

**Shifting the Literary Aesthetic:
Representations of time in Alexis Wright's
Carpentaria.**

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Masters of Research 2014

Macquarie University

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented reference to the work of others. The thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

Abstract

Carpentaria was the winner of the 2006 Miles Franklin Award, and won for its author, Alexis Wright, the 2007 Australian Literary Society Gold Medal. Wright is an Australian Indigenous Waanyi woman of Carpentaria and *Carpentaria*, like her other novels, is concerned with environmental, cultural, and racial politics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. But more importantly, *Carpentaria* is concerned with demonstrating the endurance, vitality, and autonomy of Australia's First Nations people by creating aesthetic forms that challenge the limiting discourses that restrict Indigeneity to a landless timelessness. This research investigates aesthetic representations of time in *Carpentaria* and the ways in which Wright uses time to disrupt dominant discourses about Indigeneity. I take a discourse analysis approach with the work of Edward Said, and his theories of Orientalism, to investigate Wright's displacement of dominant discourses and her creation of a discourse that privileges Indigenous ontologies. This research examines Wright's challenge to European temporal ideologies and the reinstatement of Indigenous temporal frames of reference within the novel. In particular, the research considers: Wright's reinstatement of Indigenous links to the past in history and memory-keeping; her creation of discursive links to the present in both time and space; and her vindication of claims to the future by aesthetically representing a space in which Indigenous culture is valued. This research also demonstrates the ways in which Wright has constructed a literary space whose form serves as a metaphor for the development of a syncretic cultural and physical space in Australia.

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Introduction

...who in charge of changing time then?

(Wright, *Carpentaria* 362)

Alexis Wright's 2006 novel, *Carpentaria* is difficult. It is "difficult" (Syson 86), "strange" (Ravenscroft, "Dreaming" 198), "puzzling" (Devlin-Glass, "Review" 83) and yet "an extraordinary imaginative achievement, full of feeling, humour, knowledge and power" (ASAL). It strikes the reader as being important without understanding how or why (Syson 85). From its sardonic and often tragic irony, its ambiguity and subversion, to its anger, hope, and promise of restoration to a future that was always there, Wright asserts herself as a literary writer of merit. The subversive and difficult form of *Carpentaria* becomes a metaphor for the resistance to hegemony by the First Australians as well, paradoxically, as the possibility for the syncretic culture that may result from the merging of literatures and cultures (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 15). From the irony of the opening paragraph, "A NATION CHANTS, BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 1) the reader is put on notice, they are in the presence of a text that creates a new aesthetic approach in Australian literature as it portrays socio-political rage in a blend of traditional Indigenous story-telling and literary fiction. *Carpentaria* is a novel that delivers a story from the voice of the subaltern (Brewster, "Indigenous Sovereignty" 85), those who are not heard (Sharrad 53). *Carpentaria* is a political tirade, it is a rage against Australian and

Imperial cultural discourse, and it is in the first paragraph that Wright begins her literary portrait of the rage that turns to war – “ARMAGEDDON BEGINS HERE.” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 1)

Armageddon – the judgment, the end of time. *Carpentaria* is the judgment of a colonial past and present that has resulted in the “...enormous tragedy of transgenerational poverty, neglect and dispossession” (Wright, “On Writing” 5), and “the indignity and degradation... inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture...” (Rudd). With the invocation of the Armageddon motif, Wright also invokes its dual paradigms of time suggesting that, while *Carpentaria* is a story about the war at the end of time, it is also a story of the war regarding time. Colonisation is a war fought on fronts not found in many of the official histories of Australia. *Carpentaria* restores those histories of war to the reader’s consciousness with its portrayal of the modern war; both the physical war between people as well as the war of politics (Moreton-Robinson, “A New Research Agenda” 386). It is a war that celebrates its heroes in a tribute to the heroes of the frontier wars fought by leaders such as Pemulwuy in Eora, Jandamurra of the Bunuba, and Windradyne of the Wiradjuri, and connects to the past with characters such as Uncle Mickey. Mickey keeps a museum of the unofficial history of the region displaying “...all those forty-fours, thirty-threes, three-o-threes, twelve gauges – all kinds of cartridges used in the massacre of the local tribes...his voice lives on in the great archive of cassettes which he left for the war trials he predicted would happen one day” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 10).

Carpentaria's heroes, who fight for the land of their people, "fighting, fighting all the time, for a bit of land and a little bit of recognition" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 11), also fight a cultural war as they attempt to maintain their physical and spiritual ties to the land and its ancestry. The war for cultural sovereignty is fought on many fronts with European ontological notions of literacy, temporality, epistemology, and land use, a means by which to significantly disrupt native cultural practice.

Michele Grossman has examined the disruption to native cultural practice in her examination of the colonisation of the First Australians by means of privileging the written word over the oral. She finds that imposition of literacy (1) and the displacement of orality was a means for the introduction of new ways to organise knowledge (6) supplanting traditional modes. Grossman cites Gayatri Spivak's term, "'epistemic violence' as a way of describing the invasive order of knowledge, classification and value that attempts to transform Aboriginal consciousness..." from a largely oral to a written form (2). Anita Heiss and Peter Minter (2-4), and Grossman (3) examine the emergence of written texts by Australian Indigenous writers and the political counter-effect the Indigenous word has had in reclaiming epistemologies. Their findings demonstrate that increasingly Indigenous literature is abrogating and appropriating, not only the language of the centre, but also its forms, by writing from within the dominant literary framework to resist dominant representations of Indigeneity.

Further violence to the epistemologies of Indigenous people was evidenced in the colonisation of time. Giordanno Nanni has made an extensive social historical

examination of the application of European Christian time in Australia. He finds that the introduction of European temporality was at first coercive, then forced upon native people, and used a means for social exclusion as it indicated racial inferiority (20). But Nanni also found that time was, and continues to be, a site of resistance to the imposed hegemony with such resistance indicating the incomplete project of colonisation (19). In short the result of colonisation has been dominance without hegemony. However, the colonial counter-attack has been in the form of the creation of a discourse that reduces resistance to hegemony to pejorative terms such as lazy, backward, primitive, and uncivilized (Moreton-Robinson, "Indigenous Representation" 76).

While Nanni's work has revisited the colonisation of time in Indigenous cultures from an historical viewpoint, there exists no research to date on expressions of, and resistance to, colonised time in Aboriginal literature. My research examines Alexis Wright's contestation of time and the discourses constructed about Indigeneity with reference to time, and demonstrates Wright's deconstruction of both the European models of time and those discourses that attempt to lock Indigeneity into a discursive backward or primitive state. Even with the narrowing of focus to representations of time, the potential for points of examination is so broad as to be beyond the scope of this research. As a result, I will further narrow the focus to three key areas: Indigeneity and the past in history, record keeping, and memory; Indigeneity and the present in space; and Indigeneity in the future as recovered by the traditional form of orality. Further, while a great deal of research has been conducted on Indigeneity, it is not the focus of this study

to explain, analyse or understand Indigenous culture, but to examine literary constructions of meaning that work to reappropriate legitimacy to Indigenous cultural beliefs and practices.

A great deal of the research on Indigenous representation is located in the disciplines of the social sciences, in particular anthropology, whiteness studies, cultural studies, history, and more recently, critical race studies. Contrastingly, comparatively little research is located in literary studies with a particular focus on the literary constructions of meaning in contemporary Australian Indigenous texts. This research takes, as its point of departure, the findings yielded in interdisciplinary research, particularly expressions of power and resistance, personal and cultural sovereignty, and cultural difference, thus bridging the gap between those findings and their textual expressions by taking a discourse analysis approach. In analysing Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* I employ Said's theory of Orientalism in my examination of constructions of discourses. I also make a close textual analysis to demonstrate the ways in which Indigenous writers in Australia work within the limitations and expectations of the literary genre, and its audience, to resist constructions of Indigeneity that are deemed to lack authenticity by Indigenous audiences. This research also demonstrates Wright's ability to work within discursive paradigms to invert discourse as a means to appropriate power from the Imperial centre.

Current research into Indigenous literary fiction has been rather limited. The reason for this can be explained by its relatively emergent status combined with the cultural sensitivities regarding whether or not non-Indigenous scholars should

be allowed to critique works by Indigenous writers¹. While sensitivities to cultural difference also exist in disciplines beyond literary studies, those disciplines, notably anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and history, produce a greater amount of research. This may be explained by the long association these disciplines have maintained with the study of Indigeneity, but could also be explained by the increased representations of Indigenous scholars in social studies disciplines, as well as the development of Indigenous studies as a discipline in and of itself. What I hope to demonstrate is the gap that exists between the production of Indigenous fictional texts and the scholarly research into those texts (Grossman 5). This research bridges some of that gap by analysing the conversation between Indigenous literary fiction and social science research through Alexis Wright's novel, *Carpentaria*.

Carpentaria locates much of what it attempts to critique in representations of time. History, the future, beliefs and religion, colonization of land and culture, and construction of identities are common to the imposition of temporal ontologies in Indigenous Australia. *Carpentaria* re-asserts Indigenous cultural beliefs and practices, continuing the war begun at colonization, fighting European time, with the time of the Indigenous Other; "All times are important to us. No time has ended and all worlds are possible" (Wright, "Politics" 6). But while research has not been conducted on temporality in Wright's work, or indeed in the work of

¹ Heiss argues both for and against the right of non-Indigenous scholars to examine works that are penned by Indigenous authors. Heiss identifies the potential for exploitation of Aboriginals by scholars, "who create successful academic and literary careers for themselves in the area of Aboriginal studies" (10) but she also acknowledges that, "For some white writers, credibility arises from the view that they are providing a voice (however indirectly), to Aboriginal Australia." (Heiss (a) 10)

other Australian Indigenous authors, many critics of the novel have located much of its strangeness and difficulty in its treatment of time; its shifting temporal reference points; the spiraling plot and changing tenses in particular. Wright's play with time displaces European hegemony, particularly linearity, from its dominant central position and locates the novel in the indefinite "a time" rather than the definite "the time". *Carpentaria* disrupts linearity making a "temporal lingua franca" (Nanni 2) difficult to achieve without the reader accepting the alternate Indigenous frame of reference.

The structuring of *Carpentaria* upon the Indigenous frames of reference critiques representations of Indigeneity and restores the past of ancient Australia as well as forgotten colonial Australia, both of which have been written out of history. It also asserts a connection between the people of *Carpentaria* and the land in the present, and it creates a future in which representations of Indigeneity resist dominant literary expectations by re-writing discourses. *Carpentaria* argues for the sovereignty of Australia's First People by creating a sovereign space in the Indigenous aesthetic form of the novel. It argues for sovereignty by challenging the dominant discourse to privilege Indigenous subjectivity, ontology, and epistemologies.

Published in 2006 *Carpentaria* was influenced by several historical and social contexts; from the fact of more than 200 years of colonization and the resultant loss of Indigenous lands, people, and languages to the more immediate neo-colonial and neo-liberal agendas of the conservative Howard government from

1996 to 2007. *Carpentaria* was published at a time when Aboriginal life-expectancy rates were 11.5 years below the national average for men, infant mortality rates were three times higher than for non-Indigenous infants, and educational attainment levels were significantly lower than for non-Indigenous people (only 71% of Indigenous people attaining year 10 or equivalent compared with 92% of non-Indigenous people) (ABS). It was a time when the government refused, against popular calls, to offer an apology to the Stolen Generations, and prevailed in its refusal to offer a formal treaty or an acknowledgment of Australia's First Peoples in the constitution. It was a time when the statistical differences between native and non-native Australians became politically and colloquially known as "The Gap", and government rhetoric was based on "closing the gap" (Altman 1).

