasting sharply with Odette's relational understanding. Birch shows that colonialism's extractive logic applies equally to people and land.

Narrative repair here is not grand or symbolic; it is enacted through Odette's daily acts of resistance and care. Protecting Sissy is an act of Sovereignty – asserting the right to family, culture, and future. Teaching Sissy about her heritage, about the stories of the land, is an act of cultural and ecological repair, ensuring the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge. Odette's quiet strength, her deep connection to her ancestors and the land she comes from, models a form of resilience rooted in relationality. The novel's resolution, while offering temporary safety, emphasizes that the struggle for Sovereignty and the right to live in relational connection with Country is ongoing. The narrative repairs the damaging colonial myth of the "dying race" or the "assimilated Aborigine" by portraying vibrant, adaptive Indigenous identity and knowledge.

Birch weaves Odette's memories of her mother and the past trauma of removal into the present narrative. This temporal layering emphasizes that the colonial past is not over; its impacts resonate in the present threat to Sissy. By connecting Odette's past with Sissy's potential future, the

narrative argues that healing the future requires confronting and repairing the past. The transmission of knowledge from Odette to Sissy is a bridge across time, ensuring cultural and ecological continuity against the forces of erasure.

Birch's narrative repair is subtle, grounded, and deeply human. It demonstrates that Indigenous Sovereignty and Relationality to Country are not optional extras in addressing the climate crisis in Australia; they are foundational. By centering an Aboriginal woman's perspective and lived experience, Birch challenges readers to see the land and its people through a lens of connection and responsibility, not ownership and exploitation.

Set in a near-future Australia ravaged by climate change, *The Swan Book* follows Oblivia Ethylene, an Aboriginal girl found mute after being gang-raped, who is taken in by an old woman, Bella Donna of the Elders, in a flooded, lawless swamp in the north. As climate refugees flee the devastated south, the swamp becomes a contested space. Oblivia becomes the symbolic wife of Warren Finch, the charismatic, assimilated Aboriginal leader of the First Nation Bank, who embodies the promises and perils of neoliberalism and assimilation. Warren whisks Oblivia away to the southern city, which is under constant threat from climate disasters and social unrest. Oblivia, bearing witness to profound environmental collapse, political corruption, and cultural betrayal, eventually returns north. The novel is non-linear, cyclical, and saturated with dreamtime stories, spirits, talking animals, and surreal events. Oblivia's journey is intertwined with the fate of the black swans, whose disappearance and potential return signal ecological collapse and possible renewal. The narrative resists easy resolution, ending amidst ongoing crisis but with a fragile sense of resilience rooted in the land and ancestral connections.

Wright employs Magical Realism not as mere stylistic flourish, but as a fundamental strategy of narrative repair, directly challenging the anthropocentric, linear, and rationalist narratives that enable ecological destruction. The repair operates by shattering the boundaries between human, animal, spirit, and land. The landscape is sentient –

the swamp breathes, the city groans, spirits roam. Animals, particularly the swans, are not just background fauna; they are protagonists, bearers of knowledge, and indicators of planetary health. The talking ibis, the ancestral beings, the embodied spirits of the land all demand recognition. This radical decentring of the human perspective is a direct challenge to Anthropocentrism. It forces the reader into a world where human actions have profound, often sentient, consequences for a multitude of other beings. The non-human world is not passive; it speaks, reacts, and remembers. This embodies an Indigenous Knowledge system where all life is interconnected and possesses agency.

The novel's structure is deliberately non-linear and cyclical, mirroring Indigenous understandings of time as layered and recursive rather than a straight line of progress. This temporal strategy is crucial for narrative repair. Linear, progressive time underpins the capitalist and colonial narratives that drive exploitation ("development," "growth," "assimilation"). Wright's cyclical narrative, weaving Dreamtime stories into the near-future apocalypse, disrupts this. It suggests that climate collapse is not an aberration in progress but the culmination of a destructive cycle rooted in colonialism and disconnection from Country. The potential return of the swans hints at the possibility of renewal, but it is renewal that requires a return to different ways of being, not a resumption of "progress." The past (colonial violence, dispossession) is not past; it shapes the present apocalypse. The future is not a distant goal but emerging from the cycles of the present. This reconfiguration of time is essential for understanding the deep roots of the climate crisis and imagining alternatives beyond the destructive logic of progress.

Wright's scathing satire targets the complicity of assimilated Indigenous leadership (Warren Finch) and neoliberal capitalism in exacerbating the climate crisis. Warren's First Nation Bank represents a toxic fusion of Indigenous Sovereignty rhetoric with extractive economic models, offering false promises of salvation while facilitating environmental destruction and social dislocation. The novel shows how Colonialism adapts, co-opting Indigenous symbols while continuing the project

of resource extraction and dispossession, now under the guise of economic development. The climate refugees fleeing the devastated south are the direct victims of this ongoing colonial-capitalist project. Wright's Magical Realism amplifies this critique – the grotesque excesses of the city, the surreal political machinations, the commodification of culture – exposing the inherent irrationality and violence of the system driving ecological collapse.

Oblivia's trauma (rape, muteness, displacement) mirrors the trauma of the land and its peoples. Her journey is one of witnessing – to environmental devastation, cultural betrayal, political corruption. Her muteness can be read as the silencing of Indigenous voices and the unspeakable nature of ecological collapse. Yet, her connection to Bella Donna, the land, and the ancestral spirits provides a fragile resilience. The novel's refusal of a neat, redemptive ending is itself a form of narrative honesty. Repair is not presented as a single event or easy solution, but as an ongoing, difficult process rooted in connection to Country and ancestral knowledge, even amidst overwhelming devastation. The persistence of the stories, the land, and the possibility of the swans' return embody this fragile hope.

Wright's use of Magical Realism is a powerful act of narrative repair. It creates a narrative space where the interconnectedness of all life, the cyclical nature of time, the trauma of colonialism, and the agency of the non-human world can be fully expressed. It challenges readers to perceive reality differently, to recognize the limitations of linear, anthropocentric thought, and to acknowledge the deep cultural and ecological wounds that need healing.

A sprawling, darkly comic historical novel set in early 19th century Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). It purports to be the recovered, heavily annotated memoir of William Buelow Gould, a convict forger and painter. Gould is imprisoned at the brutal Sarah Island penal colony in Macquarie Harbour. Commanded by the monstrous Commandant to paint the local fish, Gould becomes entangled in a surreal world of violence, madness, colonial ambition, and scientific obsession. The narrative weaves Gould's story with the stories of other

convicts, soldiers, Indigenous people (notably the silent figure of Twopenny Sal), and the Commandant's grandiose, doomed schemes. The colony is a microcosm of colonial violence – the felling of ancient Huon pines, the brutal treatment of convicts, the near-eradication of the local Indigenous population. Gould's paintings, initially mere documentation, become charged with strange power, blurring reality and hallucination. The narrative structure is fragmented, self-reflexive, and multi-voiced, constantly reminding the reader of its constructed nature and the unreliability of historical record. It ends with the colony's collapse and Gould's escape into the wilderness, leaving behind his "Book of Fish" as a contested, ambiguous testament.

Flanagan employs a grotesque, satirical style that mirrors the inherent violence and absurdity of the colonial project. The penal colony is not just a place of punishment; it is a factory of suffering, both human and ecological. The Commandant embodies the toxic fusion of scientific racism, colonial ambition, and extractive greed. His desire to classify, possess, and exploit – whether fish, timber, land, or people – is the driving force of the narrative's destruction. The graphic depiction of violence against convicts (floggings, torture) is inseparable from the graphic depiction of violence against the environment – the relentless felling of the "eternal" Huon pines. Flanagan forces the reader to see this entangled violence; the same system that brutalizes humans brutalizes the land. This is a direct challenge to narratives that separate social justice from environmental justice. The novel repairs the historical record by refusing to sanitize the foundational violence upon which Australia (and Tasmania specifically) was built.

