

**Balun Budjarahm**

Reflection Statement

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*“The winding path is just how a path is, and therefore it needs no name”<sup>4</sup>*

Tyson Yunkaporta’s idiomatic statement from his discursive text, *Sand Talk*, explains the absence of linear conceptions of time within Aboriginal cultures, encapsulating the complex continuum of Indigenous thinking that transcends constricting Western paradigms. Thus, English language becomes finite in its capabilities to convey the infinite, accumulating power of Indigenous culture. This inadequacy was intrinsic to the formation of my Major Work. I aimed to account for the fluidity of time, place and people, through the subversion of convention and language, allowing my form to evolve in symbiosis with my concept. My piece, *Balun Budjarahm*, becomes a continuum of synthesised personal anecdotes, Dreaming stories and the narratives of incarcerated Indigenous youth. These stories transfer generations, transcend convention and accumulate power, thus mirroring our cycles of creation.

*Balun Budjarahm* intends to decolonise the conventions of language and form, representing marginalised Indigenous voices, a response to the emphasis of the Eurocentric canon within English Extension 1. This absence of Indigenous perspectives symbolises broader historical oppression. In Advanced English, I was introduced to the power of the collective within the human experience. Connecting collective power to the Indigenous Dreaming, unified my piece and ensured a representation of the verities of all Australians. The elective Literary Mindscapes within English Extension 1 was paramount, my characters’ mindscapes representing their yearnings and emancipation. My intended audience is fellow Indigenous youth, who can resonate with my writing, as our experiences and voices are empowered and valued. I envision this piece published within a literary journal such as the Griffith Review, whose aim, *“To provide the opportunity for established and emerging writers... to tease out complexity and contradiction and propose new ways of thinking”<sup>5</sup>*, encapsulates my purpose to present the metaphysical complexities of Indigenous thinking and decolonise systemic structures. My piece expresses the evolving continuum of narrative and identity through the oscillating perspectives of two

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<sup>4</sup> Yunkaporta, T 2019, *Sand Talk; How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, The Text Publishing Company, Australia. viewed 03 August 2020.

<sup>5</sup> 'Submissions - Griffith Review' 2020, *Griffith Review*, viewed 21 August 2020, < \ <https://www.griffithreview.com/submit-to-griffith-review/> >

Aboriginal girls as they travel through the blurring worlds of reality and the Dreaming, overcoming their metaphysical and physical prisons.

The incorporation of a thesis statement, “*Memories morph across our dreamscapes, for only there can they become actualised in the intangibility of our mind; only within our dreams can the intangible become tangible*”<sup>6</sup>, was a metanarrative addition that foreshadowed the evolving states of stories and dreams, as my characters traverse liminal worlds. The presented microcosms offer glimpses of emancipation through transcension of language. Despite their differing circumstances, there exists an understanding of the fluid nature of their consciousnesses. This is an extension of my thesis, based on the First Law, that creation is just a constant state of motion<sup>7</sup>, memories transferring from one state to another, across psyches as we recycle our existences. Manifested from my desire to access the knowledge forsaken to me as an assimilated Indigenous youth, this process enabled a reclaiming of my fragmented identity: a perpetuating product of colonisation. My initial research led me to Bruce Chatwin’s *The Songlines*, which introduced the continuums of Dreaming and songlines<sup>8</sup>. Reading critiques regarding Chatwin’s work I realised his Eurocentric bias and to achieve authenticity, I investigated Indigenous schools of thought<sup>9</sup>.

