

Goorialla's Journey

Reflection Statement

“The poet is incited to create a work that can ... bridge the gulf – the chasm – between people.”

– Edward Hirsch: *How to Read a Poem*²²

My major work is a post-colonial suite of poems, intended to challenge the racial constructs that have developed under the overarching message of white supremacy. Jenny Morber argues, “Surrounded by messages of white as default, white as safe we internalize those messages.”²³ The purpose of my poetry is to acknowledge the current racial inequity that manifests throughout society between privileged ‘white-ways’ and indigenous communities, as described by Nakkiah Lui, an Indigenous Australian writer, “Australia is the myth we need to obliterate together ... start deconstructing the bastion of White Power that is girt by sea.”²⁴ In the Preliminary Extension 1 English course, I studied the colonial novella, Heart of Darkness (1899). This inspired me to explore the intergenerational oppression derived from Australia’s colonialist period, highlighting ideas such as the “second stolen generation.”²⁵

My suite of poems could be used as a foundational resource for schools, informing the younger generations on the pivotal cultural issue facing Australia today. It would

²² Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem* (United States of America: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999) p. 6

²³ Jenny Morber, *If you’re white, science says you’re probably a racist. Now what?*, created September 17th 2015, Quartz Media LLC, USA, <<https://qz.com/502019/if-youre-white-science-says-youre-probably-a-racist-now-what/>>, viewed 15th of March 2017

²⁴ Nakkiah Lui, *It’s Not Racism That Australia Needs To Get Rid Of; It’s The Privilege Of Whiteness*, created 3rd of June 2015 <<http://junkee.com/nakkiah-lui-its-not-racism-that-australia-needs-to-get-rid-of-its-the-privilege-of-whiteness/58395#jWJzDuL70LHLCFbp.99>>, viewed 15th of March 2017.

²⁵ Jane Bardon, *Indigenous families battling against becoming second Stolen Generation in Northern Territory*, Updated 20th of March 2017, The ABC News, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-20/indigenous-families-battling-second-stolen-generation/8365072>>, viewed 11th of March 2017.

perhaps be published in ‘Australian Poetry Library’²⁶, which has printed a myriad of post-colonial poems, such as The Dispossessed²⁷ (1964) composed by Oodgeroo Noonuccal. My major work identifies with a similar target audience to Noonuccal, as I aim to “convey the effects of colonisation” and dedicate my poetry to creating awareness towards “social justice and Aboriginal rights.”²⁸

My major work provides a cathartic platform to expose the repressed emotional turmoil experienced by the oppressed within Australia. To represent this notion, the seven poems integrate references to Heart Of Darkness reflecting the effects of a loss of autonomy on the individual, “like the hollowness Kurtz found within himself.”²⁹ This key decision was inspired by Chinua Achebe’s post-colonialist text, When Things Fall Apart (1958),³⁰ which critiques Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’. It conversely represents the evils of imperialism from the perspective of the Indigenous people - ultimately deconstructing the stereotypes of Africans as “savages” and “beaten niggers”.³¹ Nidesh Lawtoo argues in his essay, A Picture of Africa, that “we find an underlying mimetic continuity between Conrad’s colonial image of Africa and Achebe’s representation.”³² Researching these paramount post-colonial texts has

²⁶ Australian Poetry Library, n.d < <https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/>> viewed 22nd of June 2017

²⁷ Noonuccal, Oodgeroo, *Dispossessed*, < <https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/noonuccal-oodgeroo/the-dispossessed-0719048>> viewed 22nd of June 2017

²⁸ *Bibliography of Noonuccal Oodgeroo* < <http://marinasenglishassessment.weebly.com/the-dispossessed.html>> viewed 22nd of June 2017

²⁹ Michael Wilding, *Heart of Darkness*, Sydney Studies, Academia journal p.1, n.d, viewed 20th of June 2017

³⁰ J Merz, *Stereotypes in Heart of Darkness and Things Fall Apart*, created 2010, < <https://lsaw.lib.lehigh.edu/index.php/williams/article/view/28/37>> viewed 20th of June 2017

³¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899 (London: Penguin Group, 1899) p.60

³² Nidesh Lawtoo, *A Picture of Africa: Frenzy, Counternarrative, Mimesis, Modern Fictions Studies* 59.1, created 2013, p.27, viewed 20th of June 2015

helped me to focus my poetry on the voice of the indigenous people and more effectively represent the corollaries that stemmed from this iconoclastic suppression under European sovereignty.