The colonial project depicted is fundamentally Anthropocentric. The land is seen as empty ("Terra Nullius"), its resources as infinite, its Indigenous inhabitants as obstacles or curiosities. The Commandant's belief that he can control nature (through his fish classification, his architectural schemes, his "improvement" of the land) is portrayed as delusional and ultimately destructive. Gould's paintings, initially tools of this classifying impulse, begin to subvert it.

The fish become characters, the landscape becomes a presence, the paintings take on a life beyond the Commandant's control, hinting at the agency and mystery of the non-human world that defies human categorization. The novel's fragmented, hallucinatory style itself undermines the linear, rational, controlling narratives of colonialism and science.

The novel starkly portrays the violent erasure of Indigenous people and their Knowledge. The figure of Twopenny Sal, largely silent and objectified, represents the devastating impact of colonization – dispossession, violence, cultural disruption. The settlers' complete disregard for Indigenous Sovereignty and sustainable land management practices is evident in their rapacious exploitation. The ancient Huon pines, felled with breathtaking speed, symbolize the destruction of ecosystems that had existed in balance for millennia, managed by Indigenous peoples. Flanagan shows that the ecological devastation of Tasmania began with the violent dispossession of its Indigenous custodians and the imposition of an alien, extractive relationship with the land. Narrative repair here involves acknowledging this foundational theft and its ongoing ecological consequences.

The novel's self-reflexive structure – the multiple annotations, the contested provenance of Gould's manuscript – highlights the unreliability and partiality of colonial historical records. The "Book of Fish" itself is a palimpsest, overwritten by different voices and agendas. This meta-narrative strategy serves as a form of repair by questioning the authority of dominant colonial narratives. It suggests that alternative stories, perhaps those silenced like Twopenny Sal's, exist beneath the surface. Gould's final escape into the wilderness, leaving the book behind, can be read as a rejection of the colonial archive and a tentative step towards a different relationship with the land, however ambiguous and fraught. The novel doesn't offer easy redemption, but it clears space by exposing the lies and violence of the foundational narratives.

Flanagan's narrative repair is historical excavation. By laying bare the grotesque entanglement of human violence, ecological exploitation, Anthropocentrism, and Colonialism in Tasmania's past, he forces a recognition that the climate

crisis has deep, unresolved historical roots. The novel repairs the present by making visible the often-hidden violence of the past upon which contemporary Australia is built, challenging the myth of benign settlement and highlighting the urgent need for a different relationship with Country, one that acknowledges the injustices done and the Sovereignty of its First Peoples.

Conclusion

This analysis of Tony Birch's *The White Girl*, Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*, and Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish* demonstrates the vital role contemporary Australian literature plays in addressing the climate crisis through the framework of narrative repair. These novels do not simply document environmental degradation; they actively engage in the cultural work necessary to imagine a way beyond it. They collectively dismantle the destructive narratives – Anthropocentrism, Colonialism, linear progress, and the separation of humans from nature – that have propelled the planet into ecological crisis.

Birch's novel grounds narrative repair in the everyday, demonstrating that Indigenous Sovereignty and Relationality to Country are lived practices essential for cultural and ecological survival. By centering Odette's fierce protection of her granddaughter and her deep connection to land, Birch offers a model of resilience and resistance rooted in interdependence and responsibility. Wright's *The Swan Book* employs Magical Realism and cyclical temporality as radical tools to shatter anthropocentric perceptions and express the profound interconnectedness of all life amidst near-future collapse. It exposes the complicity of adapted colonial structures (neoliberalism, assimilationist leadership) in the climate crisis while affirming the fragile resilience of ancestral knowledge and connection to Country. Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish* excavates the grotesque historical roots of ecological exploitation in Tasmania, revealing the inextricable link between the violence of Colonialism against Indigenous peoples and the violence against the non-human world. Its fragmented, satirical narrative challenges the authority of colonial histories and forces a confrontation with the foundational injustices underpinning the climate crisis

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Returning and Re-membering: Reading Kerry Reed-Gilbert's "Wiradjuri Country"

Soumyarup Bhattacharjee

Historically, Australian literature has been a deeply contested site where aboriginal authors have persistently struggled to make their voices heard, not only to challenge the exclusion of their own agencies but also to challenge the historical omissions and silences. Literature has been a crucial political instrument for forming connections with the past despite the forced disjunctions, dislocations, and displacements that aboriginal communities have had to endure in the face of relentless settler aggression and colonial expansionism for hundreds of years. To understand the context within which these contestations in Australian literature emerge, the following passage by Emmanuel S. Nelson is worth quoting in full despite its length:

[...]indigenous Australians have not only been colonized but have been permanently rendered a mistreated and marginalized minority group on a continent which was once theirs. They constitute less than 2 percent of Australia's population of about sixteen million, so the possibilities of any radical political action or even any sustained cultural resistance are minimal. Furthermore, the Aboriginal culture remains deeply traumatized by the profound postcontact dislocations of the last two hundred years. It is necessary, then, to confront, examine, understand, accept, and affirm that past—though that past might represent defeat, dispossession, and discontinuity. Such a meaningful connection with the past is essential for racial self-retrieval, for forging a valid and liberating sense of personal and cultural wholeness. It is indispensable for healing the cultural fracture caused by the catastrophic impact of colonial intrusion; it is a prerequisite for cultural reclamation, for continued resistance. (Nelson 30)

Therefore, as J. J. Healy aptly observes, Aboriginal literature is a “literature of protest, discovery, recovery” [sic] (79). It is hardly surprising that Australian Aboriginal writing, which, according to Healy, emerged in its modern form in the 1960s, is often deeply political and infused with an awareness of history (Healy 79). Some of the most prominent Aboriginal writers and poets, such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Alexis Wright, Kerry Reed-Gilbert, Kim Scott and others, have found in their writing the scope for self-assertion, both individual and collective, as well as the possibility of cultural re-membering that which is forgotten, lost, fragmented, or silenced. I use the hyphenation in “re-membering” consciously, to highlight that the process of remembering in this context is often a painful exercise of putting together a dismembered cultural and social mode of existence and belonging as well as journeying through a long history of violence, trauma, and uprooting.

An unrelenting advocate and activist for preserving the rights of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Kerry Reed-Gilbert’s writing embodies the scope for both resistance and cultural self-articulation, intricately intertwined with each other within the richly layered textual space of her poems. One of the foremost aboriginal voices in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Australian literature, Reed-Gilbert, a poet of Wiradjuri origin who would eventually go on to become one of the “elders” of the Wiradjuri people, frequently foregrounded her poetry as an instrument to highlight not only the systematic dispossession and exploitation of the aboriginal people in Australia since its colonisation but also the urge for reclamation--of aboriginal history, identity, and agency. Prolific in her writing career, Reed-Gilbert produced many significant volumes in the span of three decades, such as *Black Woman Black Life* (Wakefield Press, 1996), *Talkin’ About Country* (Kuracca, 1997) *Message Stick: Contemporary Aboriginal writing* (IAD Press, 1997), *Ngununggula (Belonging to Here): Stories and poems* (FreeXpression, 1997), and *The Strength of Us as Women: Black women speak* (Ginninderra Press, 2000). She has also served as an editor to collections such as *A Pocket Full of Leadership* (ACT KLA’s 2016) and *Too Deadly: Or Voice Our Way Our Business* (2017). Her memoir, *The Cherry Picker’s Daughter* (Wild Dingo Press, 2019), was published

posthumously.¹ Her active involvement in the First Nations Australia Writers Network, where she worked tirelessly to promote and support indigenous poets and authors, strengthened the articulation of marginalised aboriginal voices in the country. In this brief essay we explore Reed-Gilbert's poem titled "Wiradjuri Country," published in the *Australian Poetry Anthology* (Vol. 8) in 2020. The poem, as we shall see, is both a personal tribute and an act of remembering, strongly tinged by the desire to return to one's roots. Within this context, the essay explores how the poem foregrounds a deep spiritual connection with one's ancestral land that transcends history.