But the gap is an example of the creation of a discourse about Australia's Other. It is a discourse that has been manufactured over centuries by means of colonization and the subsequent separation between the European conqueror and its native object (Said 228). Wright refers to the gap as "...the distance of tolerance..." (Wright, *Carpentaria* 97). It is a gap that has been created, and maintained by virtue of its necessity to the ongoing dominance of the white man who creates a binary of his Other (Said 228). The gap is a discursive strategy for:

...dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. (Said 3)

The result of Orientalism is the creation and maintenance of a dominant discourse

– a vocabulary used when the other is discussed or written about – that serves to subordinate the other to European hegemony. Within the discourse exist a set of tropes which are both general in nature, since they apply to all cultures within the other, and false since they exist merely to create a binary image for the superior West. Where the Oriental is lazy, the European is industrious, where the Oriental is of the past the European controls his future and so on. The tropes are self-reinforcing by virtue of the self-referencing nature of the corporation and work to establish a set of binaries that distinguish whiteness from the Other. Darwinism served only to validate the division of races between the advanced and backward, the primitive and sophisticated, the civilized and uncivilized, the conqueror and the conquered. His findings shored up the Orientalist agenda and gave greater scientific and cultural weight to the colonizing project of the European. (Said 206)

What Orientalism does is to create discursive truths in language:

[What is the truth of language but] a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are. (Nietzsche qtd in Said, 203)

The truths of Indigenous history, culture and people become lost to the truths of the dominant European discourse as the discourse constructs illusions suitable to the colonial enterprise. The fact that Indigenous Australians occupied the continent, speaking distinct languages among the hundreds of discrete tribal groups, trading, and intermarrying, was of no consequence to the European desire for land. The discourse created was a means by which to manage, dominate,

occupy, and subjugate the land as well as to justify the subjugation of the people. Indigenous people were irregular, irrational, and superstitious (Nanni 9). They were not seen as people or individuals but “as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over” (Said 207), as reflected in Mick Dodson’s work:

Since first contact with the colonizers of this country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been the object(s) of a continual flow of commentary and classification...since their first intrusive gaze, colonizing cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analyzing, studying, classifying and labeling Aborigines and Aboriginality. Under that gaze, Aboriginality changed from being a daily practice to being “a problem to be solved” (Dodson 2).

Said’s theories of Orientalism and discourse lie at the foundations of much of the current scholarly research on Indigeneity. Broadly speaking, the current research pertaining to my analysis of *Carpentaria* falls into three categories; theories of representation of Indigeneity; analysis of the white or colonial gaze; and constructions of the white literary frame². But it must be stressed that these areas of concern often overlap.

Research into representations of Indigeneity have found that the constructions of Aboriginality have largely been the domain of members of the non-Indigenous community, including literary writers such as Thomas Keneally and Xavier Herbert, politicians, and members of the media (Heiss, *Dhuuluu Yala* 10). These representations are often not only racist (Collins-Gearing 61), but also result in the

² Also of interest is the intersection between whiteness studies and Indigenous sovereignty but it is beyond both the scope of this research and my position as a non-Indigenous researcher to attempt to bridge the divide that exists within the Indigenous community on what connotes sovereignty. That said, references to sovereignty in this paper pertain to the right to self-government.

representation of whiteness as the “invisible norm against which Other races are judged” (Moreton-Robinson, “A New Research Agenda” 388). While the influence of white representations prevail there has been an increasing presence of Indigenous self-representation especially in the genre of life writing (Grossman 8). Life writing has been seen as a useful means for producing counter-histories, the exploration of self and culture, as well as the examination of cross-cultural encounters, although Ferrier argues that the genre is no longer the most useful means for representing Indigeneity (Ferrier 39). Life writing, she argues, creates an expectation that the narrator’s story is constructed upon the premise of the historical figure reconciling their past to whiteness (Ferrier 39). Wright, however, takes a different view of history and asserts that failure to extract herself from history was to be caught in the “colonizing spider’s trap door” (Wright, “On Writing” 12). “I wanted to stare at difference right now” (12) she continues, suggesting that positive representations of Indigeneity come from the release of the colonially constructed past and the embrace of positive, self-represented futures.

While self-representation by Indigenous writers has been a feature of modern Indigenous writing, Byrd and Rothberg contend that there exists a gap between the representation and the reception, citing the work of Spivak on subalternity and incommensurability as the foundation of their study (Byrd and Rothberg 5). They argue that the subaltern voice suffers from both failure to be listened to and failure to be understood. Alison Ravenscroft, writing several years earlier, takes a more positive approach to the gap between the representation and its reception, and

argues that the silence that occupies the gap presents an opportunity to alter the reader by reforming the knowledge they bring to the text (“Dreaming of Others” 4).

Ravenscroft goes further in her analysis of the Indigenous text to suggest that constructions of Indigeneity, in particular those that occupy the subject position of the text, come under the gaze of the predominantly white reader (Ravenscroft “Dreaming of Others” 6). To look, to examine, or study is the occupation of whiteness (Ravenscroft “Dreaming of Others” 6: Said 43) however, Ravenscroft and Grossman both argue the text carries the potential to return the gaze, “to disrupt or at least implicitly interrogate the readerly self” (Grossman 17). Brewster’s examination of *Carpentaria* finds that Wright has exploited that potential by inverting the colonial gaze such that the text directs the reader’s gaze towards defamiliarised representations of whiteness (Brewster 87). This paper will identify constructions of Indigenous representation in *Carpentaria* and the extent to which those representations subvert and redirect the white gaze.

The final area of research that informs this paper is on the existence of a white literary frame that circumscribes Indigenous literature. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (“Whiteness”), Carole Ferrier (“Disappearing Memory”) and Grossman examine the extent to which the accepted form for literature limits expressions of Indigeneity for Aboriginal writers. Moreton-Robinson articulates the difficulty for Aboriginal writers in constructing authentic representations of Indigeneity within the bounds of acceptable representations required by white audiences. She also

claims that conformity can simultaneously allow resistance by enabling access to knowledges about whiteness (Moreton-Robinson “Whiteness” 86). Ferrier and Grossman take a similar view, however, Ferrier notes that writers who subvert white political frames feel that acts of subversion go unnoticed (Ferrier 41). An extensive examination of the degree to which *Carpentaria*’s subversion of the literary form has been noticed by audiences is beyond the scope of this research although the constructions of resistance in the text are analyzed in Chapter 3.

This research takes at its starting point these three areas of research, representation, the white gaze, and literary frames, and takes as its foundation Said’s theory of Orientalism and discourse. This research examines aesthetic constructions of time in *Carpentaria* and the degree to which those constructions rebuke the discursive tropes that attempt to hold Indigeneity in a lost and “timeless ever-present” (Wolfe 213).

Time is the central aesthetic element in *Carpentaria*. The text uses time as its central motif to challenge Orientalist discourse regarding Indigeneity. Since settlement, time has formed one of the central unifying tropes about Indigenous people. Aboriginals were “timeless”, “irregular”, “beyond time”, “primitive”, “ancient people”, “without future” (Nanni 59, 60, 75; Wolfe 200, 213). Wright re-articulates the temporal discourse emphasizing not only an Indigenous awareness of time, but an existence that observes the necessity to adhere to temporal imperatives for both physical and spiritual survival. Her characters are modern, aware of all time, look to the future to which they are responsible whilst

maintaining a link to the past to which they are also responsible. They belong to the land and Law both of which are inherently bound in time. Linearity is lost as the plot moves in and out of the past, present, and future often causing disorientation, confusion, and a sense of strangeness (Ravenscroft, “Dreaming of Others” 198). Clausal constructions are often complicated, woven heavily with many voices representing differing temporal locations, and tense is unreliable as a means of locating the temporal position of the action at any moment in the narrative. This use of time aesthetically, as a metaphor, as an image, and as a means for disrupting literary conventions is what provides the challenge to the reader and the discourse. It is a challenge to decode the systems of meaning in the novel, a challenge to accepted literary norms and an affront to the dominating discourse.

Ravenscroft has labeled the sense of strangeness the reader feels when reading *Carpentaria* as “radical uncertainty” (“Dreaming of Others” 197). This title recalls the description of Said’s Orientalism’s “radical realism” defined as:

...[to] designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which is then considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality. Rhetorically speaking, Orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative: to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularizing and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts. (Said 72)

By relocating time within a non-European ontological framework, the construction of Western “radical realism” unravels resulting in radical uncertainty – the space between the representations within the text and their reception. Time in *Carpentaria* resists fixity, dissection, and classification and in its resistance

refuses to partake in the dominant discourse. In fact, its refusal to partake results in such cataclysmic disturbance to the system of language that the usual system fails, leaving the reader with no known language by which to decode the text, no lens through which to know the Other, the Aboriginal. As a result, the reader is left radically uncertain, without language to label or know, or even speak of the Other. It is in this space that the reader is exposed to new representations of Indigeneity, temporal order, and knowledge more generally.

This research demonstrates the ways in which Wright uses aesthetic representations of time to invert and disrupt the dominant discourse about Indigenous Australians. Further, it shows that this disruption to the hegemony creates a space within which a new, potentially syncretic, discourse may emerge, a hegemony in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians may be represented.

Re-presentations of time in *Carpentaria* address three broad categories; the representation of Western time and history making; time and its relationship to space or country; and time and its interplay with fate and literature. Wright considers the imposition of Western time on Indigenous cultures, and critiques both its forced application and Indigenous responses to it. Although the novel is overtly political, with white Australians critiqued, Wright balances her critique with a variety of responses by Indigenous peoples to the imposition of Western temporalities. The first chapter of this work examines the ways in which time has been used by Europeans to colonize and subjugate native Australians (Nanni 3),

and the manner in which *Carpentaria* makes explicit the violence of European time to Indigenous people and their epistemologies. Also investigated is the reinstatement of Indigenous cultural practices that observe the past, and the degree to which the novel constructs history, both ancient and modern. The second chapter of this work examines the way in which *Carpentaria* goes further than to simply critique Western time by abandoning use of Western literary representations of time and instead relies on alternate temporal modes. Time is linked inextricably with space and movements in space, sometimes forward, sometimes back, and occasionally colliding with many times present in a place of particular importance. The bounded nature of time and space in the novel serves to remind the reader of the inherent relatedness of time and space in Indigenous cultures (Martin 69), and the importance of the maintenance of that relatedness to Indigenous people. Wright offers the reader an alternate understanding of time through space, and demands of the reader the acquisition of new possibilities in time. The demand is made by encoding time aesthetically in the physical (both the land and its people) and literary space of the novel. The final chapter of this work considers the bounded nature of time and fate in *Carpentaria*. In the beginning of the novel is its end with the course of its events encoded in the words, characters, weather, and setting of the novel. One must read the landscape to follow the storylines, but for an untrained reader the landscape is strange and difficult. The reader may attempt to plot out events linearly, to make sense of its strangeness by analysis, “to cancel, or at least subdue and reduce, its strangeness” (Said 87). Wright creates a form for the novel that privileges orality with an oral narrator who speaks from an undefined future. She challenges the expectations of the

literary novel to create a form that encodes cultural significances and meanings, and creates new discursive tropes that make explicit the responsibilities the Indigenous people have to their country, its fate and the future they share with it.

By examining the three central ideas of time, colonizing Western time, time and space, and time and fate, I argue that time in *Carpentaria* is the central aesthetic element by which Wright challenges the hegemony and constructed discourses about Indigeneity, and that the result of this challenge is the potential for the creation of a shared cultural discourse.

Time, History and Memory

The arrival of the First Fleet was the defining moment in the history of this continent. Let me repeat that, it was the defining moment in the history of this continent. It was the moment this continent became part of the modern world. (Prime Minister Abbott qtd in Dingle)

There were the old Pricklebush people who kept the chronicles of the land hereabouts since time began. (Wright, *Carpentaria* 47)

This chapter analyses the construction of a discourse that portrays Indigeneity as lacking cognizance of time, existing in a perpetual sleep or dream, and the manner in which the discourse has formed the ideological basis for the acquisition of land from native people. Also examined is the use of time to subjugate Indigenous people and the ways in which Indigeneity has responded to European hegemony by subverting imposed epistemologies of time. A close analysis of *Carpentaria* demonstrates Wright's use of the literary form to create counter-histories and representations of Indigeneity that express agency and cultural links to the past.

On the 29th April 1770, Captain James Cook, travelling on the Endeavour, made anchor in Botany Bay on the east coast of what would later be named Australia.

Cook claimed possession of the land for England and King George III:

During our stay in this Harbour I caused the English Colours to be display'd ashore every day, and an inscription to be cut out upon one of the Trees near the Watering place, setting forth the Ship's Name, Date, etc.." (Cook May 6 1770).

Cook observed the country to be in "a pure state of nature" and its people "lived mainly on shellfish and did not cultivate the land or erect permanent habitations upon it" (Cook). He noted on many occasions the presence of Indigenous groups and families and his few encounters with the native inhabitants were largely indicative of a defence of territory on the part of the natives. His first contact diary entries include:

As we approached the Shore they all made off, except 2 Men, who seem'd resolved to oppose our landing... We then threw them some nails, beads, etc., a shore, which they took up, and seem'd not ill pleased with, in so much that I thought that they beckon'd to us to come ashore; but in this we were mistaken, for as soon as we put the boat in they again came to oppose us, upon which I fir'd a musquet between the 2, which had no other Effect than to make them retire back, where bundles of their darts lay, and one of them took up a stone and threw at us, which caused my firing a Second Musquet, load with small Shott; and altho' some of the shott struck the man, yet it had no other effect than making him lay hold on a Target (April 29 1770).

