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ABORIGINAL TO NOWHERE: song cycle of the post-modern dispossessed

Abstract:

In 1948, after many years living with the Wonguri-Mandjigai people, Ronald M. Berndt published an English language translation of a non sacred song of the Sand-fly Clan: the Song Cycle of The Moon-Bone. In 1977 Les Murray wrote his own version based on the Berndt translation The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle, a white mans revision. 2016: Murray's revision gets a revision, a homosemantic emulation (a translation from English into English retaining the cadence, mood and sound). *Aboriginal To Nowhere* transgresses Murray's vision of city folk holidaying on grandma's farm and signals a contemporary poetry of dispossession and anti-sentiment, ventures into transliminal territory and explores those in-between places of perpetual generational change; it is a text hyperaware of incremental shifts in the semiotic simulation humans call reality.

Biographical Note:

Brentley Frazer is a contemporary Australian poet, novelist, academic and editor. He holds a MA (writing) from James Cook University and will complete a PhD (creative writing) from Griffith University in 2016. Brentley's experimental memoir *Scoundrel Days* is forthcoming from University of Queensland Press (UQP) March 2017.

Keywords:

Homosemantic emulation of a translation of a semi-sacred Australian Aboriginal song cycle – transliminalist poetry – experimental Australian poetry

Aboriginal to Nowhere

Song Cycle of The Post Modern Dispossessed

. . . girls walking close to murder discard, with excitement, their
names. ~ Les Murray

1

The Citizens Netflix & chill in their minimum eight hundred
thousand dollar concrete sky-coffins in the river city;
streaming a hot series in air conditioning; Gen Y & Millennials
staying in for dinner.

Plate up & Instagram, change the rotation with a PlayStation
control, post a clever meme on Facebook, consider the likes,
speculate on advertising revenue & think of the friend requests.

Now the netizens you-tube epic fails
in the nation where the massacre never ended, the official story
books read 1920; unfamiliar with how history is written?
that doesn't matter - Beyoncé has a new album on Tidal.
Overhear the neighbours; back here for the holidays.

They have a mate staying at the Marriott
in the same suite where Barack Obama laid down his presidential head
& they're getting ramped on Smirnoff, craft beer & pills before they hit
the clubs.

It's bleak here, the architecture condemned by skyline designers
a place where beggars warm their hands at the shrine of remembrance
lest we ever forget our forefathers died for this system.
Back then the council hired some Sydney architects into Greek Revival
& other poison modernist aesthetics.

We have cultural heroes, most of them appropriated—but hey,
it's the smart state . . . ever noticed the syncopation
of Queensland & Police man, that's no mistake, rather formulaic like
everything in this metropolitan estuary; corpses rising from

the muddy banks like prawns.
City cats moored on moon bones, ice junkies under the ghost gums
on South Bank & the indigenous protest their semantic assimilation
from the big goanna
on Boundary street, now free to roam & vote, just don't use the facilities
where it's twenty bucks for a beer.

2

It's footy season, the village idiots in their jester suits provoking
cops outside Suncorp stadium.

The freeway north like a hallway though the last standing old
growth forest preserved for tourists,
crowded by the great benzene breathing serpent
coiling from Southport to Milton; to fill out old Lang park with
fifty thousand people.

The halogen brighter than the fires of the north, faces all
washed out in cold light, rainbow-winged cane beetles
powdered with ash.

After the roars in unison that sound across the suburbs above
the helicopters, sirens & night birds, the wildlife, a maelstrom
of screaming clowns pour out to fight over taxis
& black-lit buses, in a hurry to secure a spot in the standing-room
only pubs.

Remember, it's an adventure, don't ever assume otherwise; your
dreams in the neon of the casino lights don't matter, only dollars.
You can buy any experience & die while reaching for the ultimate
rush.

Or you can find that one thing & do it on repeat until your numbers
come up.

I have a memory, or read it somewhere, of a dugong rising
from the deep, it's great Jabba body like a storm cloud above
the reef

& I floundered almost drowning as ocean fluted in my snorkel
my father laughing in that Darth kind of way that happens
when you talk under water,
said it'd scared some sharks away. I hadn't even noticed.