The poem, in its opening stanza itself, offers a glimpse into a profound symbiotic bond where land and the people are inseparable; the land has offered the people a place in the world and a home for many generations, as it does today. The people, on the other hand, carry with them the history of the land and its little souvenirs—"eagles," "angels," "sun bursts," "gum trees," and "geraniums"—that give the land its own ontological and immanent agency. The poet-speaker in Wiradjuri country proudly declares herself to be one among them. Like a medieval troubadour who roams the land with his songs, she travels this land with a "pocket full of poetry" (Wiradjuri 11). She ends the first stanza with an emphatic anaphora: "I travel my country, /my land, /my life,/ my religion" (Wiradjuri 11). The poem thus also foregrounds a spiritual consciousness that challenges both anthropocentric thinking and the assumptions of post-Enlightenment Western philosophy. Rejecting the separation between "Man" and "Nature," it emphasizes a sense of belonging and oneness shared by the land, its people, the flora, and the fauna, each as a part of a larger harmonious whole. It strips human beings from their role as masters of the land and repositions the human as a "presence," one among many presences in a shared existence.

The poet-speaker hears in the wilderness a call to return, presumably to a past that has not been tainted by the cancerous

1 Kerry Reed-Gilbert's publication information in this essay has been borrowed from Jeanine Leane's obituary in the *Overland* magazine after Reed-Gilbert's passing. Check the words cited section for more details.

encroachment of modern, urban, industrialised civilization into ancestral Aboriginal land:

The bush calls me back
to the time of before.
Before tar and cement.
Brick walls and tin roofs.

To the time of Creation (Wiradjuri 11)

This is a return both to a time of simplicity and innocence, before the long history of violence and forced dispossession tarnished the harmonious existence of the people. This existence, the poem affirms, is one of “honesty,” “dignity,” “truth,” and “justice”—attributes that are inextricable from the “red dirt” of the land, as opposed to the colonial and the post-colonial periods marked by violence, treachery, and cruelty. Interestingly, the poem imagines attributes such as “truth” and “justice” beyond the institutionalised legal and judicial frameworks established by the colonial settlers and their modern incarnations. After all, the experience of the Aboriginal people with colonial laws and those who enforced them is entrenched in a vicious and traumatic past, as the following lines from the poem “Just Leave Your Mark Here”:

We, gubermment men,
sent by the King we steal their land
by one stroke of the mighty pen.
But don't tell anybody that.

Not our fault if some settlers kill the native born
with a shotgun placed between their eyes.
Shoot their families dead.
We wipe our hands of the mess we do
and look the other way. (Reed-Gilbert)

However, might be argued that the poem “Wiradjuri Country” does not participate in lamentation and mourning in a state of victimhood but offers an exuberant and optimistic call for reclamation and remembering of the past. The poet-speaker describes a transformative spiritual experience as the wind

infuses her with memories of the ancestors, extending her an invitation to walk the path, i.e., partake in the essence, experience, and wisdom preserved by the Wiradjuri for generations upon generations, making her one of their own. She has finally become aware of “dreamtime” – the inviolable spiritual connection among the past, the present, and the future and a continuity that transcends the limits of “History” as Western Enlightenment framed it. The symbolic return of the poet-speaker and a reaffirmation of her sense of belonging at the individual level is also mirrored by the return of elders to their position of respect and reverence, indicating that an individual’s return and reclamation of her Wiradjuri identity might also extend a path to a collective reclamation of lost honour and courage for the Wiradjuri people.

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Writing Against Erasure: Language Failure, Counter-Memory, and the Insurgent Voice in Jazz Money's Poetic Practice

Agnideep Datta

The act of writing poetry has long served as a powerful medium of resistance, offering marginalized voices a space to articulate identity, memory, and dissent. From the Hungryalists of Bengal post independence to the Beatniks in the United States of America, poetry has not merely been a medium of pleasure and a medium of self-expression, but a format that has been used to cry the cries of dissent, often bringing forth a wave of change, a call for revolution and resistance, if not so radical at the very least it has often been successful in holding the grounds of resistance. In the contemporary context, Jazz Money's poetry emerges as a vital site of such resistance, where personal, political, and collective struggles converge. As a Wiradjuri poet, artist, and activist, Money confronts the enduring legacies of colonial violence, systemic erasure of Indigenous languages, and the marginalization of queer and feminist subjectivities. Her debut poetry collection, *how to make a basket* (2021), alongside individual poems such as *if I write a poem*, reflects an urgent confrontation with biopolitical control, structural capitalism, and intergenerational trauma. Money's poetry is not simply an aesthetic exercise but a radical, ethical practice of survival and resistance. Money writes not only for herself but for generations whose languages and stories have been systematically stolen. In doing so, her poetry becomes a mode of reclaiming agency, bearing witness, and envisioning future possibility amid ongoing structural violence.

In the opening lines of the poem *if I write a poem*, Jazz Money writes: "*if I write a poem / it's for the pen / banned from my grandmother's hand*" (Money 1).

This evocative imagery immediately signals a profound experience of hegemonic and authoritarian control, wherein the very act of expression has been forcibly silenced. The reference to the 'grandmother's hand' introduces a significant generational dimension, suggesting that the structures of oppression are not confined to a singular moment in time but are deeply embedded within a trans-generational legacy. The grandmother figure, traditionally associated with wisdom, experience, and cultural transmission, becomes emblematic of a lineage that has suffered systemic disenfranchisement. Her inability to hold the pen symbolizes the enforced cultural amnesia imposed by colonial and patriarchal powers, effectively cutting off access to both language and historical narrative. The subsequent stanza intensifies this theme by illustrating the theft of language from the mouths of babies in cribs: "*and if I write / it's for our language / stolen from the mouths / of babies in cribs*" (Money 1). Here, the act of linguistic dispossession is portrayed as extending to the most vulnerable members of society, emphasizing the pervasive and all-encompassing nature of colonial violence. The juxtaposition of the aged grandmother and the infant highlights the indiscriminate reach of this oppression, demonstrating that it spares no individual, regardless of age or status. More than a depiction of individual suffering, this poetic imagery reflects a systemic and institutionalized project of erasure, one that aims to sever generational continuity and cultural memory. By drawing attention to both the oldest and the youngest in society, Money's poem lays bare the seemingly infinite and self-perpetuating nature of this oppressive structure. It suggests that the mechanisms of control—whether through the denial of education, the prohibition of language, or the erasure of identity—are not momentary acts but rather deeply entrenched strategies of colonial power designed to persist across generations without rupture. The absence of any clear sign of resistance within these stanzas further emphasizes the oppressive system's resilience, making the poet's own act of writing an urgent and radical intervention in a context of enduring structural violence.

In the fourth stanza of *if I write a poem*, Jazz Money writes: "*and if I write / it's because our story / hasn't been written / by us / for*

us" (Money 1). This statement captures a crucial political and epistemological stance regarding representation, authorship, and historical narrative. The act of writing here transcends mere self-expression and becomes a deliberate, radical assertion of agency against historical erasure. The poem foregrounds the tension between being written and writing oneself, highlighting that the dominant narratives of history and identity have systematically excluded First Nations voices. This is a direct challenge to colonial historiography, which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critiques in her seminal essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" where she argues that subaltern subjects are not simply excluded from dominant discourse but are rendered voiceless within it, their stories told by others rather than by themselves (Spivak 271).