Mr Hicks, who was the Officer ashore, did all in his power to intice them to him by offering them presents; but it was to no purpose, all they seem'd to want was for us to be gone. (April 30 1770).

Despite attempts to defend the land, the Indigenous people were considered passive occupants, not active owners of the space based on the seeming impermanence of their dwellings, and an unrecognisable form of land tenure to the

colonizers. The land was thus declared '*Terra Nullius*' – no man's land (Nanni 60; Moreton-Robinson, "Whiteness" 76). Australia was therefore deemed legally available for the establishment and maintenance of a British colonial outpost.

But *Terra Nullius* was only part of the ideological argument put forward by the colonisers seeking to occupy the space. The second part of the colonisers' claim to ownership was based on the beliefs, knowledge, and practices of time. Colonisers argued that philosophies and knowledge of time were lacking in Aboriginal ontology, evidenced, in part, by the seeming lack of any Aboriginal words for time, or any evidence for the measurement of time (Nanni 61). Aboriginal temporal practice relies on the observations of movements and change in nature, of particular importance are astrology, changes in flora, and the movements of animals. It is a practice and belief linked inextricably with land and Laws, and the maintenance of life (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 199-200). But in the European context "Aboriginal time was effectively nature's time, and thus no human time at all" (Nanni 72, 77). Australia was at once *Terra Nullius*, no man's land, and *Terra Sine Tempore*, a place without time, and, by extension, so too were its people.

To better understand and examine the Indigenous people of Australia, the Victorian Parliament issued a set of *Queries* for settlers in contact with native Australians. The 1858 questionnaire sought to gain a deeper knowledge of Indigenous peoples; their beliefs, practices, and ways of living, with the notable inclusion of four questions on time and temporal observation. The final question,

and sample of answers provided by responders, provides an insight into the European preoccupation with the science of time:

If time is not divided by observation of these bodies (heavenly), what other mode is adopted? and do observances connected with them rest with the priests or chiefs?

Mr Croke – Seasons

Mr Beveridge – The only method they have of dividing the year is by heat & cold, or summer & winter.

Mr J.M. Allan – they divide time by the seasons.

Mr Godfrey – Their only mode of computing time, appears to be the moon – its full especially is noted; and now they have the advantage of dating from the “Nip Nip”, or settlers’ yearly regular shearing time. This seems to supply them with a mode of stating years, which before they had not. Months or moons then satisfied them.

Mr Thomas – Time is divided by the Motion of the heavenly bodies. They have also other modes, such as the blossoming of trees & shrubs. They can occasionally define the very Month by this method. (Nanni 71-72)

This observed and reported conception of Indigenous time helped to reinforce the argument that the native population was merely an extension of the natural landscape rather than a human presence in nature. The native was inextricably connected with weather, plants, and animals in the marking of time, and demonstrated no knowledge of time independent of those things. In contrast, the coloniser could demonstrate his mastery of time, in instruments such as clocks, watches, bells, maps, and sextants, all of which were icons for his mastery of nature itself. The contrast between the European, who valued governing time and nature, with the Indigenous, whose time was always contingent upon nature, became an important distinction between the races, and was used to demonstrate not only the inferior intelligence of the natives, but also a lack of “morality,

foresight, and discipline” since native time was not Christian time (Nanni 8). Time thus became a battle-front, both political and social in nature, used at first to differentiate the colonisers from the native intellectually and morally, then as a colonising influence, and, finally, to marginalise those who would not, or could not conform to the colonial project (Nanni 7).

An examination into Australian frontier encounters reveals the origins of a discourse that locates temporality and temporal ontologies at the centre of the struggle for dominance over the native and his land. Aboriginal people were represented as primitive, of the past, backward, and lacking in agency (Moreton-Robinson, “Whiteness” 76). They were “the stone-age remnants of a dead past.” (Ross 55). The development of a discourse that placed Indigeneity in the past was advanced by the work of anthropologists and scientists, such as Darwin, who theorised a division within *genus homo* – a division that separated the European from his conquered native based on, among other things, time. After his visit to Australia, Darwin compared the consciousness of Australian Aborigines, to the “...twitching of a sleeping dog reliving the chase in its dreams” (qtd. in Wolfe 205). Representations such as Darwin’s placed Indigeneity in an intellectually and physically unreal dream space, suspended outside of time.

The anthropological contribution to the representation of Indigeneity trapped in the past, was to lend weight to the developing Imperialist metaphor of the sleeping, dreaming native. The sleeping and dreaming metaphor culminated in the now recognisable terms ‘Dreaming’ and ‘Dreamtime’ (Wolfe 202) to describe

Indigenous ontologies. Use of the ‘dream’ metaphor is not simply a means by which to create a homogenising descriptor for the many separate Indigenous language groups and their beliefs, but serves the more primary function of placing all Indigeneity out of waking, or present, time. Patrick Wolfe argues that the:

...the Dreamtime concept encodes and sustains the subjugation and expropriation of the Koori populations [and]...provides a rationale for the seizure of territory occupied by nomads. (199)

He demonstrates the self-perpetuating nature of the constructed discourse as use of the phrase, and its derivatives, made its way into popular vernacular by way of the burgeoning interest in anthropological research. Research into the Indigenous Other was shared so widely and “is of such depth that journalists, popularisers, schoolbooks and children’s stories have repeated it tirelessly” (Wolfe 210), creating, what Said describes as, a ‘truth’ in language (203).

Popular and widely disseminated colonial representations of the Indigenous ‘dreamer’ have facilitated the perpetuation of the myth of *Terra Nullius*. The discourse that emphasises dreaming or sleeping has the effect of denying agency to Indigeneity, and therefore allows for the creation of new historical truths, most notably, the construction of an historical discourse that emphasises the passive colonisation of Australia. History then begins with the arrival of the European who, in his wakefulness, offers a remedy to the perpetually sleeping native (Wolfe 210), and prevails into modernity with discourse that equates Indigenous dreaming with “alcoholic stupor” (204) - another form of lost time – and its remedy in white sobriety.

Moreton-Robinson asserts that representations that use reductive tropes, such as ‘dreamer’ or ‘ancient’, work to create a set of differences that situate Indigeneity as the binary of whiteness, and represent whiteness as the invisible, yet default, race (“Whiteness” 76). Paradoxically, encoding whiteness as the default has the simultaneous effect of rendering Indigeneity invisible by eliminating historical and cultural representations that do not conform to those represented in the dominant discourse (Heiss, “On Being Invisible” 256). Said argues along similar lines, suggesting that the creation of a reductive discourse has the effect of eradicating the difference of the native such that the native is reduced to the state of a symbol for the power and legitimacy of whiteness. In this way the native’s humanity, his cultural value and his histories are denied (Said 87). The result may be seen in a discourse such as Tony Abbot’s history of Australia in which Australia begins with the arrival of the First Fleet. Australians, then, are those that can trace their ancestry to the original convicts (Heiss, “On Being Invisible” 256), and Australian history begins with their arrival.

Another means by which to render the First Australian’s invisible was to dominate cultural practice and expression. The process of territorial dispossession, which had the immediate effect of erasing the emplacement of Indigenous culture (Meucke, *Ancient and Modern* 14), was complemented by the process of active temporal reform in the form of Mission life, work, and schooling routines. The colonial approach was to impose ‘wakefulness’ on native people with the forced imposition of Christian time: the breaking of the day into hourly observances; the

days into a weekly and annual cycles of work; and religious observation. Colonial missions were often centred around the ringing of bells to work, to church, and to study, at regular and pre-determined intervals, with a failure to respond resulting in the withholding of rations of food and privileges (Nanni 94). Contemporary European hegemony maintains the need to observe linear time with retail, welfare agencies, employment, and health-care providers requiring Indigenous people adhere to European forms of time-keeping. Aleksandar Janca and Clothilde Bullen note the poor mental health implications such systems have for Indigenous people, and argue for the need to observe alternate temporal practices to alleviate the burden European time has had on native people. Western linear time, therefore, works not only as a means of creating social inclusion for those who adhere, but for Indigenous people it becomes a system for the creation of socially exclusive domains (Bastian 97), as well as a means for the denial of the legitimacy of the ontological significance of native temporality (109).

Like discourses that have constructed a peaceful history of colonial rule in Australia, colonial discourse has also denied resistance of Indigenous people to cultural domination, by portraying Indigeneity as lacking in agency. Historical investigation into the imposition of European time on Australian native people demonstrates that resistance to temporal ontologies was mounted on several fronts. For example, groups of Indigenous people were found to hold Corroborees on Sundays instead of attending to Christian duties; they were found to resist attendance at Church, school, or work on time or at all, and individuals were reported walking off missions into the bush in observance of customary practices

(Nanni 110). These resistances were interpreted as racial inferiority and laziness rather than acts of subversion and adherence to cultural practices (Nanni 113). Similar subversions of European time continue, evidenced in expressions such as ‘blackfella time’, whereby “alternate ideas of time, order and punctuality still continue to exist and defy colonisers’ claim to temporal hegemony” (Nanni 227), but modern discourse encodes these resistances as aberrance.

The *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* (Heiss & Minter) makes the link between Indigenous resistance to cultural displacement and expressions of resistance in works of literature. Aboriginal works of literature, in English, are persistently political from very early in their development. Writers demonstrate a willingness to appropriate the dominant form as an act of subversion (Heiss & Minter 2), and use the form to challenge dominant representations of Indigeneity. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have examined the resistance to European hegemony in post-colonial literature and found that Indigenous Australians, because of their doubly marginalized position, have a greater capacity than white settler societies to subvert received assumptions about literature (144), such as linearity, consistent tense within verbs and a narrator that maintains his relative temporal position to the reader and the text.

Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* affirms Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s findings by continuing in the tradition of subverting the dominant discourses about Indigeneity and European hegemony. In *On writing Carpentaria*, Wright reflects:

I also knew I would pay a price for my decision to write a novel as though some old Aboriginal person was telling the story. I think what I feared most was that this kind of voice and style of telling would be flatly rejected in Australia. Every day I was writing the novel, I would begin the day by arguing with myself about how a manuscript written in this voice was taking a big risk. I knew that by using a story-telling narrative voice in a language that was as much my own as it is of Aboriginal people in the Gulf, I was setting myself up for failure. It felt a bit like Seamus Heaney's idea of the 'Spirit Level'. I have always created some difficulty for myself by sticking to a principle when the winds are blowing a gale in the other direction. I knew that the principle of what I believed to be the legitimate way to present this story could cost me dearly. The manuscript might never be published. What then? Could I justify taking so much time to write a novel that would be rejected because it did not conform to the status quo? Every day was the same. I went through this crisis of arguing with myself about what I was doing, the risk involved, of perhaps eventually having to archive the manuscript from at least my own destructiveness in the offices of the Carpentaria Land Council. Always, I found it was impossible for my conscience to accept the idea that there was an easier way of writing the novel. (11)

Wright emphasises the struggle between conforming to the dominant literary aesthetic, the "received assumptions about literature" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 144), and making subversive representations that address the concerns of her marginal group. The risk is that the subversive aesthetic that privileges Indigeneity, whilst a legitimate representation of culture, is too foreign and difficult for an audience that does not share its epistemologies. Subversive representations of any kind, therefore, jeopardize the neo-colonial imperative that insists on commercial success - to not be read risks the success of the subversive act and adds further to Indigenous invisibility. Wright then must construct a work that balances the familiarity of the form with a challenge to aesthetic representations. The most critical example of Wright's challenge to literary form is in her disruption to temporal literary assumptions and practices. She unsettles

the narrative processes by privileging an alternate temporal order over linearity³, but this disruption to the dominant form is at risk of being misunderstood, in the same way that other historical acts have been misunderstood, and interpreted as aberrance and inferiority rather than subversion.

Like those who held Corroborees on Sundays, Wright's hegemonic and discursive subversion requires the reader to interpret the new aesthetic. The challenge to the form is an act of subversion designed to de-stabilise the dominant discursive tropes regarding Indigeneity. *Carpentaria* jolts time out of its familiarity, allowing the gap in understanding to become metonymic of the potential for difference and alternative temporalities. This gap, or silence, is what Ravenscroft terms "radical uncertainty" (Ravenscroft, "Dreaming of Others" 197), and it answers the calls of both Moreton-Robinson ("Whiteness" 86) and Michael Bastian (117) by disrupting time, as well as other aesthetic elements, out of their usual paradigms.

