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Generating Alternative Worlds: The Indigenous Protest Poetry of Romaine Moreton

Summary

Since the 1980s, indigenous authors have had a high profile in Australia and their writing has made a significant impact on the Australian public. Given that poetry has attracted more indigenous Australians than any other mode of creative expression, this genre, too, has provided an important impetus for their cultural and political expression. Discussing the verse of Romaine Moreton, and taking up George Levine's view (2000) that works of art are able to produce critical disruptions and generate alternative worlds, the article aims to show that Moreton's mesmerising reflections on origin, dispossession, dislocation and identity of Australian indigenous peoples encouraged national self-reflection and helped create a meaningful existence for the deprived and the dispossessed. It also touches upon some other topics explored in Moreton's poetry and provides evidence of its universal relevance.

Key words: Australia, indigenous literature, protest poetry, inter-cultural communication, Romaine Moreton, *The Callused Stick of Wanting*, *Post Me to the Prime Minister*

Ustvarjanje alternativnih svetov: staroselska poezija protesta Romaine Moreton

Povzetek

V Avstraliji je od osemdesetih let dvajsetega stoletja opazen pravi razcvet staroselske književnosti. V vseh žanrih so nastala številna umetniško priznana dela in odločilno zaznamovala avstralsko politično in družbeno sceno. Še zlasti pomembno vlogo je pri tem imela poezija, saj je največje število avtohtonih Avstralcev izbralo prav ta medij za sredstvo svojega kulturnega in političnega izraza. Ob podrobni predstavitvi poezije Romaine Moreton, zlasti njene ostre družbenokritične note, in izhajajoč iz trditve Georgea Levina o politični moči umetniških besedil, avtorica članka ugotavlja, kako pesničino smelo razgaljanje družbene, politične in gospodarske neizravnosti Avstralije nagovarja neavtohtone avstralske prebivalce in prispeva k nastanku pravičnejše družbe, k odpravi rasizma, podrejanja in kršitve človekovih pravic. Poezija Romaine Moreton pa ni geografsko in časovno zamejena, kot jo zaradi kritične ostrine omalovažujoče ocenjujejo nekateri kritiki; zaznamuje jo tudi tenkočutni pogled v skrivnostni čustveni svet, kar ji daje občo veljavnost.

Ključne besede: Avstralija, staroselska književnost, angažirana poezija, medkulturna komunikacija, Romaine Moreton, *The Callused Stick of Wanting*, *Post Me to the Prime Minister*

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1. Introduction

In 1980, when Adam Shoemaker started the research for his ground-breaking work, *Black Words White Pages: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988*, he was amazed to find how little known the Australian indigenous literature was in academia and in the broader arts community, let alone in Australian society as a whole. In contrast, less than a decade later, Kevin Gilbert claims in his *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry* that “a whole new education ‘industry’ has arisen in the academic area, where it would appear that every student is doing his or her PhD thesis on ‘Aboriginal literature’” (Maver 2000, 13). Although Gilbert’s assertion is certainly exaggerated, the fact remains that the past thirty years have witnessed a veritable upsurge of critical interest in Australian indigenous authors. This is hardly surprising considering that there is no area of creative expression in which indigenous Australians have not made a significant contribution to Australian culture. Here are a few examples: in the field of narrative prose, Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* won the 2007 Francis Miles Award for the best Australian novel of the year. In 2000, this award was given to Kim Scott for his novel *Benang*. For the achievements in poetry, Kevin Gilbert and John Muk Muk Burke won the 1995 and 2000 RAKA Kate Challis Award respectively; the former for the collection *Black from the Edge* and the latter for *Night Song and Other Poems*.¹ Jack Davis’s play, *No Sugar*, received international acclaim at the 1986 World Theatre Festival in Canada. In the same year, Davis’s play was a co-winner of the Australian Writer’s Guild Award for the best stage play, whereas six years later, it received the RAKA Kate Challis Award. In listing the indigenous Australians’ accomplishments, it is impossible to overlook the success of Ivan Sen’s film production and Philip Noyce’s internationally renowned 2002 film version of Doris Pilkington’s 1996 novel, *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*.² Stemming from the authors’ desire to illustrate the cataclysmic indigenous people’s situation in Australia during and after the era of colonization, these works function in a variety of ways; among the most important being an explicit call to white populace in Australia and worldwide to halt social injustice. Given that the major issues faced by indigenous Australians today, “equal rights, equal opportunities, equal housing, better health, better education. Everything equal [...]” (Brewster, O’Neill, and Van Den Berg 2000, 189), are common to many other oppressed minorities, the worldwide appeal and numerous translations of these books are fully understandable.³