Money's insistence that their story has "not been written by us, for us" reflects a need to reclaim the power of narrative production. It reveals the structural violence inherent in colonial practices of historiography that silence or appropriate Indigenous histories, thereby perpetuating epistemic injustice. Miranda Fricker defines epistemic injustice as the wrong done to someone in their capacity as a knower, which directly applies here: First Nations peoples have been denied the authority to narrate their own histories, identities, and experiences (Fricker 1). Moreover, this stanza encapsulates the Foucauldian notion of power/knowledge, wherein the power to produce knowledge—and thus history and truth—is monopolized by dominant structures (Foucault 27). The poet's decision to write is an intervention in this system, a method of counter-conduct that seeks to disrupt and challenge the epistemic frameworks that have excluded and controlled marginalized identities. Writing becomes not merely a personal act but a political one, oriented toward resisting colonial authority and producing alternative histories that center Indigenous subjectivities. Thus, the act of writing in Money's poem is not simply about the ability or inability to write, but fundamentally about the right to write and the ethical responsibility of representation. It is a reclamation of voice and narrative agency—a deliberate act of resistance against historical and ongoing erasure.

In the lines *"and if I don't write / it's because I can't bring my baby / into a world on fire"* (Money 1), Jazz Money engages with the politics of silence as a deliberate and strategic position within the larger context of resistance. The declaration of not writing does not signify absence of thought or passivity; rather, it reveals the oppressive conditions under which speech and representation are constrained. The inability to write stems from a recognition of the systemic violence that continues to render language itself insufficient, complicit, or dangerous within structures of power. Judith Butler's concept of precariousness highlights this tension, arguing that marginalized lives exist in a condition where social, political, and material vulnerability is persistent, and where the ability to speak or represent oneself is always under threat (Butler 22).

Money's choice to emphasize the impossibility of writing in this moment signals an awareness that articulating resistance or identity is not always a matter of volition but is shaped by the conditions of the present. Her silence becomes a form of political expression in itself, exposing the limits of discourse in a world marked by ongoing environmental destruction, racialized violence, and systemic exclusion. In this context, silence is not merely a passive absence but is entangled with the same forces that perpetuate erasure and structural violence. Spivak's argument in *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"* is pertinent here: the subaltern is not only excluded from speaking in hegemonic frameworks but is structurally prohibited from speaking at all, and any attempt to speak is mediated through dominant systems that distort or appropriate their voice (Spivak 287). Moreover, this refusal to write reflects an ethical stance against replicating the cycles of oppression. Writing in a world already "on fire" risks exposing future generations to further harm, as the act of articulation itself could become another site of violence or appropriation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes the dangers of speaking for the subaltern, cautioning that such acts often reinforce the very systems of domination they attempt to contest (Spivak 305). In this light, Money's silence is not resignation but a conscious disruption of the trans-generational continuum of oppression. Her statement reveals the impossibility of breaking the cycle of

systemic violence simply through articulation alone; instead, it gestures toward the need for a different kind of praxis – one that holds space for unarticulated grief, deferred narratives, and embodied resistance.

In the lines “*and if I don’t write / it’s because this language / these letters / are not worthy*” (Money 1), Jazz Money addresses the profound failure of language to represent the fullness of experience under systemic oppression. The poet’s reluctance to write emerges from a deep skepticism toward the colonial language apparatus that has historically functioned as a tool of control, erasure, and subjugation. The assertion that the language itself is “not worthy” signals a rupture in trust, where inherited linguistic structures no longer serve as viable vessels for truth or identity. Walter Benjamin, in *The Task of the Translator*, argues that language bears the burden of mediating meaning across worlds, yet colonial languages often function to overwrite indigenous epistemologies rather than preserve them (Benjamin 74). This failure is not accidental but a direct consequence of the epistemic violence embedded within colonial power relations.

However, the poem does not remain in a space of muteness. Money continues: “*and if I write a word / on the inside of my mouth / in the dust / in the sand*” (Money 1). These metaphors of “dust” and “sand” evoke the land itself, which holds profound significance in First Nations epistemologies as both a site of belonging and resistance. The act of inscribing words into the earth becomes an act of defiance against the imposed erasures of history. This embodied inscription parallels the notion of counter-memory discussed by Michel Foucault, where the marginalized assert alternative narratives precisely because dominant histories seek to silence them (Foucault 81). The poet’s voice, once constrained by oppressive structures, now seeks to embed itself into the most elemental of materials – the land – suggesting that true expression must emerge from and return to the ground, as a reclaiming of place and origin. Moreover, the “inside of my mouth” signals an internalized tension between silence and expression. The word is formed but not yet spoken, caught in the liminal space of potential articulation. Judith Butler’s concept of performativity

becomes relevant here: speech is not merely a transparent act of communication but a performance that enacts identity and resistance (Butler 519). The word, inscribed in dust and sand, becomes a performative act of dissent against the totalizing forces that have sought to render the poet voiceless. The very earth, long subjected to colonial expropriation and violence, becomes a medium through which the voice finds its way, challenging the imposed silence.

Ultimately, the final declaration – “*because I know / no other truth at all*” (Money 1) – marks an outburst of an irrepressible voice that refuses erasure. It is not the authoritative or sanctioned truth, but an insurgent truth grounded in lived experience and survival. The poet’s voice does not merely respond to oppression; it seeks to destabilize the oppressive order itself. The image of words inscribed in dust and sand suggests the potential for these traces of dissent to outlast imposed structures, shaking the foundations of the hegemonic order in much the same way that natural forces erode and transform the landscape. The land becomes both witness and participant in the poet’s resistance, highlighting the interdependence of identity, language, and place in the struggle against structural violence.

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“Everywhen” and the River’s Memory: Communal Time, Aboriginal Sovereignty, and the Work of Remembrance in Carpentaria

Debarshi Arathdar

Abstract

Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* (2006) stages a sovereign Aboriginal imagination that resists colonial chronologies and narrates Country as an animate archive. Reading the novel through the twin lenses of communal memory and Indigenous temporalities—often glossed as “everywhen”—this essay argues that Wright remaps narrative time to align with Aboriginal ways of being, law, and relation. The book’s polyphony, spiraling structure, and ceremonial returns figure memory as a communal practice embedded in place (Country), while its temporal aesthetics interrupt the linear, extractivist time of the mine, the state, and the settler archive. Placing *Carpentaria* in conversation with key Indigenous and allied thinkers—W. E. H. Stanner on “everywhen,” Deborah Bird Rose on Country’s liveliness, Irene Watson and Aileen Moreton-Robinson on sovereignty and epistemic decolonization, Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly on songlines, and Tyson Yunkaporta on pattern knowledge—I show how Wright’s novel builds a narrative law-ground (a literary “Law ground”) where memory is enacted, not stored, and time is kin, not a measure. *Carpentaria* thus becomes both a story and a sovereign mode of knowledge transmission.

Keywords: *Aboriginal temporality, Communal memory, Sovereignty, Everywhen, Indigenous storytelling*

Introduction: From River to Relation

Set in the fictional town of Desperance on the Gulf of Carpentaria, *Carpentaria* opens onto a world where tidal

rivers think and speak, winds carry news, and the ground remembers. Wright, a Waanyi writer from the southern Gulf highlands, has described her project as an attempt “to portray the world of Indigenous Australia as being in constant opposition between different spaces of time” and to imagine “the cultural mind as sovereign and in control” even while moving through the wreckage of colonialism (Wright, “On Writing Carpentaria”). The novel is epic in scope yet intimate in its grounding: a family, a town, a river, a mine. But it refuses to unfold according to the rules of realist historical narrative. Instead, it draws readers into what Stanner called the “everywhen” of the Dreaming, where ancestral presence is ongoing and history does not recede but remains active in Country (Stanner 202). Wright makes this temporal order palpable through recursive narration, polyphony, and refusal of closure (“Everywhen” and the River’s Memory).