Carpentaria deconstructs the dominant discourse by displacing European temporality from the centre of the novel and using instead a circular temporal pattern. The result is the creation of a "void, a psychological abyss between cultures" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 63). The novel "like so much about post-colonial literature is 'about' a void..." (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 63) and, by extension, Wright's play with temporality is also about creating an abyss between

³ It is noted that while Wright is not the first writer to create alternate forms of time in the novel, she is the first to do it as a First Australian writer. This work argues that Wright's representation of time in the novel is unique because of her cultural heritage and the unique history of First Australians. An examination of Wright's treatment of time within the broader context of literary history would be of great interest but is beyond the scope of this research.

cultures. The void is created as she writes back to history, providing a counter discourse. This void has the effect of placing European temporality at an objective distance, thus creating an opportunity for the reader to question the power and legitimacy of the dominant temporality. The practice and desire for written history over oral history, and the subsequent denial of that desire in *Carpentaria*, makes the reader conscious of temporal and epistemological assumptions embedded in literary practice. Making obvious the reader's assumptions provides an opportunity for the reader to embrace a new object of study, "Ourselves, European Australians, rather than them, the Aborigines – and this entails a consideration of the nature of our colonising culture, and the nature of our knowledge and power in relation to Aborigines" (Attwood in Moreton-Robinson 81). Wright contrasts the "...daily task, a memory tribunal, undertaken with relish by the old people for everyone's matter of concern – talking oral history about the sequestrators who owned Uptown" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 50) with the town's "Book of Books...the complete collection of the Smith family's sagas, in volumes wasting away in dozens of dusty cardboard boxes in her rusty old shed" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 81). The comparison inverts the bias against the ongoing oral history, by emphasising the impermanence of the fragile written history forgotten in sheds, thus continuing Wright's creation of a counter-discourse within the novel.

In the creation of a counter-discourse, Wright confronts the imposition of Christian time with both tragedy and satire. The character of Angel Day plays the part of the successful Aboriginal, "Bureaucratic people for the *Aborigines*

department said she had ‘Go’” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 16). But Wright makes it clear that the success of Angel Day may be the greatest success achieved under a regime of government control and Indigenous invisibility. Wright’s satirical depiction of Angel’s success is emphasised in the hyperbolic treatment of the grossly insignificant:

Her fortunes were growing out of hand. She possessed dozens of Heinz baked bean tins and pickle-bottles full of nails, loose screws and bolts. She became a genius in the new ideas of blackfella advancement. Bureaucratic people for the *Aborigines* department said she had ‘Go’. She became a prime example of government policies at work and to prove it, they came and took pictures of her with a Pentax camera for a report. (Wright, *Carpentaria* 16)

The use of juxtaposition has a bitter irony in its tone; fortunes/baked bean tins, genius/pickle-bottles and Blackfella advancement/‘Go’ all carry the same tone of sarcastic rage. The satire, however, is not at the expense of the Angel Day, who becomes a figure of pathos as she strives to whiteness. Her success, or ‘advancement’, can never result in the same success enjoyed by the white, Uptowners, and although the Bureaucratic people praise her, it is the Bureaucracy that have failed her. “*Why couldn’t they have waited for a government grant?*” the text asks rhetorically (20) with the silence that follows intended to be filled by the reader with their own knowledge of the systemic bureaucratic failures Wright critiques. Wright’s critique is in the voices of the old people of the Pricklebush, the elders of the community, as they re-align the Bureaucratic ideal of ‘Aboriginal advancement’ with ‘rubbish, disease and lurgies’:

... what Angel Day had was purely magical, it was true, but sorry to say, of no benefit to anyone. This led them to say privately that she had acquired a disease from making her life out of living in other people’s rubbish. Who

knew what kind of lurgies lurked in white trash?...It was no benefit to anyone if she had magical powers to make her more like the white people. (16)

To be more like white people is Angel Day's labour, and her partial achievement constitutes her magic, "...she was a genie counting her nails like a millionaire, drawing the world to her beck and call like a queen, mind you" (16). Her husband, Norm's, desire to return to the bush evokes bodily reaction in Angel, "She said he did not think properly... she told him he made her stomach sick just by thinking she should go and live like a dog in the bush..." (16). Here the cultural desires clash as Angel aspires to whiteness and Norm attempts to retain the practices of his culture. Angel continues to acquire material possessions discarded by the white inhabitants of the town in order to procure the talismans of white success but the negative, "...lurgies lurked..." (16) emphasises the insidious nature of white magic. The paths at this point diverge as Angel and Norm move further apart in their lives. To be like white people, to have their luck, becomes a sickness that removes Angel, at first from her family and husband, and then from the community itself. This contrasts with Norm who continues to live in the town, fish the waters and commune with ancestors.

The colonial project of restoring wakefulness to the sleeping native is a project poisoned with failure as the ironic reflections of Angel Day emphasise, "...now she owned the luck of the white people" (22). The double irony is that the luck of the white people is short lived as the fate of their punishment is played out in the destruction of the town, just as Angel Day foresees: "She often spoke about the absence of God in Desperance and the need for him to make his appearance in

Uptown to redeem the cursed with his light” (19). But the most terrible irony of Angel Day’s white luck is in her final appearance in the novel:

The phantom who had her soul in a bag, came sidling up to her again, *Wanta lift doll?* She thought, *Doll! Well! Precisely. That’s more like it.* She, leg-weary already, never gave it a second thought and she took the lift. Her fate, bizarre and twisted it seemed, had arrived out of hell, in the form of a shiny, black road train, hauled by a Mack truck. (Wright 435)

She lives homeless and destitute catching snakes and living in “damp caverns of clothes” (435).

Wright focuses the dream of Angel on representations of time by using the symbols of time as talismans for Angel’s obsessive collecting of discarded object that symbolise whiteness. When sorting through the town’s rubbish, Angel discovers a clock. She deliberates on the possibility of being caught with what seems to be contraband, an object beyond the reach of an Aboriginal woman, “...the Council men...would accuse her of stealing the clock...” (21). But Angel takes the clock since:

To leave without it was a betrayal of the future she was already imagining in which the Phantom children would be going to school on time. No one in the Phantom family would be guessing the time anymore from where the sun sat in the sky. In the new sweet life, the Phantom family would be marching off to bed at the correct time, just like the school thought was really desirable, then they would march off to school on time to do their school work. (Wright 21)

Here Wright addresses the prevailing association of punctuality to time with morality and success (Nanni 8) with the repetition of ‘march’ invoking the desired military orderliness, and righteousness of clock time. Angel is not a figure of

subversion attempting to thwart the Mission's or State's objective of Aboriginal reformation, but rather a figure who, when given the opportunity, will comply and 'assimilate'. European time, and the clock as a symbol of conquest and civilisation (Nanni 29), provides the illusion of a sweet life, one that is desirable and, by virtue of obedience to it, guaranteed. The irony at the close of Angel's story, whereby the dream of the sweet life has been replaced with sordid deprivation, becomes Wright's comment on the toxicity of the "beautiful linear hours" of colonialism (Wright, *Carpentaria* 298). Where Nanni has studied the effects of colonised time on the frontiers of colonisation, Wright makes the examination contemporary and personal in the tragedy of Angel Day.

Wright takes the European hegemonic intrusion into Indigenous life further by invoking, simultaneous with the colonisation of time, the colonisation of religious practice. Wright reminds the reader of the colonial past by reconnecting the link between religion and time. The discourse realigns faith and temporality as Angel Day, her very name encapsulating the idea of the nexus between morality and Christian temporality, discovers in her trawling of the rubbish heaps, the statue of the Virgin Mary:

Now she had to carry the statue home, for she knew that with the Virgin Mary in pride of place, nobody would be able to interfere with the power of the blessings it would bestow on her home, 'Luck was going to change for sure, from this moment onwards', she told the seagulls, because she, Mrs Angel Day, now owned the luck of the white people.

Not only would her family be able to tell the time, and be able to tell other poor outsider people like themselves what the time was, but they would be prosperous. They would become like white people who prayed and said they were of the Christian faith. This was the difference between the poor old Pricklebush people and Uptown. (Wright, *Carpentaria* 22)

Nanni's research demonstrates that the connection between Christianity and temporality, in the 'civilising' of the First Australians, "entailed imposing the temporal rituals and routines of the dominant society, whilst disempowering, subsuming and reforming competing modes of temporal practice and perception" (3). Christian temporality attempted to remove Indigenous temporal and religious practices from the centre of Indigenous ontology and replace them with European beliefs. Angel Day is a literary representation of the victims of the colonisation of time. She attempts to adopt Christian linearity but this only serves to align her with the hopelessly anachronistic white characters who, "don't know their history" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 56). She is left at the close of the novel in a state of confusion about the opportunities offered by the competing European and Indigenous cultures: "There are two intertwining trees outside the warehouse and all she thinks about is Fishman or Angel. Eenie, meenie, miney mo, whose dream?" (435).

Angel Day is portrayed as a victim of the colonial process Nanni summarises as, confrontation, containment and assimilation (85). The process is revisited by Wright in *Carpentaria* with war stories of the town's past, Mickey's war museum ready for the war trials to come; the herding of the Indigenous people outside of Uptown and its required "distance of tolerance" (97); and finally, Angel conforming or 'assimilating' to the European hegemony. She is contrasted with the Indigenous heroes of the novel who mark tides, weather and the movement of animals in a novel in which alternate temporality governs the narrative. These

heroes, the characters of Will Phantom, Norm Phantom, Joseph Midnight, and Mozzie Fishman, represent Wright's inversion of the colonising process as she abrogates the Imperial centre of the text and appropriates the language and culture of that centre (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 83), filling it with Indigenous content (Tapping, "Oral Cultures" 93). The heroes of the novel restore Indigenous cultural practices to the narrative centre by surviving the storm that destroys all European presence resulting in the displacement of European time. In this manner, Wright is able to contest discursive assumptions regarding history, epistemology and literature. Wright confronts these colonising assumptions and contains them within the novel as toxic, anachronistic and ill-fated whiteness; characters such as Angel Day and the white inhabitants of Desperance. For the reader, access to the novel is contingent upon their ability to assimilate to the dominance of Wright's construction of time, history and beliefs.

Wright challenges the process of European history-making and keeping and its privileging of the written record over orality. European history-making has been the domain of white writers. *Carpentaria* opens by re-establishing the authority of oral history as it relays the ancient story of the ancestral creation serpent from "long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago..." (Wright, *Carpentaria* 1). The oral history-keeping is without limits, going beyond the reaches of human existence, thus dwarfing the record-keeping of the Europeans. Oral history becomes imbued with eternal religious authority, an authority that is passed from one generation of human story-tellers to the next. Wright seems to respond to JD Woods, a South

Australian journalist who wrote in 1879 about the Indigenous Australians of his time; “Without a history, they have no past; without a religion they have no hope; without the habits of forethought and providence, they can have no future” (qtd. in Nanni 75). The refusal to acknowledge the history-keeping of Indigenous people helped to form the argument of a dying race, a race out of time, with no connection to the past and therefore no future. *Carpentaria* responds to this logic by inverting the argument:

Uptown whitefella mob was full of people claiming they had no origins...They said that they were not strangers because they had originated from nowhere. (55)

...their history was just a half-flick of the switch of truth – simply a memory no greater than two life-spans. (56)

These people are no good. They don't believe in God...They don't even remember their own religion. (47)

Little towns belonging to the white folks are like this. You could hear the town struggling to survive, to make good of itself, crying out – *Save me! Save me!* But who listened? This was the old, unanswerable question: how the heck were they going to keep themselves out of the water? (54)

This series of excerpts demonstrates Wright's inversion of each of JD Woods' claims to the superior history-keeping of the Europeans, by challenging the discursive futureless, dying-out motif, and instead making the white coloniser the subject of those motifs. Wright appropriates the anthropological gaze of the coloniser, and in the narrator's study of the white man, notes the ironies and failings of white hegemony; white culture in *Carpentaria* has no past, practices no religion and is unprepared for its final, watery destruction.