To develop my authentic narrative voice, I manipulated sentence and grammar structure for poetic sensibilities, “*The world melting from my thoughts, mind in limbo, I exist in a pausing*”<sup>10</sup>, subverting Western constraints of form, allowing an evolving Indigenous discourse that symbolises the continuum of time and energy. The meandering format of my piece symbolises the symbiotic relationship of form and concept. The use of consistent, physically dispersed short sentences links to the oral traditions of Aboriginal storytelling and mirrors techniques employed by contemporary Indigenous authors. Combined with the synthesis of Baryulgil language,

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<sup>6</sup> Major Work, *Balun Budjarahm*

<sup>7</sup> Yunkaporta, T 2019, *Sand Talk; How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, The Text Publishing Company, Australia. viewed 03 August 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Chatwin, B 1987, *The Songlines*, Franklin Press. viewed 21 August 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Cooke, R 2017, 'Thirty Years On, what Should We Make of Bruce Chatwin’s Song to the Songlines?'. *The Monthly*. viewed 21 August 2020, < <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2017/september>

<sup>10</sup> Major Work, *Balun Budjarahm*

“*Balun Budjarahm*”, translating as ‘river dreaming’, my piece decolonises the limitations of Western convention and form, accessing the ancient traditions of Indigenous storytelling.

Through my immersion into Tara June Winch’s antithetical worlds of reality and the Dreaming within *Swallow the Air*<sup>11</sup> and *The Yield*<sup>12</sup>, I was introduced to ‘post-colonial’ Aboriginal literature that challenged Western form. The label ‘post-colonial’ became obsolete with the recognition of the evolving systems of colonisation that continue to oppress Indigenous autonomy and language. Aboriginal author, Anita Heiss explains this through her essay, *Post-colonial- NOT!*<sup>13</sup>, expanding upon the inability of literary postcolonialism, to convey the perpetuity of culture, “The term post-colonial only fits the white system, rather than acknowledging our own time-frame. My definition of time is endless, it’s past, present and future.” My form evolved in response, occupying the liminal stages between reality and the Dreaming, “*It is the collective mindscape of the dreaming that finds me*”<sup>14</sup>, allowing a glimpse of emancipation. The matriarchal patterns of relationships within my piece reflect my cyclical cultural beliefs. Three generations of strong women surround every child: sisters, mothers, aunties, grandmothers, each occupying all roles simultaneously. Thus the matriarchal support networks that surround my dual protagonists oscillate and merge, symbolising the interconnected creation patterns between concept, form and composer. The textual integrity of my Major Work is established as the stories of my ancestors and peoples are immortalised, perpetuating the continual cycles of energy and time, as audiences engage in the continuum of culture and participate in the decolonisation of literature.

The characterisation of my dual protagonists was refined in response to extensive criticism that identified their lack of distinction. The authentic characterisation of protagonists, Addie and May, was achieved through the incorporation of motifs indicative of their disparate coastal and rural environments. This symbiosis of distinct ecosystems and personality acknowledges

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<sup>11</sup> June Winch, T 2006, *Swallow the Air*, University of Queensland Press, Australia viewed 03 August 2020.

<sup>12</sup> June Winch, T 2019, *The Yield*, Penguin Books Australia, viewed 03 August 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Heiss, A n.d., *Post-Colonial-NOT!* Macquarie Pen Anthology . viewed 20 August 2020, <  
[http://macquariepenanthology.com.au/files/Critical ReadingPostcoloNOT.pdf](http://macquariepenanthology.com.au/files/Critical%20ReadingPostcoloNOT.pdf) >

<sup>14</sup> Major Work; *Balun Budjarahm*

Indigenous philosophy. Addie's transition to second person narration during moments of intense emotional trauma, "Your hands press to your side, feeling the sticky destruction of language. You're longing"<sup>15</sup>, represents a dissociative coping mechanism, emotionally appealing to the audience as they become my character, eroding unconscious racism. Incorporation of self-reflexive metanarrative comments introduced through reading Bruce Paoe's "Salt" conveys an understanding of the limitations of language, "The words form, but they are not enough, do not satiate the grand yearning", as my characters return to the ancient sounds that sang this land into existence. This was inspired by Toni Morrison's merging of consciousness within *Beloved*<sup>16</sup> which accesses the collective psyche of her ancestors mirroring Jung's theory of the collective unconsciousness<sup>17</sup>. A rewriting of my resolution, led to a merging of the consciousness of my protagonists, "*She sees me. Because I am her and she is me.*"<sup>18</sup> This manipulation of perspective and voice illuminates the interconnectedness of beings, as my fluid structure and characterisation mirror my fluid conceptual thesis. The disintegration of Addie's self as her reality dissolves into the liminal spaces of the Dreaming, "Because I'm unravelling, unravelling into time", was symbolised through an allusion to William Faulkner's *As I lay Dying*. Therefore this process of revision has been essential in helping clarify my concept, consolidating the holistic nature of my piece and allowing for a greater realisation of purpose as I distinguish the central features of my Major Work.