To speak of communal memory in this context is not to invoke a static storehouse of recollections; it is to mark a mode of living in which remembering is a collective, place-based performance. In Wright’s hands, memory is inseparable from Country, ceremony, song, and law – what Watson names as First Nations law’s non-extinguishable quality, not granted by the Crown and not erasable by statute (Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples* 17). Communal memory is the work of relation: to each other, to nonhuman kin, and to the ancestors whose tracks and songs (songlines) hold knowledge systems coded into the earth (Neale and Kelly 61). *Carpentaria*’s form often overwhelms readers used to linear chronology. Its long sentences, unbroken paragraphs, and refusal of conventional chapter markers simulate tidal rhythms. This aesthetic choice is not decorative; it places the reader within the temporalities of Country itself (“Everywhen” and the River’s Memory). Stanner’s concept of “everywhen” is crucial: Dreaming time is not locked in the past but persists across generations as an ever-present framework of being (Stanner 203). When Norm Phantom or Mozzie Fishman recount ancestral stories, they are not “retelling” old myths but activating law in the present. Wright’s spiral structure, with stories circling back upon themselves, enacts this ontology.

The storm sequence offers a clear example. Each storm is not a discrete event but a return: the cyclone that devastated past generations comes back again, linking the living to ancestors and obligating them to re-establish balance with Country ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). Narrative time is therefore not progressive but recursive. It enacts what anthropologist Lynne Hume calls the Dreaming's "eternal present," a simultaneity of times accessed ritually and narratively (Hume 199). Critics sometimes liken this to magical realism, but Wright resists such comparisons, insisting her novel emerges from Aboriginal ontologies, not imported modes. Carmen Renes describes this as "Aboriginal realism," wherein the novel represents a world where rivers and winds have agency because that is how the world is experienced in Aboriginal epistemologies (Renes 75). The spiral, then, is not fantasy but realism on Aboriginal terms.

Communal memory in Carpentaria is inseparable from the Country. The Phantom family's relationship with the land—fishing, listening to winds, attending to seasons—anchors memory in practice. Norm Phantom's authority derives from his capacity to narrate and enact Country's stories, shared and renewed communally ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). Songlines are central. Neale and Kelly describe songlines as "a memory code for everything you need to know to survive in Australia" (78). Wright embeds this into her narrative: Will Phantom's travels retrace ancestral pathways, and Mozzie Fishman's journeys become mobile ceremonies that refresh memory. To remember is to move, sing, and gather; the novel dramatizes this pedagogy ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). Yunkaporta explains that Indigenous knowledge is carried in patterns, not abstract categories (112). In Carpentaria, repeated returns to the river, cyclical storms, and shifting family focus all form a knowledge pattern. The novel itself becomes a mnemonic device, a textual songline carrying knowledge forward. This communal memory contrasts with settler modes housed in archives, monuments, and texts. Wright's novel refuses such static storage, instead emphasizing embodied enactment. Moreton-Robinson critiques white possessiveness—the drive to own and control knowledge (The White Possessive 28).

Wright resists this by presenting knowledge as performative and inalienable. Humor and gossip also serve memory's work. Oral traditions use humor to make stories memorable, and Wright's prose mimics this (Renes 80). The community remembers not just through solemnity but through laughter, exaggeration, and play.

Time Wars: Extractive Chronologies vs. Indigenous Durations

The conflict at the novel's heart is not only between Aboriginal families and settler institutions but between two temporal regimes ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). The Gurfurrit mine embodies settler-colonial time: linear, extractive, profit-oriented. Its schedules assume land is an inert matter awaiting exploitation. This contrasts violently with the river's cyclical memory and ceremonial time. Watson insists Aboriginal law is non-extinguishable, regardless of colonial statutes (Aboriginal Peoples 25). In Carpentaria, this persistence appears as temporal resilience: Country remembers even when governments declare otherwise.

Rose describes Aboriginal time as multispecies, where humans synchronize with nonhuman kin (Rose 56). In Wright's novel, such rhythms remain authoritative. When the mine destroys habitats, it disrupts both ecology and memory. The mine's forward-only temporality insists on "progress," erasing the past. Yet storms and tides continually undermine operations, showing that ecological cycles exceed industrial calendars ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). This clash of times is profoundly political: settler institutions attempt to monopolize the future, but Aboriginal temporalities insist on recurrence and balance. Another major theme is the opposition between communal memory and the settler archive. Police records, court documents, and media frame Aboriginal life as criminal or pitiable. These institutions embody what Moreton-Robinson calls "possessive logics" (Talkin' Up to the White Woman 34).

Wright counters this by giving authority to voices excluded from such archives. Angel Day's gossip, Elias Smith's recollections, Mozzie's journeys—all function as counter-

archives ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). Neale and Kelly emphasize that songlines serve as both archive and map: storing knowledge in landscape and ensuring it is passed on through performance (91). *Carpentaria* works the same way. Its narrative performs memory anew in each reading, resisting the fixity of records. Thus, Wright's novel challenges archival epistemology by being long, digressive, and resistant to summary. These qualities frustrate settler readers but train audiences to listen, wait, and reread – mimicking communal memory practice.

Form as Ceremony: Polyphony, Humor, and Communal Memory

The novel's form is ceremonial. Its polyphonic structure resembles a gathering where multiple storytellers contribute, modeling memory as collective performance ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). Humor is crucial. Aboriginal storytelling often uses satire to disarm authority. In *Carpentaria*, ridicule of elites undermines settler seriousness. Humor becomes a strategy of survival, affirming life through wit (Renes 82). Renes suggests that Wright's "Aboriginal realism" refuses to separate myth from fact (77). This realism sustains communal memory: tall tales are not false but another truth mode.

Education practices echo this. Teachers emphasize reading the novel slowly, sometimes aloud, to capture its rhythms (Reading Australia). In classrooms, reading becomes a communal event, echoing oral traditions. Thus, form itself becomes pedagogy. If memory and time are communal and cyclical, sovereignty in *Carpentaria* is enacted through the Country itself. Watson insists that Aboriginal sovereignty persists as law grounded in Country (Aboriginal Peoples 29). Wright depicts land enforcing sovereignty: rivers speak, storms return, landscapes demand respect. These are not metaphors but manifestations of jurisdiction ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). Moreton-Robinson critiques settler notions of sovereignty that frame Indigenous peoples as postcolonial subjects seeking recognition (The White Possessive 38). Wright stages the opposite: sovereignty is already enacted through relation with Country. The mine represents settler

attempts to override jurisdiction, imposing its own timelines. But Wright shows the limits of such imposition: natural forces continually reassert themselves. Aesthetically, Wright asserts sovereignty by refusing settler narrative conventions, instead privileging Aboriginal temporalities.

Carpentaria also anticipates climate discourse. By emphasizing the agency of storms, rivers, and animals, Wright presents an ecological worldview in which survival depends on respecting cycles ("Everywhen" and the River's Memory). Rose describes how caring for Country is inseparable from remembering law (65). In Wright's novel, ecological crises are also crises of memory. When the mine disrupts habitats, it erases mnemonic systems embedded in them. Neale and Kelly highlight how songlines encode ecological knowledge (108). Wright shows how communal memory sustains this, ensuring transmission through ceremony. Yunkaporta reinforces this: survival depends on recognizing relational patterns (134). The novel's refusal of closure mirrors ecological processes and insists repair is ongoing. Communal memory ensures devastations are remembered, but also enables futures rooted in law and relation.

Conclusion: Reading as Relation

Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* asks readers not simply to learn about Aboriginal time and memory in a detached or anthropological sense, but to experience them through the very act of reading. The novel's structure is deliberately crafted to estrange readers from conventional Western narrative expectations—linear plots, chronological development, and clear distinctions between past and present—and instead to immerse them in what W.E.H. Stanner once called "everywhen," the Aboriginal sense of time that is simultaneously past, present, and future. Wright achieves this immersion by drawing readers into spirals, recursions, and polyphonies that enact the rhythms of Aboriginal storytelling traditions. The novel's spiraling form exemplifies Indigenous temporalities by refusing a singular entry point or conclusive end. Instead of unfolding as a sequence of discrete events, the narrative circles back on itself, repeating motifs, revisiting scenes, and layering ancestral presences with contemporary

political conflicts. For instance, the serpent—both a creation ancestor and a force still shaping Country—moves in and out of the narrative at unpredictable intervals. This repetition is not redundant but pedagogical: it teaches readers that time in Aboriginal cosmology is not linear progression but continual return and renewal. By placing myth alongside the everyday struggles of the Pricklebush people, Wright shows that Dreaming is not consigned to a mythical past but remains active in the present.