Carpentaria opens with the dual invocation of the colonial past and the ancient past of the land. “A NATION CHANTS, BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY” (1) alerts the reader to Wright’s intention to challenge what is known by the “nation” and the nation’s use of the subject, “we”. For this reason this paragraph forms the foundation of Wright’s response to discourses regarding Indigeneity – she intends to disrupt what is known since knowing the story of the Other has been a mechanism by which to dominate and control him (Said 3), but the sudden shift in the paragraph leaves the subject position uncertain:

A NATION CHANTS, BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY. THE BELLS PEAL EVERYWHERE. CHURCH BELLS CALLING THE FAITHFUL TO THE TABERNACLE WHERE THE GATES OF HEAVEN WILL OPEN, BUT NOT FOR THE WICKED. CALLING INNOCENT LITTLE BLACK GIRLS FROM A DISTANT COMMUNITY WHERE THE WHITE DOVE BEARING AN OLIVE BRANCH NEVER LANDS. LITTLE GIRLS WHO COME BACK HOME AFTER CHURCH ON SUNDAY, WHO LOOK AROUND THEMSELVES AT THE HUMAN FALLOUT AND ANNOUNCE MATTER-OF-FACTLY, ARMAGEDDON BEGINS HERE. (1)

The white subject of the first sentence is dropped as the ambiguous “faithful” take the subject position. The final sentence displaces the white subject, and in this position are placed the “innocent little black girls”. It is the “innocent little black girls”, who demonstrate agency in their proclamation of the beginning of Armageddon. They announce the story the white subject does not know – the story of his downfall. In this inversion of knowing, Wright demonstrates the ignorance of “the nation” who cannot know the story of the Other since he does not know the story of himself.

In this paragraph Wright returns temporality to religiosity but she inverts the colonial history by making whiteness the object of the colonising bell. It is the

white man's tardiness, his failure to observe the bell's call to salvation as the gates of heaven open, that is his destruction. The white man can no more account for his days and hours on Earth, with a "memory no greater than two life spans" (Wright, *Carpentari* 56), than hear the bell announcing the Day of Judgement, "They don't even remember their own religion" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 47). Wright juxtaposes the white amnesia and the declaration of Armageddon with the detailed account of the long Indigenous memory of the beginning of time in the following paragraph. The narrator's description of genesis, as the serpent creates the land, defies the refrain, "But we know your story already". It gives voice to a story that had been silenced by the discursive race without history trope. In these few paragraphs Wright is demonstrating that the white man, by virtue of his lost history, is running out of time, where the native is in a moment of infinite time.

The inversion of the dominant discourse serves many functions: it privileges the Indigenous subject and reinstates Indigenous sovereignty (Brewster, "Indigenous Sovereignty" 87); it creates a literary form in which time is aesthetically linked with an Indigenous past, and by extension, the varied ontologies the past encapsulates; and importantly, it allows the opportunity for the reader to undertake an examination, and critique, of dominant epistemologies and representations of Indigeneity, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and the effects the imposition of Western time has had on native cultures.

I return to the quote by Tony Abbot that opened this chapter; "The arrival of the First Fleet was the defining moment in the history of this continent...It was the

moment this continent became part of the modern world" (qtd. in Dingle). *Carpentaria* negates the idea that the colonizer was a savior of a sleeping land and people by contextualizing the European presence within an Indigenous history of billions of years. Wright's Indigenous heroes endure the apocalyptic storm of the close of the novel and return from the sea to continue the connection to land. Native Carpentarian time is restored suggesting the restoration of Indigenous consciousness (Grossman 2) and cultural autonomy. European time, which "...seems nothing more than hot air passing through the mind..." (Wright, "On Writing" 5), a moment in the "once upon a time" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 53), is replaced with another understanding and representation of time, by encapsulating multiple times simultaneously, symbolising the end of colonisation with the white man assuming the position of his former Other insofar as he is, by the close of the novel, *homo ex tempore* – man without time.

Attending to the Present

“‘*They got no sanctified ground?*’ They got no sanctified ground.” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 56)

The previous chapter considered the ways in which Alexis Wright’s novel, *Carpentaria*, politicizes Western concepts of time by inverting the discursive tropes regarding Indigeneity, and temporality with regard to the past. Wright reestablishes Indigenous links to the past with a counter-history that occupies the center of the novel placing whiteness at the margins of the Indigenous subject. The placement of European temporality at the margins of the dominant European discourse creates the opportunity for whiteness to become an object of study, and a means by which to reveal the dominating and destructive effects of its hegemony.

This chapter examines the ways in which Wright makes links between time and space⁴ in *Carpentaria*. It investigates the importance of the link between time and space in Indigenous cultures, and the manner in which time and space were disrupted in the process of colonization. Further, an examination of the ways in which Wright reasserts the ongoing link Indigenous cultures have kept between

⁴ In deference to Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, the word space will be used in preference to place, consistent with their study (2010). Although I am aware of Meucke’s arguments for the term place it is felt that language used by First Australians is a preference.

time and space reveals the comparatively tenuous nature of the colonial presence in Australia. Finally, I demonstrate Wright's inversion of the discursive trope of *terra nullius* and her portrayal of the ongoing sovereignty of Indigenous people based on current temporal and spatial, or physical, ties to country.

To demonstrate Wright's discursive challenge to hegemony it is necessary to briefly elucidate some of the contrasting characteristics of Indigenous and European temporal epistemologies, as well as some of the history that has formed the basis for the dominant discourses about Indigeneity. Ambelin Kwaymullina and Blaze Kwaymullina describe Indigenous belief systems as 'holistic':

...in which everything is interrelated and interdependent. Nothing exists in isolation. All life – and everything is alive in an Aboriginal worldview – exists in *relationship* to everything else...Within this worldview, time is “neither linear nor absolute [but] ...like all things, is relative to the enduring physical and metaphysical context of country. (196-199)

Time exists in relation to space. Similarly, time and knowledge are bound in space which “is alive and conscious” (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 201), encapsulating the physical space, the weather, and plants and animals.

Contrastingly, European constructions of time and space are both absolute and relative. They are absolute insofar as they are fixed and measurable, and relative in that their value is contingent upon utility (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 200). It is this ideological construction of space and time that formed the basis for the legal argument of *terra nullius* – a land empty - because the people on it neither measured it, nor utilized it, in a way recognizable to the Europeans. Legal claim

to the space was made by colonizers who perceived the natives' attachment to the land as tenuous (Nanni 60). The land was not recognized as a metaphysical space, but rather "something for the humans to tame and subdue, to conquer and make their own" (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 201), a thing which required the civilizing influence of the Europeans. Dispossession of the land for Indigenous Australians was then not only a dispossession of living space, but also a severing of the related temporal and knowledge systems, and practices of the original owners – effectively an occupation of the temporal order (Nanni 14).

Over time, the effects of removing Indigenous people from their space was amplified in the establishment of Aboriginal Missions. Missions held people from country often many hundreds of miles away from their home land, and prevented the return to country for those who sought it. In more contemporary times, generations of children were removed from their families and their country, and to this day land has been acquired for mining, farming, and real-estate. As well as the damage sustained to language and culture, the effect of multi-generational removal of Aboriginal people from their space has been the discursive re-location of Indigeneity into a landless ever-present with no past or future. The legal paradox that results is that:

By locating events of continuing legal significance...in the far-off past, the damage caused by these events can be viewed as ameliorated, or at least shorn of some of their legal consequences, by the passage of time...Ironically, while Aboriginal law is formed by a worldview which did not contain notions of linear time, the increasingly heavy burden placed on native title claimants is tied to Western perceptions of Aboriginal 'traditional laws and customs' which must be shown to remain substantially unchanged throughout the passage of linear years. So, while Australian law moves into the future, Aboriginal people are faced with the unhappy task of proving

they have never left the past in order to have rights recognized in the present.
(Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 199)

What Western jurisprudence and discourse neglects is the continuity of the connection Indigenous people have maintained to country: “they put their cities and their culture all over our country. But underneath this, all the time, Aboriginal culture and laws stay alive” (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 205). It is the Western discursive neglect of the continuity of the connection Indigenous Australians have maintained between time and space that becomes the concern of *Carpentaria*. Wright creates an aesthetic that negates the spaceless, timeless discourse of non-Indigenous Australia and demonstrates the resilience of Indigenous cultural practices and beliefs that have survived colonization.

Carpentaria opens with the invocation of the ancestral serpent, contextualizing the novel within an Indigenous setting, that is both physical and temporal; The serpent:

“CAME DOWN THOSE BILLIONS OF YEARS AGO, TO CRAWL ON ITS HEAVY BELLY, ALL AROUND THE WET CLAY SOILS IN THE GULF OF CARPENTARIA”:

“LONG BEFORE MAN WAS A CREATURE WHO COULD CONTEMPLATE THE NEXT MOMENT IN TIME” (1).

Wright attests to the resilience of Indigenous knowledge by placing the serpent in the physical world, occupying a moment of time that initially pre-dates, not only colonial history, but all human history. The serpent’s presence throughout the text, from the creation of life to the daily existence of the protagonists, “they say its being is porous; it permeates everything” (2), places it in all times, but most

importantly implicates it in the development of the action of the novel. At the close of the novel the serpent prevails:

All dreams come true somehow, Norm murmured, sizing up the flattened landscape, already planning the home he would rebuild on the same piece of land where his old house had been, among the spirits in the remains of the ghost town, where the snake slept underneath. (499)

The serpent, whilst carrying significant cultural importance to some Indigenous cultural groups, can be more generally read as metaphoric of the endurance of Indigenous culture.

The closing image of the sleeping serpent completes the opening image of the creative serpent. The serpent sleeps only once the task of creation and restoration, begun those billions of years before, is complete, however its presence continues in the space. The narrator is aligned with the serpent throughout the novel, as its enduring witness and chronicler of its actions and significance. Like the serpent, the narrator spans all time, from the creation of the land to the telling of the story. But while it is the serpent's role to create and destroy the space, the narrator's role is to mirror the destruction of the town in the destruction of the conventional novel. Where the serpent permeates everything in the space of Carpentaria, the narrator permeates everything in the construction of *Carpentaria*. In particular, the narrator disrupts expectations of the treatment of time as he plays with grammatical constructions of tense. His voice is spoken from the future throughout the novel, and is inflected with the knowledge of the completed restoration of Indigeneity to the town, although that knowledge is only hinted at:

So, the ‘edge’ people...sat back and watched this spectacle of the snow man taking place on the beach...It was the beginning of the story of the day the spirits of the seas and storms mixed their business, and sent Elias from out of oblivion into Desperance with good reason. This was the story about Elias Smith which was later put alongside the Dreamtime by the keepers of the Law to explain what happened once upon a time with those dry claypans sitting quietly out yonder there for anybody to look at, and wonder about what was happening in the world, and to be happy knowing at least this was paradise on earth, and why would anyone want to live anywhere else. (53)

The narrator’s tone sounds ironic in its description of Desperance as paradise on earth, since Desperance has been framed within a context of Indigenous deprivation and poverty, “*You is in hell*, Pricklebush could have told them travellers” (59). The conflict in potential meanings is explained with an examination of Wright’s play with grammatical constructions of time. The paragraph describes the scene on the beach as Elias Smith walks in from the sea. The narrator speaks in the past tense, *this was the story of the edge people who sat back and watched*. But the rule of the permanence of the reference point (Reichenbach 74) is broken in the following clause as the narrator rapidly changes the reference point to a distant time in the future; *this was the story...which was later*. ‘This’ and ‘later’ indicate a change in the reference point and the original point of reference, “the ‘edge’ people sat back and watched”, becomes the “once upon a time”. To understand the irony of the paragraph, that the space is paradise on earth, the reader is required to accept that the point of reference rule is not followed in the text, and that meaning is created from multiple temporal locations. In this way, the space becomes imbued with multiple temporal moments, including the post-apocalyptic moment of “paradise on earth”, similar to that observed in Meucke’s examination of time and space: “Country can hold several moments simultaneously” (Meucke, *Ancient and Modern* 17).

Wright's conflation of multiple times into a single space disrupts the temporal and spatial expectations of the reader, and emphasizes the spatial connection Indigeneity has maintained over the course of colonisation. Wright destabilizes the assumptions of the measurability and utility of time and space as they become difficult to grasp in the text, "...is there a sense of instability about time that has to be remade by the people and its leaders in overcoming oppression?" (Wright, "On Writing" 4). Wright creates an unfamiliar representation of time, and, whether or not that representation is culturally indicative of Indigeneity, or a particular Indigenous group, the effect is to create a gap in understanding for the reader by making time unfamiliar and questionable.

The gap in understanding created in *Carpentaria* does not signify an opportunity for the reader to develop a knowledge of Indigeneity, but rather provides an opportunity for the gaze to be turned towards whiteness. In her paper on *Carpentaria*, Ravenscroft makes the important distinction between moving towards, and arriving at, knowledge of the Other since the arrival is never possible, "...how do we see, or know, or imagine, from a Waanyi point of view if we are not Waanyi?" (Ravenscroft, "Dreaming of Others" 213). Wright addresses the idea similarly:

Can someone who did not grow up in a place that is sometimes under water, sometimes bone-dry, know when the trade winds blowing off the southern and northern hemispheres will merge in summer? Know the moment of climatic change better than they know themselves? (Wright, "On Writing" 3).