¹ RAKA (Ruth Adeney Koori Award) is the award for indigenous creative artists. See <http://www.australian.unimelb.edu.au/public/awards/raka.html>

² Ivan Sen’s films *Beneath Clouds* and *Dust*, won the 2002 Australian Film Institute Award and the 2000 Australian Teachers of Media Award for Best Short Drama respectively.

³ In Slovenia, to date only a few works have found their way onto the desks of translators and publishers, all of them after the turn of the century. Beginning with the latest, the Slovene publications include: Doris Pilkington’s *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, known in Slovene translation as *Zajčja ograja*, Sally Morgan’s life story *My Place*, entitled in Slovene edition as *V objem korenin*, and two books of poetry: *Konec sanjske dobe*, a tiny anthology of contemporary indigenous poetry by Kath Walker (better known as Oodgeroo), Jack Davis, Kevin Gilbert, Lionel G. Fogarty, Herb Wharton, Mudrooroo Narrogin, Bobbi Sykes, and Lisa Belleair, and *Vesolje okrog kuščarja*, which includes verse by two indigenous authors, Oodgeroo and Lionel G. Fogarty.

2. Australian indigenous protest poetry

Poetry has attracted more indigenous Australians than any other mode of creative expression, so this genre, too, has provided an important impetus for their cultural and political expression. Adam Shoemaker suggests that “if there is any ‘school of Black Australian poetry, it is one of social protest,” arguing that “most Aboriginal poets reject the art for art’s sake argument and feel that their work has at least some social utility” (Shoemaker 1989, 201, 180). Indeed, in accordance with Michael Lipsky’s definition of protest activity as a “mode of political action oriented toward objection to one or more policies or conditions” (Lipsky 1968, 1145), much of contemporary indigenous poetry is characterized by political or social critique in objecting to the conditions of indigenous people’s minoritisation. Another essential aspect of protest poetry is its capacity “to offer revelations of social worlds [...] to which readers respond with shock, concern, sometimes political questioning” (Coles 1986, 677). As several critical readers have shown for other visible and prolific exponents of indigenous protest writing in Australia, such as Kath Walker (better known as Oodgeroo) and Kevin Gilbert for example, their writing is capable of ensuring maximum affective impact on the readers.

However, as several other critics have proved, it would be wrong to assume that protest is the only theme of this poetry and, on the basis of this assumption, to dismiss it as mere propaganda. And yet, despite the wide variety of indigenous writing, ranging from overt political commitment to celebrations of nature and personal introspection, critics often take this perspectival stance and discuss it in ways that serve to affirm its politics and find the aesthetics lacking.⁴ John Beston is right when he claims that the canonical ground rules of formalism do not always apply to this writing, and that indigenous poets indeed seem to feel comfortable in the “short line lyric with its established metrical and structural pattern” (Beston 1977, 458), or in free verse that often lacks fluidity, but this is not to deny the power of their poetic expression, nor is it to diminish the significance of their achievements.