Similarly, the novel's polyphonic voices expand the field of memory and time. Wright does not present a single authoritative narrator; instead, she orchestrates a chorus of voices—ancestral, communal, ecological, and individual—that overlap and interrupt one another. These voices resist containment within settler genres of history or ethnography. Instead, they enact memory as a living practice, one that belongs not to individuals but to communities and their Country. In Aboriginal oral traditions, storytelling is not merely about recalling facts; it is an ongoing re-enactment of law and knowledge, binding people, land, and ancestors together. Wright brings this tradition into the novel form, so that reading itself becomes a participatory act in keeping memory alive. Foregrounding these Aboriginal temporalities is not a neutral aesthetic choice—it is a direct challenge to extractive chronologies and settler archives. Colonial historiography in Australia has long been organized around linear progress narratives: the movement from “terra nullius” to colonization, settlement, and modernization. Within that frame, Aboriginal peoples were often represented as vanishing relics of a premodern past. Wright refuses this erasure by narrating a world in which ancestral presences, community struggles, and ecological cycles coexist. Her cyclical time undermines the colonial fantasy of progress that justifies mining companies' extraction of land and resources in the Gulf country. By emphasizing ecological rhythms such as tides, cyclones, and seasonal renewal, Wright situates Aboriginal time within the living pulse of Country rather than within settler calendars of exploitation.

In doing so, Wright also contests the authority of the settler archive. Archives, as colonial institutions, have historically reduced Aboriginal memory to written records, anthropological notes, or state documents — forms that separate knowledge from Country and community. *Carpentaria* offers a counter-archive: one that is embodied, oral, and ecological. Its communal storytelling foregrounds the sovereignty of Indigenous epistemologies, demonstrating that memory persists not because it is validated by external recognition but because it is enacted daily through relation to land, law, and story. This emphasis on communal memory carries profound political implications. In settler frameworks, sovereignty is typically imagined as something conferred or recognized by external authorities, such as the Crown or the state. Wright reorients sovereignty as something intrinsic and enacted through lived relation to Country. By centering communal memory, she shows that sovereignty is not a legal status to be granted or withheld but a cultural fact that has always existed. The Pricklebush people's survival, their ongoing storytelling, and their maintenance of relationships with ancestors and land are themselves enactments of sovereign being. *Carpentaria* is not simply a novel to be analyzed for its themes; it is itself a ceremonial act of storytelling that enacts Aboriginal ways of knowing. Its spirals reflect the cycles of Country, its polyphonies echo the collective voices of the community, and its temporalities refuse settler logics of disappearance. By doing so, Wright affirms the continuity of Aboriginal sovereignty and challenges readers to rethink what it means to inhabit time, memory, and story on this land.

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Gender and Nation: A Feminist Reading of Banjo Paterson and Dorothea Mackellar

Sudipta Dutta

Abstract

This paper examines the gendered construction of Australian national identity through a feminist reading of Banjo Paterson's 'We're All Australians Now' and Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country.' While Paterson's poem envisions nationhood through masculine sacrifice, unity, and martial valor, Mackellar's poem locates national identity in a feminine attachment to landscape, endurance, and affect. The analysis situates these poems in their cultural context, highlighting how they represent divergent yet complementary strands of early twentieth-century national discourse. Using feminist and ecofeminist theory, the paper argues that Paterson's masculinist nationalism and Mackellar's feminine nationalism together illuminate the complex interplay of gender in shaping cultural identity in Australia. This dialogue between masculine and feminine articulations provides insight into both the inclusions and exclusions of early Australian nation-making.

Keywords: *Gender, Nationalism, Australian Poetry, Feminism, Landscape*

Introduction

The early decades of the twentieth century were crucial in the shaping of Australian cultural identity. Federation in 1901 brought together the colonies into a Commonwealth, and within a short span of time, the search for a unified national voice began to be reflected in literature. Among the poets who contributed to this process, Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson (1864–1941) and Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar (1885–

1968) hold a central position. Paterson, already celebrated for his ballads of bush life such as 'Man from Snowy River' (1895) and 'Clancy of the Overflow' (1889), turned in his later work toward themes of national pride and collective belonging. Mackellar, in contrast, gained recognition for her enduring lyric 'My Country' (first published in 1908), which continues to be considered a quintessential expression of Australian attachment to the land.

Although both poets write within the framework of nationalism, their perspectives diverge in significant ways. Paterson's 'We're All Australians Now' (1915) articulates a vision of the nation that is built upon collective masculine effort, martial valor, and the sacrifice of young men in service to the greater whole. Mackellar's 'My Country,' on the other hand, presents a deeply personal and gendered articulation of belonging, emphasizing emotional and embodied connections to the natural environment. The juxtaposition of these two works opens up fertile ground for feminist literary analysis, allowing us to ask: how do gendered perspectives shape the construction of national identity in early Australian poetry?

This paper argues that Paterson's poem establishes nationhood as a masculine project tied to war and struggle, while Mackellar's poem presents a feminine vision of the nation, rooted in landscape, resilience, and affect. By analyzing these poems structurally and thematically, and situating them in their literary and cultural contexts, we can see how gendered voices were instrumental in creating divergent but complementary narratives of Australian national identity.

Nationalism and Literary Context in Early Twentieth-Century Australia

The early twentieth century was marked by attempts to define what it meant to be Australian. Literature provided one of the most effective vehicles for this national self-definition. Paterson, as a bush balladeer, had long contributed to the mythologizing of rural Australia as the true site of national character. His later patriotic verse continued this tradition by emphasizing collective unity, physical toughness, and loyalty. These values resonated with the broader cultural currents that equated masculinity with national progress.

Dorothea Mackellar, by contrast, entered the literary scene as a young woman from a privileged background who nonetheless felt compelled to counter prevailing Eurocentric visions of landscape. While much poetry of her time idealized English pastoral imagery, Mackellar insisted on representing the uniqueness of the Australian environment. Her insistence on the harsh beauty of droughts, floods, and burning plains challenged both imported aesthetics and gender expectations. Rather than engaging in explicitly political discourse, she articulated a more intimate, affective vision of nationhood that was nonetheless deeply political in its implications.

This literary moment highlights the intersection of gender and nation in striking ways. As feminist theorists such as Nira Yuval-Davis have argued, women often serve as symbolic bearers of the nation, embodying its continuity, traditions, and boundaries (Yuval-Davis 45). At the same time, women writers like Mackellar could disrupt this passive role by asserting their own voices in the creation of national identity. Reading Paterson and Mackellar together thus reveals not only the gendered nature of national discourse but also the tensions between masculine and feminine articulations of belonging.

Banjo Paterson's 'We're All Australians Now'

Paterson's 'We're All Australians Now' is structured as a ballad, consistent with his characteristic style. Its rhyming quatrains and regular rhythm create a sense of marching cadence, appropriate for a poem celebrating national resolve. The poem begins with the collective 'Australia takes her pen in hand / To write a line to you' (ll. 1-2), personifying the nation itself as the author of the message. The speaker positions himself as the voice of the nation, addressing 'you fellows' — the fighting men.