Both Wright's, whose academic interest in Said is documented in her essay *On Writing Carpentaria* (4), and Ravenscroft's ideas on knowing the Other, are consistent with Said's theory of Orientalism insofar as to know the Other is to translate "into our own nexus of intelligibility" (Ravenscroft, "Dreaming of Others" 214), to "cancel out, or at least subdue and reduce, its strangeness..." (Said 87). Wright resists translating *Carpentaria* into a familiar intelligibility or form for readers, instead using its strangeness to signify difference. The reader is required to recognize the limits of their own epistemologies as well as the possibilities of alternate ones. What is important is the arrival at a point of not knowing, and a recognition of difference. The signification of difference is then the opportunity for the recognition of alternate representations and beliefs (Ravenscroft, "Dreaming of Others" 216)⁵.

In *Carpentaria* the idea of the 'present' is significant as Wright reconnects its multiple meanings to emphasize the potential for European understanding of Indigenous ontology. 'Present' invokes all three meanings; the here, in existence, and the now, thus equating the meaning of the English word, 'present' with Indigenous beliefs of relatedness of space, knowledge (cognizance), and time. Although the meaning of present indicates the potential for a European understanding of the relatedness of time and space, Wright demonstrates the severed nature of time and space in the experience and practice of the 'present' for the colonizers of the novel. For the white inhabitants of the town, time is governed by the progress of the clock, without the necessity to refer to space or

⁵ A more detailed examination of not knowing the Other can be found in Alison Ravenscroft, "Dreaming of Others". A detailed treatment of this idea is beyond the scope of this work.

nature. This results in a population fixed in linear time rather than connected to all times but “...since everything must interconnect and interrelate to survive, if a pattern is fixed in time, it loses its ability to dynamically connect with other patterns. To be temporally fixed is therefore to be isolated; frozen” (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 200). Wright emphasizes the fixity of time for the white inhabitants of the town when the storm that carries Elias in from the sea stops all the clocks and watches, “they were only fit to be thrown down on the rubbish dump” (43). Time is frozen as the white inhabitants have no recourse to the space and its connection to time. *Carpentaria* effectively demonstrates that to be in the present is to be both connected to time and space, and without such a connection one can only live as if fixed or frozen. This use of the present to connect time and space demonstrates the fixity of European existence, and privileges the dynamism of Indigenous presence in the space.

To contrast the fixity of whiteness with the dynamism of Indigeneity, Wright constructs space as a character⁶ that is represented by two distinctive groups of settings that work in opposition. The first group of settings is the enclosed spaces belonging to the white members of the community. Contrasted with those spaces are the open spaces of the Indigenous communities. The enclosed spaces occupied by the white inhabitants of the town include the police station and gaol, the council chambers, school, pub, and the mine. As a second level of enclosure the

⁶ I am resisting here the use of the term personified to describe the setting/space since this term likens the thing to a human when very clearly the intention is not to humanize the space but to describe its agency as consistent with Indigenous ontology whereby space has the capacity to act, protect and cause action (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 201-202).

town is protected by a net that covers and protects the white occupied sections, “...a defense system in the form of a giant net made of prayers and god-fearing devotion – a protective shield, saving the town from a cyclone” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 80). Enclosure acts as a metaphor for the fixity of colonial space with the recurring net metaphor connoting entrapment:

Although many often complained about ‘the dead town with no life to it at all,’ and frequently lamented how they wanted to leave one day, it was pretty difficult to unbuckle the notions of permanence. The constricting binds strapped into their lives, strangling them with the fear of possibility. (Wright, *Carpentaria* 301)

Space for the white people is represented as hostile and active with the verbs ‘strapped’ and ‘strangling’, but its agency is not acknowledged since the white inhabitants value the space only for its utility. For this reason they fail to perceive the space’s increasing levels of hostility and danger, as symbolized by the oleander bush. Oleander is present outside the main bureaucratic spaces of the novel including the police station and the Town Council building, and becomes a symbol for the noxious toxicity of the white spaces of town. When Angel Day is in the town’s tip she muses over the council documents regarding her family, “At least she could sit in a shady nook amongst the dying oleander hedge cuttings” (21). Whilst sitting there she discovers the clock. The toxic oleander is simultaneously associated with the bureaucratic knowledge of her children as well as European temporality in the clock. Importantly, the oleander is dying signifying the approaching end of poisonous invasion.

Oleander is also present outside the police station, Police Constable Truthful

E'Strange's "...head was like the sedentary oleander beside the jail" (343). Again, the symbol of toxicity is linked with the idea of white power and bureaucracy as well as with fixity in the word 'sedentary'. The police station and gaol is so hopelessly fixed in time and space that it takes on the function of a nursery for the constable's collection of fichus plants. But when three young Indigenous boys are arrested and put in the lock-up the space becomes hostile. The boys are savagely beaten and, in a state of profound fear, hang themselves. Truthful discovers the death of the boys as the space becomes active, expressing its agency through resistance and subversion by invoking the ancestral spirits of the past:

Moments later, in panic and with a racing heart, Truthful thought, *What of his prisoners, the three boys?* 'Excuse me! Excuse me! He found himself speaking as though he was a ghost himself. He pushed, shoved, inched his way through the throng, thinking faster and faster, if the boys could see them too, then maybe, he was not dreaming. It felt like an eternity to reach the back of the building to the cells. 'Excuse me! Excuse me!' Slowly, like a cloud moving, the grey spirits drifted aside. (343)

When confronted with the death of the boys and a space that expresses sentence, the constable is unable to reconcile the living space to his epistemologies, and his lack of language with which to describe it results in his mental, or cognitive, collapse.

The toxicity, hostility and entrapment of the white spaces is contrasted with the open and active spaces associated with Indigeneity, where "Law is part of a larger way of knowing the world, one which is formed by a living landscape where time is measured by cycles, not lines; and the 'space' of country is both physical and

metaphysical” (Kwaymullina 198). The novel opens with the wide panorama of the creation of the country by the ancestral serpent. This contextualizes the space both temporally and ontologically locating it in the vastness of the physical and metaphysical of eternal time. But very rapidly the focus narrows to Norm Phantom, a tribal man living in the Pricklebush at the edge of the town of Desperance. Like the cycles of Indigenous time, the narrative cycles temporally with the narrator moving the story rapidly between ever narrowing focal points in the past. The setting of the novel moves inversely, incorporating an ever-widening view of the country. Where first the Aboriginal population is located in the Pricklebush, the narration then moves to the rivers, the claypans and hills, the sea, and finally back to the obliterated town. By opening the novel within the space of the edge of town, the Pricklebush, Wright appears to affirm the discursive marginality of Indigenous connections to space with the symbolic Pricklebush, like oleander, suggesting noxious toxicity. However, as the focus broadens the discursive connections to space increasingly incorporate notions of temporality and knowledge:

It was high tide. Will knew how the tides worked simply by looking at the movement of a tree, or where the moon crossed the sky, the light of day, or the appearance of the sea. He carried the tide in his body. Even way out in the desert, when he was on the Fishman’s convoy, a thousand miles from the sea, he felt its rhythms. (385)

Will, like the characters of Mozzie Fishman, Norm Phantom and Joseph Midnight, exists in the present, connected to both time and space, despite the presence of police, town officials, and miners who all seek to entrap him. The ongoing connection these characters have to the present is affirmed by the agency of the

space, as it works to assist them in the eradication of the white occupation. Where the space is hostile to white occupation, it works inversely to assist the Indigenous characters in their endeavor to free the land of occupation. Will is rescued from the captivity of the miners and chased by a miner when:

...the yellow-haired man tripped. Instantly, his head was split open at the temple by a rock that had, up to that moment, lain on the ground, embedded in soil that was thousands of seasons old, untouched by humankind since the ancestor had placed it in this spot, as if it had planned to do this incredible thing. (389)

Similarly, when the mine hangars are on fire but the fire appears to be going out, the space becomes active:

The unbelievable miracle came flying by. A whirly wind, mind you nobody had seen one for days, just as a matter of fact sprung up from those hills themselves. It swirled straight through from behind those men, picking up their wish and plucking the baseball caps which came flying off their heads, together with all the loose balls of spinifex flying with the dust and the baseball caps, the whole lot moving towards the fire...

It happened so fast when the fiery whirlwind shot into the bowlers and momentarily, lit them up like candles. (394-395)

The character of the space works to assert its connection to the Indigenous people and the present, just as it had worked in the gaol to emphasize the disconnect between the white police officer and the present. Wright inverts the discursive trope of the placeless Aboriginal, existing in a dream-like state out of time. Inverting the discourse has the dual effect of examining the attachment of white characters to space and time. Since the white characters live in toxically enclosed spaces, existing in a fixed temporal state, they occupy a liminal or purgatorial space, between living and the foretold Armageddon of the close of the novel. The

white characters, and Angel Day too, who has strived to gain the magic of whiteness, come to fulfill Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina's prediction for those who do not connect to and uphold the laws of creation; "Life might continue, but not, perhaps, in any way that we would recognize as living now" (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina 204).

Carpentaria challenges the discursive trope of the landless Aboriginal existing out of time by reasserting the resilience of Indigenous culture with links to time, space and knowledge. Wright's aesthetic representations of the sentience of space and its ability to subvert the colonizing imperative of containment and utility disrupts the dominance of European hegemony, and creates the potential for a gap in understanding for readers. The gap allows the reader the opportunity to recognize the dominance of a European discourse that considers Indigenous space as an object without utility in need of civilization and control. Wright locates the setting of the novel as a central character in the progression of the plot with its agency in the progression of the action. Space then works to demonstrate the attachment Indigeneity has to it which is contrasted with the rather tenuous and hostile relationship the white characters have. The hostility that exists between the European and space in the novel becomes a metaphor for the white man's inability to exist in the present, that is, in the here and the now. The colonizer and country are disconnected heralding an inevitable end of time for his existence in the space, leaving him ultimately in *terra nullius* – no man's land.

A Discourse for the Future

...*Carpentaria* is the land of the untouched: an Indigenous sovereignty of the imagination. Just such a story as we might tell in our story place. Something to grow the land perhaps. Or, to visit the future. (Wright, "On Writing" 16)

The concern of this research has until now been with Alexis Wright's creation of a discourse that restores Indigenous links to history and space. The research has also dealt with Wright's inversion of the discursive tropes that have bonded Indigeneity to lost time and space to demonstrate the tenuous holds whiteness has to both. This chapter considers European discourses that pertain to Indigeneity in the future and Wright's inversion of those discourses to demonstrate the strength of the bond between the Indigenous present and future. Under consideration is Wright's emphasis of the form of the novel, with a particular consideration of orality, narrative voice, and temporal sequencing, and the manner in which the novel form is used to create meaning. Finally this chapter examines the construction of *Carpentaria* as a work of literature that creates a sovereign space for Indigeneity, and the possibility of a shared discourse.

J.D. Woods' assertion that, "Without a history they have no past; without a religion they have no hope; without habits of forethought and providence, they can have no future" (qtd. in Nanni 75), was an idea premised on the ideological relegation of Indigeneity to the past, and an awareness of the colonial project to eliminate natives from the land in order to replace their presence (Nanni 13; Said 207). The construction of the futureless native trope is an example of Said's

orientalist mechanism for creating truths in language (Said 203), and in the case of the Australian native, a truth based on phrenology, ideology, and commerce. Tropes that pertain to the futureless nature of Indigeneity prevail because of the difficulty in challenging the cultural strength that supports pervasive discourses (Said 41), discourses whose own self-referencing, denies the possibility of alternate truths (Moreton-Robinson 87; Wolf 209). When the subaltern voice is heard to challenge the dominance of the European system, the act is “attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behaviour” (Fanon 46) rather than a legitimate challenge to inequality.

Wright encapsulates the difficulty for the Indigenous writer who writes from the margins of society to challenge the dominant discourse:

I tried to come to an understanding of...how to understand the idea of Indigenous people living with the stories of all times in this country, and secondly, how to write from this perspective. (Wright, “On Writing” 2).

How to write from the perspective of the Other and maintain a truth commensurate with that perspective, as opposed to the constructed truths of the discourse, is the challenge for not only the Indigenous, but all marginal groups whose truth is not found in the discourse of the dominant. Moreton-Robinson’s examination of the difficulty for the Indigenous writer reveals that, because Indigenous literature is circumscribed by a dual audience, there arises a potential for conflict between the expected, acceptable representations of Indigeneity and the authentic representations desired by an Indigenous audience. But Moreton-Robinson suggests that working within a white paradigm can enable forms of resistance,

“One can conform and resist simultaneously because conformity enables access to certain knowledges about whiteness which can be appropriated to use strategically in the act of writing itself” (Moreton-Robinson, “Whiteness” 86). Michael Taussig summarises the process succinctly, “the power of the copy to influence what it is a copy of” (250).