The historical silencing of Indigenous voices is prolific within our justice system and has been exhumed with recent Black Lives Matter protests. The incarceration of protagonist Addie is reflective of the disproportionate imprisonment that Indigenous youth face, making up 59% of prison populations, yet composing only 10% of the Australian population<sup>19</sup>. My interview conducted with an Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer to authenticate my piece illustrates this, as she commented on the lack of empathy within the investigative and prosecutorial process. This

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<sup>15</sup> Major Work; *Balun Budjarahm*

<sup>16</sup> Morrison, T 1987, *Beloved*, Alfred A, Knopf Inc. n.p., viewed 21 August 2020.

<sup>17</sup> McLeod, S 2018, *Carl Jung*. viewed 21 August 2020, <<https://www.simplypsychology.org/carl-jung.html> >

<sup>18</sup> Major Work; *Balun Budjarahm*

<sup>19</sup> *Youth Detention Population in Australia* 2018, Australian Government . viewed 18 August 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/55f8ff82-9091-420-d-a75e-37799af96943/aihw-juv-128-youth-detention-population-in-Australia-2018-bulletin-145-dec-2018.pdf.aspx?inline=true> >

was consolidated within *Ngaga-Dji* (Hear Me), an Indigenous publication of stories that provides the opportunity for incarcerated youth to share their story, “They didn’t know my story and they didn’t ask. What did they think would change?”<sup>20</sup>, exemplifying the dehumanising systemic oppression. Within my piece repetitive symbolic imagery, “ These are the hands that tore you... The same hands that cuffed you... The same hands that beat you...”<sup>21</sup>, captures these cycles of intergenerational trauma and systemic abuse.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye’s portrayal of liminal spaces through earthen and aqueous hues within *Earth’s Creation*<sup>22</sup>, has influenced my colour palettes, motifs and rhythmic formations of language as I overcome the linguistic constraints of short story. My juxtaposing imagery aims to present the conflict between Capitalist society and eternal nature. My subversion of white and black colour symbolism was triggered by Joseph Conrad’s, “Heart of Darkness”<sup>23</sup> where the binary disparities between purity connotated white and evil connotated black became apparent. Within *Balun Budjarahm*, white is positioned as clinical and leaching, whilst black is associated with the cyclical processes of earth and familiarity of Country. This subversion symbolises the active decolonisation of language features and techniques.

*Balun Budjarahm* has become a manifestation of my history, stories and introspective realisations, gleaned from the creative process. The extensive research process has revealed vital components of my identity, reconnecting me with culture and language, actively decolonising my mind. This piece contributes to the decolonisation of Australian culture and literary canon, as audiences are introduced to the evolving continuum of time and energy, actively perpetuating these cycles and thus participating in decolonisation.

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<sup>20</sup> Koorie Youth Council 2018, 'Ngaga-diji (Hear me)'. viewed 21 August 2020, <  
<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2018/08/31/lock-i-didnt-feel-alive-insights-stories-youth-detention> >

<sup>21</sup> Major Work, *Balun Budjarahm*

<sup>22</sup> Kingwarraye, E 1994, “Earth’s Creation” (Acrylic on Canvas)

<sup>23</sup> Conrad, J 1902, *Heart of Darkness*, Blackwoods Magazine. n.p., viewed 21 August 2020.

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