Because of its overt political message, Romaine Moreton’s poetry has also been discussed dismissively and patronizingly (Brewster 2008, 59). In this essay, and in accordance with Anne Brewster, who positions Moreton within the context of Australian indigenous protest poetry, I discuss the affective impact of Moreton’s hard-hitting reflections regarding the political, economic and cultural subordination of Australian indigenous peoples (56). In this sense, and taking up the view that works of art not only had “a deep implication in the politics of Western imperialism and the suppression of ‘inferior’ races and cultures,” but also displayed a clear capacity “to disrupt the exercise of power” (Levine 2000, 383–4), I aim to show that Moreton’s work, like the work of other contemporary indigenous poets, has played an important role in generating de-colonial

⁴ Critics generally concur that a failure to achieve high standard English, symptomatic of much indigenous writing, has to be attributed to the limited formal education of these authors and their lack of confidence when entering a field that was previously monopolized by the white elite, as proposed by John Beston in 1977. Another aspect is political; as observed by Igor Maver, for many indigenous Australians the English language is still synonymous with colonial authority, so they are reluctant to purify it of tribal and colloquial speech patterns (Maver 2000). For more information on the ‘imperialism of English’ see also Adam Shoemaker’s *Black Words, White Pages: Aboriginal Literature 1929–1988*.

thought and has contributed to the significant improvement of the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. In addition to examining the poetess's rigorous voice of protest and audience responses to the rhetoric of her social and political critique, this investigation also aims to show that any reading that acknowledges only the socio-political relevance of her poetry is too narrow to do it justice. Despite her activism, Moreton also explores more subjective themes of human existence, which urges us to see her writing in a perspective much wider than that of a political imperative for social improvement.

3. Romaine Moreton's protest poetry

In Moreton's poem "Don't let it make you over", published in her collection *Post Me to the Prime Minister* (2000), there are these revealing verses: "It ain't easy being black/ this kinda livin' is all political" (111). Indeed, Moreton "sees black life in Australia as inherently political" (Brewster 2008, 64) and her work is marked by overt references to socio-economic issues concerning contemporary indigenous peoples. She has manifested her objection to the social and political marginalization of Australian indigenous peoples, and her Goenpul nation in particular, by writing poetry, performing her verse, and by making films.⁵ To date, she has published two collections of poems, *The Callused Stick of Wanting* (1995) and *Post Me to the Prime Minister* (2004). The former, which will be the main topic of this discussion, was republished in the anthology *Rimfire: Poetry from Aboriginal Australia*, published by Magabala Books in 2000. She is represented in several other anthologies of Australian indigenous writing, including *Untreated: Poems by Black Writers* (2001). Despite her awareness of the common unappreciative stance towards engaged writing, Moreton has continued to view her verse in the first place as a site of resistance: "I believe it is important as an indigenous poet that I create works that are not only accessible in terms of language and imagery to indigenous audiences, but also pertinent. As a result, the language and themes I do choose to work with have been considered rather confronting and challenging, which I can understand. However, the things I have to say and how I say them are a direct response to the environment in which I have grown up and continue to live in. To create works that do not deal with the morbid and mortal effects of racism for one, and the beauty of indigenous culture for another, would be for me personally, to produce works that are farcical."⁶

Expressing grievances and concern felt collectively by the entire indigenous community suffering racial discrimination, marginalization, dislocation, institutionalization, poverty and abuse, Moreton's poetry is perhaps among the most penetrating fictional indictment of colonization in Australia. Her angle of vision, coupled with the anger fuelled by righteous indignation and generative urgency, make her work sought after by a huge participatory audience. Moreton has ensured the maximum affective impact of her verse also by employing living linguistic structures, such as rhetorical questions, direct address to the reader, satirical antitheses, etc. that invite the reader's

⁵ Two of her films were sent to fringe festivals in Cannes. *Cherish* (1997) was included in a package of student works from all over the country, while her 1988 film *Redreaming the Dark* was screened at film festivals in Cannes and New York. Her third film, *A Walk with Words* (2000), based on her poetry and experience, won the award for the best international short film at the World of Women Film Festival.