Carpentaria attempts to “...critically engage with and deconstruct the white cultural representations of Indigeneity” (Moreton-Robinson, “Whiteness” 86) in a literary form. There exist within the novel familiar representations of Indigeneity; the young petrol sniffers, the dilapidated living conditions, the children who are late to school, and men who become miners despite the ruin to native land. But these familiar representations of Indigeneity are deconstructed by the inversion of discursive tropes; Indigenous characters are granted agency by occupying the subject position of the novel, and are portrayed as wise and heroic, while whiteness occupies the margins and is represented as out of time and place; Indigeneity is temporally and spatially situated; counter histories are voiced, such as in the voice of Micky and his war museum, and written; the small town setting is familiar but the view is from a different angle, that is, from the outskirts of town rather than the white centre. Wright engages with the novel as a predominantly white art form to create a form that enables resistance. *Carpentaria* can be read as a strategic use of appropriated literary forms and language to create a new way of understanding both Indigeneity and whiteness, and for that reason the appropriated form of the novel is as important in creating meaning as is the content (Tapping “Oral Cultures” 91).

One of the difficulties in creating a form for *Carpentaria* was the choice of its narration. *Carpentaria*'s predominantly oral form was a point that occupied Wright for some time (Wright, "On Writing" 2). Her hope that the oral voice would both observe the tradition of story-telling as well as engage more Indigenous readers is an attempt to construct a text that is authentically Indigenous, "...to create in writing an authentic form of Indigenous storytelling that uses the diction and vernacular of the region" (Wright, "On Writing" 6). While creating an authentic voice, the choice to adopt an oral form for the narration of *Carpentaria* is also a means by which to resist European hegemony.

Traditional oral story telling resists the generic imperatives of the literary novel vis-à-vis temporal sequencing, linear plotting and the centrality of whiteness, and Wright hopes that its use in *Carpentaria* portrays, "the reality of the Indigenous world differently than in the context of how novels might normally be written..." (Wright, "On Writing" 3). Wright explains that fiction, and in particular English and Australian fiction, is limited by boundaries "which encode the development of thinking in this country, and which follows through to containment of thought and ideas in the novel" (Wright, "On Writing" 3). To liberate the ideas encapsulated in *Carpentaria*, in particular ideas regarding beliefs and knowledge, Wright resists the traditional boundaries of the novel, and presents instead a form that is a hybrid of the literary and oral traditions. In this way the voice of *Carpentaria* maintains Indigenous authenticity whilst conforming to some conventions of the novel. In this way, Wright addresses the dual audiences that circumscribe Indigenous

literature, and offers a form that at once conforms and resists “white regimes of knowledge” (Moreton-Robinson, “Whiteness” 86).

One of Wright’s objectives in writing *Carpentaria* was to “question the idea of boundaries through exploring how ancient beliefs sit in the modern world...” (Wright, “On Writing” 3). The use of the traditional oral narrator is a mechanism for allowing the text to question the boundaries and expectations non-Indigenous readers refuse to acknowledge (Heiss and Minter 2-4). These boundaries and expectations take the form of generic textual expectations and representations, and cultural epistemologies.

Orality has a unique set of syntactic forms that have been relinquished with the advent of the written text, forms that often align with the cultural beliefs and knowledge of the story-teller. For example, the syntactic structures common to oral texts, in particular, parataxis and apposition, resist the typical hierarchical structures of the novel, in particular the necessity for linearity and progress, or plotting (Brooks xi), and instead support the idea of things being in equal relationship. Parataxis is the process of accumulating clauses in coordination rather than subordination:

Everyone had seen these boys walking about town, speeded up on petrol fumes and looking like zombies, walking straight past people as though they did not exist, sometimes with their little girls in tow, initiated by older boys on petrol as well. (Wright, *Carpentaria* 313)

The accumulation of equally weighted clauses prevents the description from progressing. Instead, the temporal moment is held still as the description builds.

Similarly, apposition, the process of placing two phrases, normally noun phrases, side by side with one element identifying the Other, is used to accumulate information with regards to the noun.

So, the 'edge' people, all of the blackfella mob living with quiet breathing in higgily-piggerly, rubbish-dump trash shacks, all popped any old where in the prickly bushes, all along a cobweb of dirt tracks running crooked, left, right and centre outside of town...(Wright, *Carpentaria* 53)

The apposition results in the elimination of the verb of a supporting clause with the effect of description dominating over action. Like parataxis, information is cumulative and serves to disrupt linearity by holding the moment still. These syntactic structures work to resist the privilege of linearity and plot, opting more for the privileging of ideas and descriptions.

The use of the syntax common to the oral tradition is not of itself enough to disrupt linearity. Another feature of orality is its emphasis on a series of episodes rather than the development of a climactic linear plot. Ong's study of orality and literacy has shown that while orality has no tradition of lengthy or novel-sized linear plots, *Carpentaria*, which is epic even for a novel, is created in the tradition of extended stories, or strings of related episodes that form to create a plot (Ong 144). Traditionally, the progress of the story tended to be episodic or thematically driven rather than plot driven. Episodes could be re-arranged without the loss of the thematic driver of the text, and without the necessity to strictly adhere to linearity. The singer, poet, or story-teller's role was to transfer traditional thought from the songs he has heard sung to his listeners (Ong 145-146). The focus on the story or song is not simply to entertain but to disseminate knowledge in a series of

theme based episodes. *Carpentaria* takes up the tradition of emphasising episodic themes over plot, with the effect of creating a non-linear plot that appears to spiral through a series of temporal reference shifts and flashbacks.

When examined as a series of thematically based episodes, *Carpentaria*'s structure is somewhat like the boxes within boxes described by Walter J. Ong (144), or as Wright puts it in *Carpentaria*, "...anyone can find hope in the stories: the big stories and the little ones between" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 12). The big story that encapsulates the whole is the thematic episode of the creation and destruction of the town of Desperance as bounded in the opening two paragraphs, "Armageddon begins here" followed by the ancestral creation serpent coming down "long before man was a creature..." (Wright, *Carpentaria* 1). Between creation and destruction are a number of other episodes that serve to contextualise themes regarding topics, such as: the importance of story in providing knowledge for the survival of all things; the living nature of space and its participation in its own survival; the importance of Indigenous Law and kinship; the necessity to observe the spirits of the land, and so on. These themes are explored in the episodes of the arrival, death, and burial of Elias; the imprisonment, death, and burial of the three young Aboriginal boys; the development of the town and mine, and the destruction of both; the white invasion of the Indigenous people, their ongoing culture, and return to sovereignty by the cyclone. Weaving in and out of each of the episodes are characters who offer various additional information by way of focalised third person narrative. In this way, episodes are visited at several points throughout the novel thus resisting linear climactic plotting.

Part of the resistance to the form of the novel is in the use of focalisation to narrow in on episodes of particular importance. Wright manipulates the character of the narrator to have him focalise through different characters in the text. While focalisation, and even the changing of focalised characters, is of no particular interest, what is interesting in *Carpentaria* is the blending of temporal changes with a change in focalisation. The arrival of Elias Smith to the town after having been washed up in a storm provides a good example. After a large electrical storm, Elias is seen by local children walking in from the sea. He collapses on the sand and is unable to speak. Over the course of thirty pages, Wright describes the arrival of Elias using a blend of first and third person narration. The first person narration slowly moves to third person, decreasing in narrative bias, as the focalisation narrows; from the town, to the Uptown people, to the Uptown people on the beach, and to individual characters. Complicating the narrative is the interjection of past and future episodes. The narrator takes over the story slipping into the first person, as well as sliding in temporal reference points to relay tangential episodes leading to or from the moment on the beach. The significance of Elias arriving on the beach is emphasised by the narrative circling, the multiple voices to tell the story of his arrival, and the placement of Elias in the future and past of many stories, “This was the story about Elias Smith which was later put alongside the Dreamtime by the keepers of the Law to explain what happened once upon a time...” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 53). The complicated grammatical structure in this sentence reveals a disruption to the practice of fixed reference

points (Reichenbach 74) and challenges the reader's expectations of temporal fixity.

As well as resisting the traditional linearity, sequencing, and plotting of the novel, the oral form in *Carpentaria* has the additional effect of placing Indigeneity in the subject position. The narrator's occupation of the subject position in the text has the result of displacing the dominant white narrator, and thus places Indigeneity in the default position (Brewster, "Indigenous Sovereignty" 87). The narrator's adoption of the subject position disrupts the discursive race dying out trope (Wolfe 208), whereby Indigeneity is defined by a lack of agency (Brewster, "Indigenous Sovereignty" 87), and repositions the Indigenous characters as the instruments of action. Brewster's suggests that the effect of Indigeneity assuming the default or normalised position in literature is to defamiliarise whiteness (Brewster, "Indigenous Sovereignty" 87). By defamiliarising whiteness, the received assumptions about literature, as well as the value of the colonising project may be brought into question by virtue of occupying the Other position, a position to be studied and examined (Said 32). For example, Wright's Indigenous narrator assumes Indigeneity as the default system of belief and knowledge. His temporal ordering of the novel becomes merely an artefact of the text, an assumed shared knowledge. By assuming Aboriginal temporal knowledge as the default, European knowledge, in particular, temporality, is moved to the margins thus positioning the reader to question its assumed dominance and relevance⁷.

⁷ Brewster makes a very detailed examination of the defamiliarising of whiteness in *Carpentaria*, however, she interprets Wright's representation of whiteness as satirical where I would read it as realist. I am in agreement with Brewster insofar as the text decenters whiteness and makes it available for analysis.

The centrality of *Carpentaria's* traditional oral narrator creates in the novel a sense of the performativity of the oral tradition. In the oral performance the narrator occupies the same space as the audience and characters created in the story (Ong 46), and in this shared space the story invokes all participants. *Carpentaria's* narrator becomes a character who carries the authority of the elder, the wise old man who speaks to his audience, like “some old Aboriginal person was telling the story” (Wright, “On Writing” 11). His wisdom is accentuated by his vast knowledge of the space and all its stories. But his wisdom is incorporeal as is revealed in the first page of the novel when he describes the creation of the land. The language is heavily loaded with the images of the event with the detail of the images suggesting the narrator’s presence at the event. Emphasising the narrator’s omniscient presence is his invocation of the audience as he slips briefly into a second person narrative; he remarks, “...if you had been watching...”, and, “Picture the creative serpent...” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 1). The use of second person has the effect of comparing the status of the audience, who is earth and time bound, with the narrator who travels time and space to be present not only in the ancient past, but also the distant future from which he speaks. But the recruitment of the audience into a participative role in the story also has the effect of creating empathy in the audience (Ong 46), an empathy that Wright cojoins to the normalised Indigenous centre.

There are also occasions when the narrator moves into a first person narrative, thus implicating himself in the action:

The soundwaves coming off the explosion in the aeroplane hangars at the biggest mine of its type in the world, Gurfurrit, were just about as tremendous a sound you could ever expect to hear on this earth. Like guyfork night. Boom! Boom! Over and over. But one hundred times more louder than that. Ripped the lot. We were thinking, those of us lying on the ground up in the hills smelling ash – what if our ears exploded? What would deafness sound like? We should have thought of that first. (Wright, *Carpentaria* 393)

The use of the first person narration heightens the effect created by the occasional use of second person narrative. This implicates the narrator into the story, the result of which is the blurring of boundaries between the roles of narrator and participant, and audience and participant, thus eliminating the necessity for temporal logic since the story is always at the time of its performance, and its concerns are always the concerns of its audience. The use of the participatory narrator and audience personas effectively challenges the boundaries within the novel that limit knowledge as identified by Wright since knowledge is expanded by the development of the empathetic relationship with the Other.

Wright's use of the participatory oral narrator has the secondary effect of challenging the language of the novel. As the narrative moves into first person, the narrator adopts the vernacular of the men he describes with the use of the repetitive onomatopoeia, the mis-spelling of Guy Fawkes (which is an interesting play with the vernacular in the literate, graphological form), and the grammatically irregular, "more louder". The narrator adopts the persona of one of the men, the heroes in the novel, which lends to his account a greater authority as well as giving him some earthly status. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin consider the use of code-switching and adoption of the characters' vernacular as a means to

appropriate the power of the colonial centre. Language, which has been the source of power, is controlled by the narrator who first appropriates then alters it to better represent those that exist at the margins of the dominant language (72-74). Griffiths and Tiffin's analysis of the code-switching in Joseph Furphy's 1903 novel *Such is Life* is particularly relevant to *Carpentaria*:

The linguistic multiplicity outlines both the complexity of the society and the complexity of a language in the process of formation. Variance in this novel is a signifier of a radical Otherness, not just as a construct which continually reinserts the gap of silence, but as a process which relentlessly foregrounds variance and marginality as the norm. (75)

The confidence of the narrator, his part in resistance as well as his omniscient state in the novel, asserts the continuing cultural resistance and resilience of Indigenous people, their story, and knowledge. The code-switching and vernacular transcription asserts not only a confidence but a necessity to move the marginal and silenced voice of the Other to the centre. In the case of *Carpentaria*, failure to learn the syncretic language of the narrator results in the difficulty of decoding the meaning.