The central imagery of the poem revolves around masculine labor and martial effort. The 'shearing shed and cattle run' and the 'fisher-boys' who 'dropped sail and oar' (ll. 5-12) exemplify a rural, working-class masculinity that becomes redirected from labor to battle. The idea of solidarity is underscored in lines such as 'The old state jealousies of yore

/ Are dead as Pharaoh's sow' (ll. 17-18). Here, the masculine body becomes the symbol of national unity, dissolving regional differences.

Strikingly, women are absent from this national vision. The poem constructs the nation entirely through male figures: shearers, farmers' sons, fisher-boys, and miners. Their sacrifices are represented as the foundation of Australia's new history: 'We have, through what you boys have done, / A history of our own' (ll. 45-46). The collective 'we' is gendered male, excluding women's roles in sustaining the home front or contributing to national culture.

Structurally, the poem functions as propaganda, using repetition ('Fight on, fight on' [ll. 61-62]) and imperatives to inspire perseverance. Its tone is declarative and celebratory, affirming that 'Our old world differences are dead' (l. 49). The nation emerges through martial sacrifice and masculine solidarity, leaving little room for other voices.

Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country'

If Paterson's nation is forged in masculine battle, Mackellar's is created through feminine attachment to landscape. 'My Country' begins by acknowledging the traditional English pastoral imagery that shaped earlier poetry: 'The love of field and coppice, / Of green and shaded lanes, / Of ordered woods and gardens / Is running in your veins' (ll. 1-4). However, Mackellar rejects this imagery as alien to her own experience: 'I know but cannot share it, / My love is otherwise' (ll. 7-8).

This opening sets up a contrast between imported European aesthetics and Mackellar's distinctive love of Australia: 'I love a sunburnt country, / A land of sweeping plains, / Of ragged mountain ranges, / Of droughts and flooding rains' (ll. 13-16). Her descriptions combine beauty and terror, suggesting an ambivalent but passionate relationship with the land.

The poem's structure reinforces this intimate engagement. Its stanzas alternate between descriptions of harshness and renewal, death and regeneration: 'Her pitiless blue sky, / When sick at heart, around us, / We see the cattle die - / But then the grey clouds gather, / And we can bless again / The

steady, soaking rain' (ll. 37–42). The rhythm of natural cycles becomes a metaphor for endurance, resilience, and emotional investment.

Unlike Paterson, Mackellar centers subjectivity and affect. She repeatedly declares 'Core of my heart, my country!' (ll. 33, 45), emphasizing personal emotion as the basis of national belonging. Her insistence that 'All you who have not loved her, / You will not understand' (ll. 55–56) constructs a boundary of inclusion and exclusion, but one based on love and emotional connection rather than bloodshed.

Comparative Discussion

The contrast between Paterson and Mackellar highlights the gendered bifurcation of national discourse. Paterson's poem, with its emphasis on masculine labor and sacrifice, constructs the nation through collective action and martial endurance. Women are absent from his framework, their contributions silenced in favor of heroic male figures. Mackellar's poem, by contrast, positions feminine subjectivity at the center of the national narrative, making emotional attachment to the land the primary marker of belonging.

Structurally, the two poems also diverge. Paterson's ballad form and direct address make his work propagandistic, meant for public consumption and national mobilization. Mackellar's more lyrical form, with its refrain 'Core of my heart, my country,' foregrounds the interior, private dimensions of nationalism. Both forms, however, contribute to constructing a sense of collective identity: one through public exhortation, the other through intimate resonance.

Theoretical Engagement

Feminist theorists have long pointed out the gendered dynamics of nationalism. Anne McClintock observes that 'all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous' (McClintock 355). Paterson's poem exemplifies this danger by equating national identity with martial masculinity, leaving no room for women or alternative identities. His vision reinforces patriarchal dominance by coding national belonging as male.

Nira Yuval-Davis highlights how women are often constructed as symbolic reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 45). Mackellar's poem challenges this by moving from symbolism to authorship. She does not merely embody the nation but actively defines it through her voice. Her relationship with the land resonates with ecofeminist thought, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of women and nature in systems of oppression and resistance (Gaard 13).

Conclusion

The juxtaposition of Banjo Paterson's 'We're All Australians Now' and Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country' illuminates the gendered construction of nationalism in early twentieth-century Australia. Paterson's masculine nation is forged in sacrifice, labor, and martial unity, while Mackellar's feminine nation emerges through attachment to landscape, endurance, and emotion. Together, they reflect the complex interplay of gender in shaping cultural identity.

Through close textual analysis and feminist theoretical engagement, it becomes evident that national identity in Australia was not a singular narrative but a dialogue between masculine and feminine articulations. Recognizing these dual strands enriches our understanding of how literature both reflected and shaped the cultural imagination of the time. Moreover, it allows contemporary readers to question exclusionary models of nationhood and to appreciate the diversity of voices — male and female — that contributed to the making of 'Australia.'

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The Theme of Ageing in a Postcolonial World in Australian Literature

Natasha Chatterjee

Abstract:

This paper explores the theme of ageing in Australian literature through a postcolonial lens, emphasizing how ageing is represented as both a personal and collective experience shaped by historical trauma, colonial legacies, and cultural survival. In works such as Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, and Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth*, elderly characters function as custodians of memory, carriers of cultural resistance, and witnesses to the unsettled histories of colonization. For Indigenous characters, ageing is tied to resilience and cultural continuity, with elders preserving oral traditions and resisting the erasure of identity under colonial pressures. For non-Indigenous figures, ageing often reveals anxieties around belonging, inheritance, and the unsettled guilt of colonial dispossession. These narratives demonstrate that ageing is not simply a biological process but also a historical one, deeply entwined with the negotiation of identity and land. By portraying the elderly as cultural anchors and critical voices, Australian literature highlights how memory and survival remain central to the ongoing process of decolonization. Ageing thus becomes a metaphor for endurance, resistance, and the persistent influence of history, reminding us that the past continues to shape the present in a postcolonial world.

Keywords: *Ageing, Postcolonial Literature, Australian Fiction, Memory, Trauma, Decolonization.*

Introduction

Ageing as a theme in literature often reflects the struggles, desires, and complex realities of individuals as they encounter the inevitability of time, identity, and societal expectations. In postcolonial contexts, this theme becomes layered with

historical trauma, colonial legacies, and the redefinition of cultural and national identities. In Australian literature, the theme of ageing emerges within a society deeply affected by its colonial past, the displacement of Indigenous communities, and the multicultural fabric that now shapes the nation. Ageing in a postcolonial world is not only about the passage of time, but also about navigating the legacies of colonialism, racialization, and cultural preservation.

This paper explores how ageing is represented in Australian literature, with particular emphasis on the works of authors such as David Malouf, Alexis Wright, Kim Scott, and Oodgeroo Noonuccal. Through their novels, poetry, and stories, these writers engage with the multifaceted experience of ageing in a postcolonial world, addressing the effects of historical trauma, the construction of identity over time, and the challenges faced by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in coming to terms with the past. By analysing these works, this paper will highlight how ageing, when viewed through the lens of postcolonialism, becomes a site of memory, resistance, and transformation.

1. The Postcolonial Context of Ageing in Australian Literature

Ageing in a postcolonial world is more than just the experience of growing old. It is shaped by the broader social and political context of colonization and its aftermath. In Australia, the effects of British colonization were not limited to physical displacement but extended into cultural erasure, systemic violence, and the rewriting of Indigenous histories. The trauma of colonization, which has been passed down through generations of Indigenous Australians, intersects with the experiences of ageing in complex ways.

For Indigenous Australians, ageing is intertwined with the process of cultural survival. Many Indigenous communities experienced not just the loss of land and language but also the erosion of traditional forms of knowledge and cultural transmission. The elderly, often the keepers of wisdom and history, found themselves in a society that devalued their knowledge in favor of a colonial system that undermined their way of life.

For non-Indigenous Australians, the experience of ageing is similarly shaped by the legacy of colonialism, especially in the context of national identity. Older generations who lived through periods of intense racial and cultural exclusion may find themselves reflecting on the ways in which Australia's identity has evolved and the continuing impact of colonial ideologies on the present.