⁶ See the transcript of her interview with Andrew Ford for the Music Show on Radio National on 25 January 2003, available at http://www.asu.edu/pjpercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_5_2001/curre (accessed 8 February 2010).

active participation through emotional identification, together with individual and communal conversion. As Brewster puts it, Moreton's verse engages the public in "a reassessment of history, an enquiry into contemporary cultural and economic inequality, and a scrutiny of white privilege, entitlement and denial" (2008, 68). "The First Sin", one of many poems in the collection *The Callused Stick of Wanting*⁷ that perform this function by pointing to the unconscionable suffering and tyrannical living conditions of the indigenous minority begins thus:

He was guilty of the first sin—
 Being Black
 He was sentenced very early in life—
 At birth
 and only substances appeased his pangs of guilt. (3)

In the same vein and aroused by both her anger and resentment at those inflicting injustice on other people, and her affection for those experiencing the inhumanity of racial subordination, Moreton reflects in "You Are Black?". The poem abounds in references to injustices the Black communities have had to endure under the white settlers' dominance. It begins in the manner of English mock-epic poetry and proceeds by piling on fact after fact about flagrant violations of the native Australians' civil and human rights, their loss of dignity, through threats, reprisals and violence.

If you are oppressed in any way,
 you are Black.
 If you are a woman who loves women
 or a man who loves men,
 you are Black.
 If it is that people do not accept you
 simply for what you do,
 you are Black.
 If they do not accept that their God is not yours
 or yours is not theirs, and would want to crucify,
 you are Black. (55)

The poem closes with allusions to the Black people's resilience and resourcefulness, which have kept alive their desire to live and retain their dignity on their own land: "[...] for you know how it is to fight/ for the simple right/ to exist/ As You Please" (56).

In "Genocide Is Never Justified", Moreton signals her moral outrage and the outright disapproval already in the poem's title. Her fusion of intimate narrative sentences with a set of rhetorical questions enforces a symphonic quality in the poem. Involving the reader in an imaginary conversation with the indigenous speaker, the poem resembles a dialogic concert, with voices overlapping, complementing or opposing each other. The first part reads:

⁷ All subsequent quotations of Moreton's poetry will be from her collection *The Callused Stick of Wanting*.

And the past was open to gross misinterpretation.
 Why do the sons and daughters of the raped and murdered
 deserve any more or any less than those who have prospered
 from the atrocities of heritage?
 And why do the sons and daughters refuse to reap
 what was sown
 from bloodied soil?
 And why does history ignore their existence?
 This land, *terra nullius* was never barren and
 unoccupied!
 This land was never void of human life!
 Instead
 thriving with the knowledge of tens of thousand of years. (31–2)

The poem is a powerful protest against the unbridled egoism of the white colonizers. Characterized by a direct manner of writing, which gains poignancy by the ironic subtleties of her statements, it exposes the key social injustices, including the tyranny of oppression and abuse, arrogance of power, poverty, and willful destruction of indigenous peoples. Although not an autobiographical confession, the poem is acutely personal; it is a harrowing cry against all the forms of suppression and victimization of the people who lived in Australia for thousands of years before the white settlement. But, “who was here first is not the question/ anymore,” Moreton continues her exposure of institutional and historical processes and logics that have maintained white racial privilege, suggesting at least the recognition of oppression by majority Australians: “It is what you have done since you arrived, the actions you refuse to admit to,/ the genocide you say you never committed!” (31).⁸ A startling effect is achieved by finally pointing to the indigenous peoples’ spiritual and emotional depth. This inherent quality has not only helped them survive in a hostile, morally decayed and emotionally sterile white environment, Moreton suggests at the end of this deeply felt elegy, but also distinguishes them from it:

Why are you so rich, by secular standards
 and we now so poor, by secular standards
 The remnants of a culture though,
 still
 Rich
 In
 Spirit
 and
 Soul. (32)

Several other poems in this collection also humanize indigenous Australians and attack the atrocities performed in the name of “civilizing the uncivilized,” as Moreton ironically refers to

⁸ Moreton also talks about her interest in the state of communication between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in a 2003 interview with Andrew Ford, saying that the most indigenous population can hope for at the moment is that the emotional impact of colonization, evasion, being removed from the family, etc. is at least acknowledged by the non-indigenous population, before they will be able to fully understand their emotional state.