This is metaphor;
the song-cycle of the post modern dispossessed, the homeless
in their own home, or aboriginal to nowhere.
Seduced by masks. Anglo sons studying to become gangsters
or judges,
looking down from high rise apartments, a surgeon's
view of the bridge, the arteries.
What do you do when your million dollar view gets boring,
move on, sell it to a foreign investor for better money
tell your mates, high five, buy some cocaine.

3

Out here where the road signs have bullet holes & the CCTVs
have relaxed their gaze, leave the car cracking in the heat
& wander up the creek awhile.
The cool green & kookaburras laughing calm nerves burred
from city life, the overcrowded streets; but these
poisoned streams & denuded fields stolen in unrecorded
frontier wars will soon conurbate, landscaped, old colonial
& artificial.
Who wants to get depressed about it? Make some rain sticks
from nature's bones.
Is it worth it, this game of thrones?

4

The crows noticed us first.
Rising up & yelling we disturbed them, *fuck you fuck off* they

shat on the roof of our Tucson, tried to tear off
the aerial; we noticed later the fuzzy reception.
A weird clear trail of bird waste like dehydrated rain drops on the
windshield.
We're heading north now, back to Brisbane; doing one hundred
on the New England, hit a kookaburra as it alit from the grass
of the shoulder, smashed a headlight, made us worry about karma.
Those birds partner for life.
A discussion about road kill, hundreds of massacred marsupials.
Talk about the north where my parents live, they string up ghost
nets in the canopy so possums & koalas can cross &
not get cleaned up
by a b-double or greyhound bus;
however the cassowaries still suffer, splatted over the bitumen
in the unforgiving northern summer.
For weeks after returning to the city, in our back yard a kookaburra
sat on the hills & laughed in the window.

5

Hey dad, you were born in 1950, when your father got back
horny from the war impregnated with horror & he only
operated a radio off the coast of New Guinea; but the Japanese
bombers, he said, roared over them like God yelling at Moses.
O Christ, war stories us kids cried in unison & he darkened,
sucked his barley-sugar harder in the front seat, put his foot down
& ran over two dogs playing in the gutter. I'll never forget
it, on our way back from fishing on Mon Repos beach
in the middle of turtle season, when it's forbidden
but he didn't give a shit, dreaming about barbequed trevally trumps
everything to him.
He had a pension, both as a veteran & a line man
for the Post Master General;

claims to have laid the telecom cables all the way from
Cairns to Sydney.

When he died recently the R.S.L attended his funeral,
laid down his slouch hat & shaded his grave with a plaque of war medals.
They said a few words, how his service was important for Australia.

What about our mothers? Poets rarely mention them.

My grandma dragged my grandad to a flap tent
in a drought starved field to find Jesus among the social
refugees. A hundred men there who saw their friends
turned to mince on the western front knelt & prayed
for forgiveness, not particularly thankful
they survived.

6

They returned home just now, the neighbours drunk & playing
a game of *I've Never Ever*, larking about in a kiddie
pool with a beer bong in their underwear.

They only left at eleven & they're back already, woke my kids
again & I'm swearing out the window but they ignore me, I'm
just a grey beard, a boring parent.

This attitude & vernacular swagger, all talking like valley girls
or Beavis & Butt-head; it

reminds me of the eighties when all the black kids acted
like Niggas With Attitude, wearing those Sox caps but we don't play
baseball in this neighbourhood.

& someone is vomiting over the fence, the girl I saw earlier twerking
topless on the steps in blue Bonds boy legs & the kid who
claims to be a personal trainer but he's built like a bowling pin
whistling *you shoulda put a ring on it*.

Of course the revenue hunters come; I didn't call them, sirens
on & everything, four squad cars & a paddy wagon.

The music cuts, right on the lyric *for all the girls that got dick*

from Kanye West & the party is laughing, the cops
can't stop that drunk chick cartwheeling up the sidewalk.
Then the dawn, broken with the Rage theme from a static television
car alarms & dogs barking,
as Sunday begins.