Post-colonialism derives from post-modernist theory, as it forces the audience to recognise the power dynamic established by colonialism. Jean-François Lyotard, a French philosopher, expresses post-modernity as he critiques such grand-narratives, arguing they “serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any...practice.”³³ By incorporating these concepts within my poetry, I was able to critique the power dichotomies that privilege white ways of thinking and thus, continue to suppress Indigenous communities. Graham Huggan, a professor of Postcolonial Studies, connects this purpose of post-colonial literature to the Australian context, “[W]hile Australia is postcolonial with respect to its former British colonizers, it remains very much colonial or...*neo*-colonial in its treatment of its own indigenous peoples.”³⁴

The dreamtime Rainbow serpent, referred to as Goorialla in traditional indigenous culture, is the creator deity in Aboriginal Mythology acting as the provider of life and fertility.³⁵ This is reflected by the protective role of Goorialla established in my opening poem, “Coil my people with my rattling tail.”³⁶ The concept of dreamtime originates from within the spiritual realm of Indigenous theology, retaining powerful existentialist and meta-physical notions that form the iconography of Indigenous

³³ Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (Continuum International Publishing Group, 23 November 2006), p.169

³⁴ Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2007), p27

³⁵ William Edward Hanley Stanner, *The Dreaming & Other Essays* (Australia: Black Inc. Agenda, 2011)

³⁶ Student 28762135, *Goorialla's Journey*, 2017

culture. Jeannie Nungarrayi presents this: “Dreaming isn’t something that has been consigned to the past but is a lived daily reality”³⁷ and reaffirmed by Cane Scott, “It is...the conceptual vehicle through which people fulfill themselves.”³⁸ Throughout my poems, I allegorically allude to Yhi, the solar deity representative of light and faith. Concurrently, I represent Namarrkon; the ‘lightning spirit’ as a figure of the darkness and dualism of man, reflected through the pathetic fallacy of the motif of rain (Bana).³⁹ This dichotomised notion of light present within this darkness, inspired by the paradoxical notion T.S Eliot reflects within his poem, ‘*East Coker*’: “So the darkness shall be the light”,⁴⁰ reminds the reader of the discrimination that permeates the social paradigm of the 21st century. However, it simultaneously sheds light on the acts of reconciliation within Australia’s context.

My suite of poems chronologically addresses the paradigmatic shift away from cultural multiplicity, towards colonial authoritarianism regimes. This key progression is represented by the extended metaphor of Goorialla’s journey throughout each respective poem. The opening two poems signify the birth of Indigenous culture, during 50,000-65,000 years ago. Poem three deliberately advances to 1788, representing the arrival of the first fleet in Australia, establishing the notion of the discrimination of ‘the other’. Following, in poem five Lester Maher’s testimony exemplifies the imprisonment of the individual as a product of these imperialist hegemonic doctrines during Australia’s colonialist era. This notion of incarceration is influenced by Derek Walcott’s post-colonialist epic poem, *Omeros* (1990), which

³⁷ Dorothea Hoffmann, Telling stories of the Dreamtime, Academia.edu journal, p.5

³⁸ Cane, Scott, 2013, *First Footprints: The epic story of the first Australians* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2013)

³⁹ ‘Rain’ in Dharug dialect

⁴⁰ T.S Eliot, *East Coker: Four Quartets* ([Harcourt](#) (US), 1943)

represents the effects of slavery on the individual - “Now they were...dismembered/branches, not men.”⁴¹ My concluding poem sheds light on this darkness, adding a layer of complexity to the paradoxical image - with Yhi’s metaphorical return. Evidently, however, the poem continues to extend the darkness through the intertextual reference to Stan Grant’s personified “shadow”,⁴² introduced in the epigraph of the poem. This culminates in the final message – that indeed Australia has undertaken progressive steps towards reconciliation, however marginalisation is still a highly prevalent social issue in contemporary society. The final stanza of the poem closes with the motif “Nara Bura”,⁴³ paying homage to the song of the Yorta Yorta people, signifying their emancipation from slavery – which portrays the ultimate message of hope. Thus my poetry begins to signify the notion that George Handley masterfully describes through a post-colonialist lens, the “function of poetry serves to debunk prior myths” and in the process, “returns to...the specificities of place, gender, race that colonialism has attempted to erase.”⁴⁴

My poetry employs ironic intertextuality to subvert the integral meaning attached to Australia’s national anthem (1984). This is presented in poem five, “Like a poisonous medicine/...Within our home we are/Young and free.”⁴⁵ By intertwining these references in stark juxtaposition to the darkening realism of death, I reaffirm the hypocrisy presented throughout history as Australian’s believed, “aboriginal natives shall not be counted”,⁴⁶ however claims “let us all combine.”⁴⁷ It was from the critical

