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A Loud Shout from the Waanyi's Sea, Soul, and Spirit: Confronting Mending and Harmony in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*

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ABSTRACT

Aboriginal Australia is a unique world with vast cultural knowledge and heritage associating history, emotions, ancestors, Dreamtime, and the like. The inhabitant's perception of the landscape gleans from spiritual knowledge, ancestral narratives, cultural properties, creation stories, and the like. Holistically, aboriginals' cultural spirituality treasures the sea world. Their harmony and healing are integrated with their land, sea, bush, caves, lagoons, and the like. Contemporary Australian Aboriginal writers document detailed descriptions of their landscape and their integration with their ancestors' spirituality. Alexis Wright is one such writer who represents the values of the Gulf people through her novels. This paper illustrates the Aboriginal spiritual journey from the chosen novel, *Carpentaria.* The novel delineates the Waanyi Aboriginals who live in the northern coastal and Gulf regions of Australia. The Aboriginal characters in the novel explore their ecological commitment by analysing their integration with the deep-sea world. They navigate into the depths of their cultural sites, which are emotionally destined to represent their cultural values, and mores. The novel indicates the way the waanyi's cherish their dreamtime heritage by navigating into the deep-sea world. The article employs an ecocritical approach to investigate the Aboriginals integration with

their landscape.

Introduction: Australia is a continent that occupies many distinct Aboriginal groups. Particularly, on contemplating the northwestern part of Australia, the Gulf region is surrounded by Torres Strait Islanders, Waanyi Aboriginals in Queensland, Garawa, Gunindiri, and the like. This paper studies the novel *Carpentaria* by unfolding the Waanyi Aboriginals who live in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The Gulf region of Carpentaria occupies spiritual sites such as the waterhole of the rainbow serpent, dreaming sites, streams and rivers, sea nymphs, and the like. The Aboriginals in the novel *Carpentaria* have spiritual significance with all the natural elements in the environment. The stories from the sea world are recounted by an Aboriginal fisherman named Norm Phantom. The paper unfolds Phantom's Sea voyage to the isolated spiritual site and his encounter with sea spirits, and how he handles them through the disseminated stories of his ancestors.

Waanyi's Sea, Soul, and Spirit

a place or area valued by an Aboriginal group (or groups) because of their long and complex relationship with that land. It expresses their unity with the natural and spiritual environment. It embodies their traditional knowledge of spirits, places, land uses, and ecology. Material remains of the association may be prominent, but will often be minimal or absent. (Buggey 1)

As the quote states, the cultural integration of Waanyi Aboriginals is nature-centric. They share an intense relationship with their landscape because they perceive that their ancestors become a part of nature. They believe that every aborigine's life after death gains a spiritual attainment where they mingle with the elements in nature. As Andrew Taylor says, "for the Aboriginals, the land is alive with significance" (Taylor 146). The Aboriginal descendants believe that the spirits of their ancestors' dwell in the atmosphere as breeze, serpent, rocks, or any object from the environment. The ancestors are perceived as deities who move around their environment like a wind, "the spirit of intemperate disposition, woefully blue little gusty breezes for days and passed through the night" (*Carpentaria* 239).

With respect to the above notion, the novel denotes that the ancestral serpent is the creator God. The waanyi [pricklebush in the novel] aboriginals consider their landscape a sacred spot as the ancestral serpent dwells beneath the ground. Even Norm Phantom has constructed his house over the spirit's

dwelling. His house is "built on the top of the nest of a snake spirit" (*Carpentaria* 13). Holistically, every aborigine in the town desperance claims that "every house had a spirit" (207).

Contemplating the creator god [ancestral spirits], the novel affirms how the serpent wanders beneath the ground to create the earth: "deep down under the ground in a vast network of limestone aquifers. They say the serpent is like a liquid that can pass through everything and everywhere. It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like their skin" (2).

Their land is filled with "full of tricks" (264) and its sea world is "full of spirits" (264). The aboriginals believe that healing befalls from their atmosphere thereby their cultural behaviour is "influenced more by landscape than it is by culture" (Haskell 49). Examining the transformation of cultural memories, the cultural knowledge is disseminated by their ancestors through oral narratives, cultural memory, folklore, cultural expression and properties and the like. The creation of the Waanyi land, its rivers, and the sea has a unique narration in the Aboriginal realm. The creation narratives relish their culture with cultural attributes. The birth of the creatures on earth is believed to be created by ancestral serpent [rainbow serpent]. The novel opens with a remark that states that the "ancestral serpent, a creature larger than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity" (1).

