
FOURTH WORLD LITERATURE :
THE DISPLACEMENT OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN ALEXIS WRIGHT'S CARPENTARIA

DR.M.LATHA, RAJYALAXMI YESIREDDY

Abstract: Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* is a fiction that offers a positive outlook for Aboriginal people, one that also recognizes the difficulties of contemporary Aboriginal experience. The novel creates a sense of desperation with the threat of cyclones, social break down, the racist beatings and murders of indigenous people, including children. Aboriginal people are silent and passive victims in their own land. Wright's work arises from intellectual to Indigenous people, and aspires to the idea of a distinctive 'Aboriginal sovereignty of the mind'. The Pricklebush people and their relationship with Uptown, the white sector of the fictional town of Desperance in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Under the guise of a timeless narrative of mythic proportions, *Carpentaria* can also be read as a powerful indictment of the Australian mining industry controlled by international conglomerates ignorant of the cultural wealth of the land and its people. Alexis Wright's major theme is the dispossession of ancient Aboriginal lands by white newcomers, and in particular by an international mining company.

Keywords: aboriginals, displacement, mine, dispossession of sacred land.

Introduction: Aboriginal writer Alexis Wright received the Miles Franklin award, the most prestigious literary prize for Australian literature, in 2007.

The coastal and fictional town of Desperance, on the Gulf of Carpentaria in northwest Queensland, Australia, There the aboriginal people of the Pricklebush clan are engaged in conflicts with various enemies in the community, including the white inhabitants of Desperance, the local law enforcement and government officials, and a large multinational mining operation that has been established on their traditional sacred land. The powerful Phantom family, whose members are the leaders of the Pricklebush people, and their battles with old Joseph Midnight's mob on the one hand, and the white officials of Uptown and the neighbouring Gurfurrit mine on the other to save Carpentaria.

In the town of Desperance, the question of land ownership is complicated, and every family stakes a claim. There's Phantom's family, Norm Phantom, the great fisher man, legendary storyteller, suspected murderer and leader of the Pricklebush people, the Phantoms battle to retain sovereignty over carpentaria. Mozzie Fishman's gang and the white settlers who control the region, but can't quite figure out how to get the native Pricklebush people to assimilate to the white man's ways. When the Gurfurrit mine moves in, making uneasy alliances to support its ownership of the region's land and rich

mineral resources, it aggravates an already complex relationship between Uptown whitefolk and Pricklebush Aboriginals. Life in Desperance is completely segregated, including the drinking, a favorite sport for both sides but a special affliction for Aborigines, who for decades have experienced high rates of alcoholism and alcohol-related violence. Violence is everywhere, between the Aborigines and the whites. Trapped between politics and principle, past and present, the indigenous tribes fight to protect their natural resources, sacred sites, and their people.

Edge Of Desperance: the Pricklebush plants, imported by Europeans to north Queensland, yet its second meaning is revealed in the way the white dwellers of Uptown treat the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Pricklebush-covered area, on the edge of town. They are the 'Fringe mob, the edge people' kept outside of Desperance's safety net of prayer, supposed to protect the town from cyclones and spirits, 'Just because of the gap of wasteland, half a mile, called the distance of tolerance, that surrounded the town and where black people were allowed to live on the other side'.

Desperance is divided between Uptown and the Pricklebush community, and among the latter between the Westside and Eastside mobs led by Norm Phantom and Joseph Midnight, respectively. This is an obvious marker of segregated space, accompanied by the distinction between the land and

the sea, with characters belonging to either one or the other. Like the Aboriginal songlines that religious zealot Mozzie Fishman and his convoy of pilgrims follow across the continent, these spaces add several layers to the literary map of the Gulf.

The Displacement: Confined between Uptown and the Gurfurrit mine's sphere of influence, the Pricklebush people are also a displaced people, for whom ancestral land and sacred places are out of reach; pushed towards urban centres by the industrial exploitation of natural resources they are simultaneously pushed out of these centres by urban white institutions.

The arrival of the mine in the region leads to corruption and division between those Pricklebush people who welcome and take well-paid jobs at the mine; 'the pro-land-rights brigade'; those who want the mining company to give the country back; and those who oppose the idea of having any mine on 'their sacred country'. The very idea of mining, scarring the land to extract its riches for monetary gain without respect for sacred places and spirits, could be interpreted as a corrupted version of the traditional Aboriginal digging stick, used to unearth food and find water underground.

Angel Day is Norm Phantom's wife and Will Phantom's mother. She is a very strong-willed, capable and resourceful woman who builds the family house from white's scratch: 'the rubbish dump palace'. Angel Day's son Will Phantom is a land rights activist, a young man on the run after sabotaging pipes belonging to the mine. When the mine investor threatens withdrawal from the project, both the Queensland State government and the Federal government in Canberra send dozens of police officers with dogs to find Will. After years hiding among Mozzie Fishman's convoy, Will finally returns to Desperance.

References:

1. SERAN, 'Fortunes and Fringe-dwellers' | Australian Studies vol. 5 | 2013.
2. Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (New York: Atria Books, 2009), p. 4.
3. Gillian Dooley, 'Review of *Carpentaria*', rev. of *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright.
4. On writing *Carpentaria*- ALEXIS WRIGHT, reprinted from Harper's Gold, HEAT 13 n.s. (2006).
5. *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright-Atria-ISBN: 1416593101
6. Molly, *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Vol 12, No 3 (2012).
7. *Carpentaria*, Alexis Wright's time-slipping tale of an Aboriginal mystic, impresses Jem Poster-Saturday 26 April 2008.

Shortly after his return, Will is captured by workers and taken to the mine, from which, it is made very clear to him, he will not escape alive, for they will only let him go if he can pay for the damages. Mozzie's men, scheduled to depart from Desperance, find Will, free him.

Unsurprisingly, the Gurfurrit mine's power is derived from its capital, hence its ability to buy an entire town: Desperance 'belonged totally to the big mine. When the mine came along with all of its big equipment, big ideas, big dollars from the bank - Every bit of Uptown humanity went for it. 'This war with the mine had no rules. Nothing was sacred. It was a war for money'. Given that the mine owners view wealth purely in fiscal terms, the sole way to hurt them, as Will understands, is to make them lose money: and blow up the mine along with Mozzie's men.

By winning this battle and blowing up the mine they take on its power; the victory enriches their self-esteem and sense of identity. From tramps crossing the desert in rusty cars they become freedom fighters, dragon slayers, country purifiers.

Conclusion: *Carpentaria* can be read as a powerful indictment of the Australian mining industry controlled by international conglomerates ignorant of the true wealth of the land and its people. *Carpentaria*, emphasises the opposition of the Aboriginal characters to 'the big powerful mining company, Gurfurrit International', We also learn that the mine criminally burned down the Desperance council offices and offered to pay for a new building once the town ensured there would be no Native Title claim. *Carpentaria* raises central issues related to notions of wealth and poverty as well as literary genres and the postcolonial world in general.

Dr.M.Latha
HOD and Associate professor of English
KLUniversity/ vaddeswaram/ Guntur/ Andhra Pradesh

Rajyalaxmi Yesireddy/
Asst.Prof. in English/ Vignan's Institute of Technology and /
Aeronautical/Engineering/ Hyderabad