⁴¹ Derek Walcott’s, *Omeros*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), XXVIII.ii.150

⁴² Student 28762135, *Gooriella’s Journey*, 2017

⁴³ Student 28762135, *Gooriella’s Journey*, 2017

⁴⁴ George B. Handley, *A Postcolonial Sense of Place and Work of Derek Walcott*, p.10

⁴⁵ Student 28762135, *Gooriella’s Journey*, 2017

⁴⁶ Commonwealth Documents, Museum of Australian Democracy: Documenting a Democracy, *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act: Amendment to Section 127*, p. 24, created 10 August 1967/ updated 29th of July 1977

study of T.S Eliot's poem, 'The Long Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1910) that I discovered the power of poetic devices to subvert the integrity of a referenced text and thus, "influence our understanding"⁴⁸ of its significance. Furthermore, I intertextually reference Shaun Tan and John Marsden's picture book, "The Rabbits" (1998)⁴⁹ to strengthen the exploration of the darkness, integrating the titular metaphor of the British colonizers as "rabbits".

In strengthening my form, I read Ode Less Travelled by Stephen Fry and How to read a poem (1999), composed by Edward Hirsch, as they similarly argue the importance of rhythmic structure. Fry describes, "Poetry is all about the concentration of mind... and language into words within a rhythmic structure"⁵⁰ and Hirsch reaffirms, "Rhythm creates a pattern of...recurrence and difference."⁵¹ My poetry's form integrates two key poetic rhythms, including trochee and spondee, as reflected by the motif, "My arms, the trees."⁵² In unison, the poems incorporate end rhyme and internal rhyme to extend this flow, "Bricks are laid upon my chest/As the rabbits build their nest."⁵³ Moreover, anaphora is an imperative literary device in forming a sense of rhythmic continuity throughout the poems, portrayed in, "For the children they

<<http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/amendment-amid-21.html>>, viewed 15th March 2017.

⁴⁷ National Unity Government, 'Advance Australia Fair' and 'The White Australia Policy', Sovereign Union – First Nations asserting sovereignty, n.d, <<http://nationalunitygovernment.org/content/was-advance-australia-fair-written-white-people>>, viewed 15th March 2017.

⁴⁸ Tracy Lemaster, *What is "Intertextuality?"* The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, created 2012, p.1, viewed 20th of June 2017

⁴⁹ John Marsden & Shaun Tan, *The Rabbits* (Victoria: Thomas C. Lothian, 1998)

⁵⁰ Stephen Fry, *Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within*, (United Kingdom: Arrow Books, 2005), Metre p.48.

⁵¹ Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem* (United States of America: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999) p. 21

⁵² Student 28762135, *Gooriella's Journey*, 2017

⁵³ Student 28762135, *Gooriella's Journey*, 2017

stole/For the lies they told/For ⁵⁴...” However, at times this combination of poetic devices are deliberately fragmented by end stopping and line breaks to create the emphatic effect of bringing the sounds of pain into reality, evoking pathos in the reader. The octave from poem three replicates this structure, “Rabbits disembark off the bangala”, which deliberately employs a sustained switch between trochee and anapaest feet, however later becomes broken in, “And displace/My people”, which employs anapaest followed by a tribrach metric foot.

I establish a powerful juxtaposition between the romanticised imagery of nature and the post-colonialist realism of death, disintegrating the enlightenment that existed prior to colonisation. This is reflected in the imagery of, “My heart the lake/My face, sea” and broken by the darkening figurative language, “Is a wasteland of rotting corpses”⁵⁵. This is reinforced in poem five with the rainbow serpent nostalgically reminiscing on life before colonisation, “Smelling the eucalyptus/And honey myrtle trees”⁵⁶ in stark contrast to, “Her tendrils twist my peoples’ fragile skin/round and round.”⁵⁷

It is an integral component of society that we as the ‘privileged’ individuals begin acknowledging the inequity between white-ways and the indigenous people by exposing the negative acts of social normativity that perpetuate the perception of the Indigenous people as being inferior. I intend to inspire the reader to “use that privilege

⁵⁴ Student 28762135, *Goorialla's Journey*, 2017

⁵⁵ Student 28762135, *Goorialla's Journey*, 2017

⁵⁶ Student 28762135, *Goorialla's Journey*, 2017

⁵⁷ Student 28762135, *Goorialla's Journey*, 2017

for the greater good... bring attention to how those without privileges are disenfranchised.”⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ Roxane Gay, *Peculiar Benefits*, created 16th May 2012, The Rumpus <<http://therumpus.net/2012/05/peculiar-benefits/>>, viewed 16th of March 2017

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