7

A strange man stalks the markets like a scowling boy; he's wearing
an akubra that's never seen a cattle yard or the bush in muster
it has a hundred tourist pins & political ribbons & he's clutching
a radio wrapped in a plastic bag, a mop & bucket.
I saw him in the shadows of the city shouting
something about the war down the concourse of central station.
His dog has walked half way around this continent nation
on concrete
& a diet of white bread, her ribs exposed; involuntarily emancipation
from the state.
East of certainty, that's for sure, like a child disappearing
from a public toilet block or that nurse at the magic show.
Did you read about the guy who shot himself during *The Watchmen*?
Suicide in the theatre for real, truth & fiction bleeding together
like the edges of shadows, blasting the reality bedrock, coal seam
mining the alluvial fabric. Not him though, that strange man
who weaves like a dingo that's chewed off her trapped foot
through the throng of farmer's market hipsters & women
in yoga pants.
I bet he's seen real terror, killed a man or two.

8

Another day in the data mines, it's all I have to dream about,
getting screamed at by an irate customer

on the complaints line.

Calls himself Osborne, says he's in orbit
on Percocet sourced from the dark net, only ten bucks
a tablet.

The cold rains of indifference, a dogs eyes that hate you
on the other side of the fence.

A lone white cockatoo burned in an esky.

Lost in news print & visual pollution on the trip home.

Busted umbrella in the gutter.

Walking across King George this guy in greasy adidas
with waiting room tats of anchors & ships

tried to pick pocket us; stared him down
with eyes just as hungry as his.

The billboard-sized big screen showing a film clip
of some kids in the ghettos.

But what can I do about it, struggling to make ends meet
myself.

O for some entertainment not this sentimental shit,
the music & the lyrics

don't match the visuals; The pop star gyrates,
shakes her hips.

It's social consciousness as marketing tool,
the rich mocking the poor considering how much
spent on the film crew & production.

What do you reckon?

You're an armchair anthropologist with your fingers
in the sockets of popular culture . . . give us an opinion.

The cicadas, buzzing mains transformers, fuzzy reception
here on the fortieth floor.

9

Went walking on the banks of the Brisbane River

& saw coming up out of it an immortal being reborn here
a thousand times; took the form of an ibis caught
in a six pack ring, dancing like T' googala

The Wraith Wind, not the search engine.

& it gets fragmented here, the black dog howl drowns
all other sounds; no escaping that atmospheric riptide
as it drags you down.

Camels come like steady spectres drifting in without a sound,
drifting in like plagiarised half-remembered lines
on the edge of forgotten towns.

The elders sit in sorrow, the ever presence of the hunters
& their arrows,
in the shadows of the overpass.

In your present form, Eternal Being, you are an angry cynic
on a park bench with a sherry flagon.

& I love you.

10

That homeless year freezing in an abandoned warehouse
in Northcote

writing poems to the beat of anxious alcove pigeons & the shriek
of trams. Spending the dole on drugs & a weekly pizza.

Almost got caught stealing a fifty meter extension lead from Mitre Ten.

Climbed through the roof to the dance studio next door, at night,
to steal electricity for a bar heater.

All I could see was the disappearing wings of my guardian angel.

Visiting John, a lapsed rabbi in Balaclava

to buy skunk for twenty a gram, the hall always full of Jews
still seeking guidance, but he's a folk musician now only interested
in flogging CDs & weed.

Watched a kid graffiti *this is the new notorious* in an interesting
electric red cursive on the train station wall.

My squat mate, a body modification artist into scarification
between girlfriends & showers, he's from a ruined aristocracy
has an air of wounded pride, like a curlew
with an arrow through it. He says he has to buy
the biggest condoms. He boasts a lot; is gorgeous for a boy.

Is comfortable with his sexuality. He regrets his Prince Albert
because now he has to sit when pissing. He's hardly fractured, originally
from New Zealand. The Kiwis seem comfortable with Maori place names.

They seem happier over the there.
He says it's because everyone is poor & they don't give a damn.

We smoked D.M.T on a mezzanine in a broken light bulb.
Saw dragons & yowies contorting in the corners.

11

Raining as I arrive.

Walk two kilometres through the bush to campus.

Soaked to the skin.

Didn't bring an umbrella.

Sunshine when I left.

Figures slump through the tint.

Toads in the pond traps on a golf course.

Crows steal the balls.

The lecturer flicks through stations.

Bulldoze dream time for a freeway.

Scroll through my photos.

An apostle bird on a fence.

Rabbits & prickly pear.

My children.

Generational displacement.

Urban refuse.