The Aboriginals living in Waanyi possess profound environmental knowledge. This passage draws how the Aboriginals perceive the sea world and the oral narratives that are closely knitted. The novel alludes that "everyone in Pricklebush [waanyi] knew of the poisonous countries out at sea, places where it was too dangerous for a man to go, where the spirits dwelt, like the Gundugundu men who were even more dangerous than Kadajala, the white-man devil, and those of the unhappy warring spirit warriors of the old wars (276). The marine aboriginal world has a unique characteristic. Norm Phantom, the protagonist is deeply rooted with ancestral ideologies. He takes a deep dive into the ocean to perform funeral to the dead body of his friend. During his voyage, he encounters the gundugundu spirits and kadajala. The aboriginals refer to gardajala as "poor land woman devil" (264). Gardajala spins around the sea with jealous rage, the sea woman [the wind] is magical and stays as a defender against Gardajala. The low clouds and Gardajala are the enemies of sea woman. Gardajala defends herself "into a *wirriwidji* whirly wind [and] throw[s] her spiteful hand full of dirt at the sea" (264). Similarly, the gundugundu spirits "could kill a man straight out in the middle of their stormy wars" (264).

The Aboriginals personify everything in nature. To quote from the novel, Norm Phantom is "a follower of spirits out in the sea" (124). He calls the month of November as a "giant in a cloak" (295) and the

skies as 'the giant sugarbag man'. Further, he claims that the skies walk between the horizons, and calls humidity as a curse to the atmosphere. The sugarbag man as "'seasonal rains'" or "'silly season'" (295).

The cultural networks of Aboriginals coincide with what Margaret Bruchac points, they possess "a network of knowledges, beliefs, and traditions intended to preserve, communicate, and contextualize Indigenous relationships with culture and landscape over time" (Bruchac 3814). To support the above quote, incidents from the novel indicates the Aboriginals connection with nature helps them to preserve their culture. As Norm is devoted to the spiritual aesthetics of nature, he fondly communicates with birds or believes that nature communicates to him by gestures. When Norm is at the sea, he comrades with the gropers at the sea and at the same time he comprehends the celestial beings. The novel indicates that he is "right up to the stars in the company of groper fish when it stormed at sea, when the sea and the sky became one" (7). He asserts that he is the best fisherman who is guided by stars and birds: "I am the best fisherman that ever breathed, or that can talk to birds for company and I follow tracks made by the stars so I never get lost, and sometimes, I go away fishing and never come back until people forget my name?" (280). He believes that birds are holy and perceives it to be a prophet. The Aboriginals say that it has "psychic powers – old people declared the bird to be prophet" (100). Aboriginal people rely on the prophet bird for anything that must be done. The novel remarks that "[t]he bird felt inclined, he might answer, *yes, no*… they (Aborigines) considered him to be a truthful bird, even when the truth hurt" (100). The integration of aboriginals with the birds coincides with farca's notion, he says that "the symbiosis between the Aboriginals and birds demonstrates their integration into the landscape" (Farca 33).

In the sea, Norm is skilful in catching a trevally, a catfish, a Spanish mackerel, and a codfish in the flickering light. He maintains "friendly terms with gropers, the giant codfish of the Gulf sea" (6). Norm's knowledge and relevance to nature coincides with Rosemary van den Berg's perception, "Aboriginal culture is a unique culture and the uniqueness comes out ... in their art and cultural expression. It can also be seen in their expertise and knowledge of their country" (Berg 74). Another principal characteristic in Aboriginal culture is taxidermy (preserving the dead creatures). Norm preserves the dead fishes and converts it into a beautiful piece of art. He transforms his room "as an experimental studio, a type of expose for life in the decaying world, where the air smelt like a beach" (197). Once he completes his task, he finally holds a masterpiece in his hands. The way of preserving the creatures exhibits the Aboriginals religious beliefs. Their spiritual association with nature impels them to perform totemism.

Another spiritual embodiment is dreamtime, or dreaming. The Aboriginals seclude themselves for dream time; it is a time in which they spend communicating with their ancestors. For them, dreaming is an art, and they pay reverence to it. As Issitt puts it dreaming is, "one of the core concepts of Aboriginal spirituality, reflecting mythological concepts concerning the nature of humans, animals and the natural environment" (Issitt 429). The novel exemplifies the stories of dreamtime of Aboriginal characters. Norm Phantom, Mozzie Fishman, and Will Phantom have separate dreamtime sites. Since the Aboriginals value the dreamtime, they choose to "disappear into the bush to go 'walkabout', and to reforge their ties with the eternal dreamtime" (Sturkey 38). Through dreamtime, the Aboriginal descendants gain "good information, intelligence, etiquette of what to do, how to behave for knowing how to live like a proper human being" through the dreaming (235). Furthermore, the novel evidences that through dreamtime the Aboriginals see "huge, powerful, ancestral creation spirits occupying the land and sea moving through the town, even inside other folk's houses, right across of the country" (57).

Conclusion

The Aboriginal healing and integration threw sea, soul, and spirit is a physical and emotional recovery. Through healing and integration, the Aboriginals recover their past spiritual foundation laid by their ancestors. As the quote by an Aborigine opines, the indigenous people learn from their environment. They communicate with their environment: If [Indigenous people] go back to [their] roots and we look at where education started for us as Indigenous people, it interacted with the land… The basis of the education is delivered through the land. It's a way to interact with learning from the land, learning from the environment, the things that surround us. (Blue Sky)

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