2. The Elderly as Custodians of Memory: Indigenous Perspectives

In Australian literature, the elderly are often portrayed as the custodians of memory, particularly in Indigenous narratives. The theme of memory and the passing of knowledge is central to the lives of Indigenous elders, as they carry cultural and historical knowledge that connects the past with the present. However, this role has been complicated by the colonial legacy, where the imposition of Western education, values, and systems of knowledge has led to a marginalization of Indigenous elders and their teachings.

2.1. "Carpentaria" by Alexis Wright

Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria* (2006) provides a powerful example of how Indigenous ageing is depicted in postcolonial Australia. The novel is set in the remote town of Desperance and follows the lives of the Anangu people, focusing particularly on the character of Old People, elders who embody the wisdom and strength of the Indigenous community. The elderly in Wright's novel are not just repositories of traditional knowledge but also active participants in shaping the future of their people. The character of Norma, an elder who refuses to give up her land and identity, demonstrates the power of memory and tradition in resisting colonial oppression.

Through the lives of its elderly characters, *Carpentaria* presents the complex relationship between ageing, memory, and survival in a postcolonial world. The ageing process for these characters is not just a personal journey but a collective one, as they fight to maintain cultural continuity in the face of environmental destruction, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure. Wright's portrayal of Indigenous ageing emphasizes the resilience and strength of the elderly, who

serve as protectors of culture and tradition even as they face the challenges of age.

2.2. “Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence” by Doris Pilkington

Although not a work of fiction in the traditional sense, Doris Pilkington’s memoir *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996) reflects on the experiences of her mother and her family as they were subjected to the Australian government’s policy of removing Aboriginal children from their families (the Stolen Generations). Pilkington’s narrative includes the perspective of her elderly mother, whose life was marked by the trauma of forced assimilation and cultural dislocation. The representation of ageing in this memoir is deeply tied to the intergenerational trauma caused by colonial policies, showing how the elderly carry the weight of lost histories and broken families.

The trauma of colonization is depicted through the eyes of the elderly, who are the surviving links to a pre-colonial world that has been irrevocably altered. Their ageing is marked by the loss of a cultural heritage that can never be fully reclaimed. Yet, in their narratives, there is also the potential for healing and resistance, as their memories of a once-strong Indigenous culture continue to shape the younger generations’ understanding of their identity and heritage.

3. Ageing and Identity in the Australian Settler Context

In settler colonial contexts, ageing is often portrayed in terms of reflecting on the passage of time and the transformations in national identity. For non-Indigenous Australians, the experience of growing older is intertwined with the nation’s evolving understanding of its own history. The postcolonial world challenges Australians to reconcile their national identity with the ongoing legacies of colonization.

3.1. “Remembering Babylon” by David Malouf

David Malouf’s novel *Remembering Babylon* (1993) takes a nuanced approach to the theme of ageing and memory, particularly in relation to the settler colonial experience. The novel tells the story of Gemmy, a British man who is raised by Aboriginal people and returns to the colonial settlement

as an adult. Through the character of Mr. Frazer, an elderly settler who reflects on the transformation of the land and the social order, Malouf examines how ageing intersects with the formation of national identity.

The elderly in *Remembering Babylon* serve as a link between the colonial past and the present, grappling with the social changes brought about by the expansion of European settlement and the displacement of Indigenous populations. Mr. Frazer's aging process becomes a metaphor for the collective memory of colonialism and the erosion of traditional ways of life, as he attempts to reconcile his role in the colonization process with the evolving consciousness of the country's history. Ageing, in this context, is not merely about the individual's life but about the broader nation's process of coming to terms with its colonial legacy.

3.2. "The White Earth" by Andrew McGahan

Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth* (2004) explores themes of identity, family, and land through the eyes of an elderly man, Billy, who reflects on his life as a settler in the Australian outback. His ageing process is tied to the trauma of colonization, particularly the dispossession of Indigenous land. The novel examines the generational conflict between Billy and his son, who becomes increasingly aware of the injustices that have been perpetuated against Indigenous Australians.

The theme of ageing in *The White Earth* underscores the complexity of national identity in postcolonial Australia. For Billy, ageing means grappling with the weight of his own complicity in the colonial project. His reflections on his past illuminate the ways in which the legacies of colonization continue to affect both the elderly and younger generations. The novel suggests that ageing in a postcolonial world requires a deep reckoning with the past, as older generations confront the sins of their history while younger generations struggle to forge new paths forward.

4. Ageing, Resistance, and Cultural Survival

In postcolonial literature, ageing can also be seen as an act of resistance, as individuals and communities fight to preserve

their cultural traditions in the face of external pressures. The elderly often serve as the last bastion of cultural survival, passing on stories, traditions, and wisdom to younger generations. Their ageing becomes an act of resilience, as they navigate the changing socio-political landscape while attempting to hold onto their heritage.

In works such as *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright and *The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan, the elderly characters resist the erasure of their cultures by insisting on the value of memory, language, and traditions. These characters embody the survival of cultural knowledge and historical narratives in the face of colonialism, making their ageing process an act of defiance and strength.

Conclusion

Ageing in a postcolonial context is never just a matter of individual decline or personal reflection; rather, it becomes a process interwoven with cultural memory, historical trauma, and the struggle for survival. In Australian literature, ageing is frequently depicted as a communal experience, one that mirrors the broader negotiations between past and present, colonizer and colonized, survival and erasure. The elderly characters in these narratives embody more than just lived years – they become guardians of memory, carriers of trauma, and symbols of endurance in the face of profound historical dislocation.

For Indigenous communities, the depiction of ageing is often tied to the endurance of culture against colonial attempts at dispossession and assimilation. In Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, for instance, ageing figures such as the elder Normal Phantom stand as cultural anchors for their communities. They resist the destructive forces of mining corporations and colonial exploitation by preserving ancestral knowledge and oral traditions. Through their voices, the novel emphasizes how ageing within Indigenous contexts is inseparable from cultural survival and the ongoing work of decolonization. Elders embody continuity, not just of family ties but of collective memory, ensuring that the lessons of the past remain active in the present.

Conversely, in works such as David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, ageing among non-Indigenous characters often exposes anxieties about belonging and legitimacy in the postcolonial nation. The novel portrays settlers and their descendants grappling with the unsettling presence of Gemmy, a white man who has lived with Aboriginal people. Older characters in particular embody fears of cultural dislocation, revealing the fragility of settler identity in the face of Indigenous histories that cannot be erased. Ageing, in this context, highlights the limits of settler belonging and the lingering specter of colonial guilt.

Similarly, in Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth*, ageing intersects with questions of inheritance, memory, and land ownership. The elderly figures in this novel symbolize the weight of colonial history, particularly through their attachment to land obtained through dispossession. Their decline mirrors the crumbling of settler narratives of entitlement, as younger generations confront the uncomfortable legacies of colonial violence. The novel suggests that ageing for these characters is not merely biological but historical, a process of reckoning with what is inherited and what must be re-examined.

Across these texts, ageing becomes a deeply political and cultural theme. Elders are not passive figures receding into irrelevance; rather, they are positioned as active participants in shaping memory, community, and identity. Ageing brings with it the responsibility of bearing witness, of ensuring that the stories of survival, displacement, or injustice are not forgotten. This is especially crucial in a postcolonial context, where forgetting serves the interests of the dominant culture, while remembering becomes an act of resistance.

Ultimately, Australian literature's portrayal of ageing underscores that the past is never fully past. Ageing in a postcolonial world reveals how memory persists, how trauma reverberates across generations, and how wisdom becomes a resource for decolonization and renewal. These narratives remind us that the elderly, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, stand at the intersection of history and identity, embodying the fragile yet enduring continuity of culture in a nation still grappling with its colonial legacies.

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