Sagging gates.

Collapsed footpaths.

Piles of windscreen glass.

An old video of a farmer saying: having a king
is the only thing that separates me from all those black fellers.

Footage of war.

Back when education was an end unto itself.

Still raining.

Run along the bush path through the poisoned foliage.

Figures half seen in the ticker at the stock exchange.

The way the bus tunnel lights kaleidoscope on your hair.

The way you guard your name

braving the sharks grey shadows every night
on your way home.

12

What stalked the highways of the 1970s stalks the freeways
of the twenty teens.

He's sitting there in a Bedford van at Byron Bay indifferent
to the gulls eating a jellyfish.

He has her name from the bulletin board *lift wanted* tear off a tab
& he's watching her skin darken in the sun.

Deep in the bush her lonely screams will go unaided
like a ghost phone vibration in the pocket
of a man with phantom limb.

& her skin will burn, never to heal again.

The indigenous goddess exits
stage left.

I read somewhere that in Australia you are never more than two
metres from a snake.

13

My people of the Beaten Akubra

of the Oil Band & the Black Cockatoo Feather
punched through felt & of weathered brows, eyes strained for clouds,
of old names like James or Henry.

You are not my people.

My people of the Holden Torana, of the Ford Charger
of the Metal Band & Fluffy Dice on the rear-view mirror
of the Bogan Mother & Bevan Father, fists perpetual ready
clenched to strike

of eighties names like Clint & Trevor.

You are not my people.

Are you my mother, Australia? Always there
outside my window, creeping in with your desert tits
your burnt sienna, your yellow ochre.

Are you my mother, City?

With your inroad freeways & friendly hotel billboards—a home
away from home

a breakfast just like grans—a dinner of slogans
a welcome bed, Wi-Fi & cable, overnight or longer.

Are you my mother, Cafes & Bars
with your glitzy citizens all dressed for show.

Antisocial music, conversation pointless, imported
dance moves & disenfranchised lyrics, lost on you.

& lost on me.

Are you my Father, sunburnt country, land of cattle bones
of armoured fish & camouflage, the Southern Cross, the blue & white
& red of outback dust.

Are you my father, sun burned farmer
city slicker, simple folk, intelligentsia, illegal by boat, immigrant
faggot, white invader, abo . . . social misanthrope.

Be my father, give me history . . . I don't know what I am doing here,
crumpled in the window

of every passing bus.

Home is where the baby screams & the possum

in the ceiling keeps you awake for days.
Home is not Australia, with all it's potholed highways
& unmarked graves full
of broken hopes.

...

Research Statement

Research background

Where homage and theft intersect, on that transliminal threshold shimmers a gossamer of ethics where the influenced becomes the influencer and the lineage of literature continues; the transliminalist author appropriates everything within a given semiotic world and invents new writing.

Research contribution

The author of this text places himself and his reader under surveillance; of balaclavaed security guards, the technofeudal gaze of machines, the known, the unknown, dark masters, the new magicians and cultural guardians. In doing so arises *Transliminalist* poetry; a poetry that distills the subtle but persistent feeling of being out of place and institutionalized *within* language. Capturing the eerie and forlorn atmosphere of streets, marketplaces and cinemas usually bustling with people but now abandoned and quiet. Hypothetical conversations compulsively playing out in your head. A state of exhaustion inspired by acts of senseless semantic violence. Quotidian explorations celebrating imagist informality. Metaphorical iconoclasm. The awareness of the smallness of your perspective.

Research significance

Aboriginal to Nowhere inhabits the space between cultural narrative tensions and explores that threshold. One step from the most ancient land on earth across an aluminum door track and into Aldi. Beneath a post modernist umbrella in the shadow of colossal politics, of great writers admired for their singular sentenism, but then, this Aristotelian TETRIS game of emotional vectors near drove me to silence. Tetris teaches us that if you try to fit in, you disappear. Stimuli from supraliminal pollution undergoes a transliminal leak across the threshold to the subliminal consciousness and there wrecks havoc on self definition. This poem re-mythologises contemporary Australia and engages with all sides of the story.

Notes

Transliminal ~ a hypersensitivity to psychological material (imagery, ideation, affect, and perception) originating in (a) the unconscious, and/or (b) the external environment.

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