With the use of the performative participation of the narrator, his invocation of both himself and his audience into the story, as well as his code-switching, Wright creates of *Carpentaria* a theatrical performance of an historical moment; part song, poem, dance, and play. Stephen Meucke has examined the importance of theatre, in particular the tradition of pageants, in keeping and celebrating the history of place in Australia, and notes particularly the role David Unaipon played in reinstalling Indigeneity into the history of Tasmania in his 1910 pageant

performance (Meucke, *Ancient and Modern* 34); the first pageant to include Indigenous actors and story. In many ways, *Carpentaria* follows in Unaipon's footsteps by appropriating the performance space to write counter histories as well as counter discourses, and speaks to Meucke's concern that "rewriting history in spatial metaphors will not efface the important part that performance, including voice, has and will continue to play in creating history *in situ* with a participatory audience" (Meucke, *Ancient and Modern* 34).

The opening paragraph with its declaration of finality, "Armageddon begins here" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 1) is immediately contrasted with the second paragraph that tells the story of the Creation Serpent carving the land at the beginning of all time. After creation the giant serpent resides deep under the ground, permeates everything and "attaches to the lives of the river people like skin" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 2). The attachment to the river people is maintained by the observance of its story and the care of its place and its land. Normal Phantom's home is on the nest of the serpent creating for some a sense of unrest, but for others a sense of belonging. The invocation of the Creation Serpent at the opening of the novel reinforces the importance of ancient stories to the modern people of the post-Apocalypse. The narrator tells the story of all time, keeping it alive and present, observing an obligation that ensures his survival, but also affirming for the reader his value as their guide. The observance of ancient story in *Carpentaria* fulfils the narrator's obligation to keep the stories as well as meeting Wright's objective to write a story that would speak to her people and her land (Wright, "On Writing" 2).

There is a clear correspondence between the inhabitants of the novel and those of the Bible, Quran and Torah. Mozzie Fishman, "...his name might have been Paul, or something Old Testament like Joshua..." (Wright, *Carpentaria* 116), becomes a modern Moses as he leads his pilgrims on constant journeys "through every desert on the continent...totally responsible for keeping the one Law strong" (119). Those familiar with the stories of Moses will notice other similarities between the two; the similarity between names, Mozzie is phonemically similar to the Hebrew Moseh, the two share impaired eye-sight, the ability to divine water in the desert, lives lead as desert man, as well as their roles in the release of various plagues upon the oppressors. Wright infuses the novel with several of the ten plagues released by Moses on the Pharaoh and his people, the plague of frogs, water into blood, diseased livestock, plague of flies, storms of fire, darkness and perhaps most notably the Passover as the final wrath that engulfs Desperance spares Mozzie who hides in his car marked with the sign of the cross. This is not to deny Mozzie Fishman's role as a symbol of Indigeneity and Indigenous Law but to assert that Wright has constructed figures that are able to traverse the broad spectrum of religious story in such a way as to be identifiable to many. Mozzie can then be Moses or a great Elder carrying the Law of all time. He comes to represent the observance to religion, the restoration of Law, and the power of story-telling; "Even if I don't get through, don't survive this, the story has to go on. Nothing must stop our stories, understand?" (Wright, *Carpentaria* 413). Devlin-Glass has suggested that the difficulty of reading *Carpentaria* is due to the "...incommensurability of Aboriginal mythological systems and Western

representations” (Devlin-Glass, “Review” 83) however, I would argue that while Mozzie ostensibly argues against Christianity, “...lived in somebody else’s desert” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 142), and spends his time preaching Indigenous Law, Wright has constructed a character whom European readers should recognise from their own stories. *Carpentaria* suggests that religion is a system of stories for the provision of knowledge by way of apprenticeship (Ong 9), of rules and, ultimately, of salvation or punishment with the corollary that the lost story leads to the loss of life.

Story in *Carpentaria* is not the exclusive domain of one culture over another, but a valued custom used by cultures to carry memory. Stories share many of the same objectives: to explain creation; to establish a code of rules for moral living, “...what to do, how to live like a proper human beings” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 246); and to provide practical advice on physical survival. Stories obligate the cultural group to the maintenance, care, and survival of the story as well as inform listeners of other obligations, such as those to other members of the group, to the land, and environment and to themselves. The Apocalyptic hand of destruction strikes those that fail to meet the obligations of the story. Failure to meet obligations to story results in self-destruction as the novel suggests of the white inhabitants of Uptown who allow the mine to destroy their land. In the Indigenous Law stories of the novel it is the land and the environment that rids the town of the mine and those who support it, whereas a Biblical reading of the novel suggests that it is God unhappy with the white inhabitants of the town and their injustice

and sin, who rids the landscape of their presence. Both readings conclude that the obligations of humanity as found in story are imperative to survival.

As Mozzie Fishman leads his religious pilgrimage across country, carrying the traditional story, and observing the obligations he has to telling the story to the land and its people, Wright carries out this role too with her telling of *Carpentaria*. She writes:

...realising the largeness of standing where countless generations of people whose ancestry I share would have left their footprints, that I decided I wanted to return something of what I have learnt and to continue the story of this country of my forefathers. So in a very small way, I would like to think that *Carpentaria* is a narration of the kind of stories we can tell to our ancestral land. (Wright, "On Writing" 2)

The practice of oral history-keeping and talking to the people about the stories, is contrasted with the history-keeping of the white inhabitants of Desperance, whose minutes of meetings are later found on the local rubbish tip. The town also keeps the 'Book of Books'; a complete record of the town's history, kept in Sally-Anne Smith's back shed under lock and key. The Pricklebush mob "...began their memory revisions. This was a daily task, a memory tribunal, undertaken with relish by the old people for everyone's matter of concern" (Wright 50), chorus their concerns for a population without story or history to anchor them in the present; "*These people are not any good.*"; "*They don't even remember their own religion*" (47); "Uptown whitefella mob was full of people claiming they had no origins...They said they were not strangers because they had originated from nowhere" (55); "*They got no sanctified ground? They got no sanctified ground*" (56). The invocation of religion reinforces the idea that religion is a way of

teaching ontologies and epistemologies that assists in ongoing survival, and that the knowledges are passed on in story. If the Uptown residents of Desperance, the white people, had known their religion, their story, then they would be able to read the signs understood by the “Innocent little Black Girls” who look to the approaching Apocalyptic storm and ask “...if the weather has been forecast correctly today” (Wright, *Carpentaria* 11).

In looking to the future, *Carpentaria* has made a significant claim to the importance of both a syncretic discourse as well as a syncretic form for the representation of cultures in Australia. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s 1989 examination of post-colonial literature has revealed that the hybridized, post-colonial literatures, such as that of Australia, have sought to “disrupt notions of history and the ordering of time” (34) in order to create discourses that reflect different cultural circumstances. *Carpentaria* is an example of a hybrid cultural artefact since it has combined many of the traditional story-telling techniques mentioned, but has also maintained a position in the classification of literary texts. Although I have examined the role orality plays in the narration of *Carpentaria*, it retains its links to the literary with perhaps the most obvious fact of it being a written text. Secondly, it is a text that has been written in the dominant language of English, and has, despite many of its resistances, maintained enough of the expected forms of the novel, it is written, it follows the progress of a set of characters whose actions constitute a plot and so on, to retain its place as a novel. However, *Carpentaria*’s hybridity goes further than the works of other Australian Indigenous writers, whose work has largely been within the memoir genre, by not

only disrupting history and time, but also the representations of space, performance, and narration, as well as whiteness and Indigeneity. Wright's creation of a new discourse is not merely a reflection of the post-colonial space of Australia but importantly a syncretic representation of the endurance of a strong Indigenous culture within that space. In short, it is a novel that creates a discourse for a shared future.

To address the futureless tropes used to define Indigeneity Alexis Wright has constructed a literary form that resists the dominant discourses and boundaries that prevail in Australian literature. Balancing her work between the desired representations expected by white audiences and the authentic representations expected by Indigenous authors, Wright works from within the literary paradigm to critically engage with the form of the novel to create a form that enables resistance. Wright relies on the use of the oral tradition of story telling to resist the linear imperatives of sequencing and plotting, as well as the centering of Indigeneity to defamiliarise whiteness thus allowing European hegemony to be held up for scrutiny. The creation of audience empathy also works to locate the reader within the normalised Indigenous hegemony. The blending of traditional Aboriginal story-telling techniques and knowledge with colonial techniques creates a hybridised form for the novel which offers itself as a hopeful discourse for the future.

Concluding Remarks and Future Research

This body of research opened with the quote “...who in charge of changing time then?” taken from *Carpentaria* (362). The use of the rhetorical question encapsulates both the central concern of the novel, constructions, and imposition of European hegemony, as well as the potential for reclamation of Indigenous cultural systems and beliefs. At the conclusion of the text, the answer might have been, ‘Colonists changed it, but we, the Aboriginals, are changing it back again.’ This one rhetorical sentence operates at the nexus between the colonizer and the prevailing native, and reinforces the assertion that colonialism has resulted in dominance without hegemony.

Carpentaria demonstrates Indigenous resistance to European hegemony and the enduring vitality and autonomy of Indigenous culture by creating aesthetic forms that challenge the limiting European discourses that restrict Indigeneity to a landless timelessness. In this research I have demonstrated Wright’s use of aesthetic representations of time in *Carpentaria* and the ways in which those representations disrupt the dominant European discourses about Indigeneity. By taking as a point of departure the seminal work of Said’s *Orientalism* coupled with a discourse analysis approach I have investigated Wright’s displacement of dominant discourses and the creation of an alternative discourse that privileges Indigenous ontologies. Broadly, this research analyses Wright’s challenge to European temporal ideologies and the reinstatement of Indigenous temporal frames of reference within the novel. In

particular the research considers: Wright's reinstatement of Indigenous links to the past in history and memory-keeping; her creation of discursive links to the present in both time and space; and her justification of claims to the future by aesthetically representing a space in which Indigeneity prevails as the dominant hegemony. This research also demonstrates the ways in which Wright has constructed a literary space whose form serves as a metaphor for the development of a syncretic cultural and physical space in Australia.

While research has been conducted on Indigenous literature in Australia, much of that research is located in the disciplines of the social sciences, in particular whiteness studies, cultural studies, anthropology, and history. Comparatively little research has been located in literary studies with a particular focus on the literary constructions of meaning in contemporary Australian Indigenous texts. This research has taken as its starting point the findings yielded in interdisciplinary research, particularly Indigenous expressions of power, and resistance, personal and cultural sovereignty and cultural difference. I have attempted to bridge the gap between those findings and their textual expressions by taking a discourse analysis approach, similar to the process employed by Said in his analysis of the construction of Orientalist discourse. Close analysis of Wright's *Carpentaria* has demonstrated the ways in which Indigenous writers in Australia work within the limitations and expectations of the genre of the novel and its audience to resist constructions of Indigeneity that are deemed to lack authenticity by Indigenous audiences.

Future research could be focussed on continuing the process of analysing literary texts for their unique expressions of Indigeneity. I would like to focus my future research

on the manner in which Indigenous writers are creating literature that utilizes traditional oral forms within the Western literary framework. In particular, an examination of the recovering of orality in Indigenous writing with a particular focus on Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and Kim Scott's *That Dead Man Dance* would be beneficial to future scholarship in Indigenous studies. Both works have been received into the Australian literary canon with the awarding of the Miles Franklin Award for Literature and yet, interestingly, both rely predominantly on the oral form. Taking as its methodological framework Fred C. Robinson's analysis of orality and variance or apposition in the work of Beowulf (Robinson), my future research hopes to identify the ways in which apposition is used to navigate the interrelations between Indigenous cultural beliefs and Christianity, and the degree to which Indigenous cultural identity is reflected in those interrelations.

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Acknowledgements: Many thanks to my family for their support and patience with special thanks to my partner for seeing value in my work. A very particular thank you to Professor Mitchell whose wisdom and gentle encouragement made all the difference.