the inhuman practices of those who have “elect[ed] themselves as the/ supremacist race/ by virtue of the christened barrel, all in the name of peace/ and justice” in the poem “What Kind of People?” (45). “What kind of people would kick the heads off babies/ or rip at the stomach of the impregnated,/ as would a ravaged wolf,” the poetess continues in her disdainful address to an apathetic reader, who repudiates any suggestion that their ancestors were capable of “such murderous feats” (45). The poem proceeds in true Moreton fashion, compiling a catalogue of evidence to show the inhumanity of racial subordination. This is done in the form of rhetorical questions which Moreton frequently employs to point to “the absence of *responsiveness* in contemporary Australian culture and politics” (Brewster 2008, 66). It has to be borne in mind that it was not until February 2008 that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd opened a new chapter in Australia’s tortured relations with its indigenous peoples by making a comprehensive apology for the past policies, which had – in Prime Minister’s words – “inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss” (Johnston 2008, 3) on fellow Australians.

The underlying irony of her statements, a common poetic device of Moreton’s verse, is well-noticed also in “Forgive and Forget”. So is a high degree of seriousness and emotional commitment with which she approaches her material:

Sometimes images just fade
 and you find yourself
 wondering
 whether it was real
 or merely figments of our imagination.
 And it is easy to forget,
 If you are not reminded or educated
 about past atrocities.
 Mere wailings
 of archaic ghosts
 who live on in the flesh of presence,
 who refuse to die
although focussed extermination
 was the only purpose of a nation’s existence. (27)

The above poem also displays another characteristic that is symptomatic of Moreton’s verse in general: its dialogic structure. It is through such conversational tone and a direct address to a reader (“you”) that Moreton excels in revealing the tensions underlying the relationships between white and black Australians. While in several other poems, Moreton provides for a textual illusion of a discourse between the indigenous speaker and the non-indigenous reader, thus dramatizing the inter-racial encounter, in this poem she invokes indigenous addressee:

To forgive and forget is a fool’s utopia—
 Justice and peace should persuade the rich man’s pride.
 Justice and Peace will convince the rich man’s pride,
 until are all equal
 in truth

and all are equal
in life
as they are
in death. (27)

“This Place”, another poem that demonstrates Moreton’s power dynamics and her ability to address issues of social injustice through piercing scrutiny and deft argument, begins: “There is a place where babies are more burden than beauty,/ where education is an empty cause, [...]/. Where reading means just being able to sign your name,/ and arithmetic becomes obsolete, except when counting/ small change” (70). Like much of Moreton’s poetry, this poem proceeds as a “deductively reasoned analysis,” merging the feelings of sorrow and dark despair (Brewster 2008, 65). A heart-breaking picture of the reproduction of white privilege and the concomitant invisibility of indigenous peoples, which Moreton elaborates throughout the poem, takes an unexpected ending by not turning this invisibility to the indigenous peoples’ advantage. Rather, the last stanza reads: “The old remember all, for time drags her feet, while the/ young lay with hands behind their heads supine, swearing to/ never end up like the rest, their only true desire/ Is to get out of This Place” (71).

Despite the seeming darkness of much of her verse, and contrary to the above poem, Moreton’s conception of art is not pessimistic, and her thorny plight is often brightened with instances of hope and optimism. In “Time for Dreaming”, for example, she alludes to the passing of white supremacy by addressing the reader with the words: “Do not wonder about the ways of the whiteman/ for they have already run their course” (1). My Tellurian grandfather, too, ends on an optimistic tone, pointing to the native Australians’ capacity for survival in a hostile world: “[...] you can put the flame out/ [...] but there will always be fire” (29).

4. The invisibility of black women and other themes in Moreton’s poetry

In several of Moreton’s poems the invisibility of black women is either the central or the subordinate theme. Written as an intimate confession, these poems chronicle experiences illustrative of her own and the communal situation. “Ode to Barbie”, for example, is a welcome commentary for all black women who struggled as teenagers to fit into the mould of a blonde, beautiful and sexually appealing white woman. In an admirably condensed manner and conversational style, Moreton conveys the message that instead of suffering “a barbie doll complex,” a black woman should find her own identity (“we all do not have to look like barbie,/ anorexic bitch that she is”), and for doing that one does not need “barbie’s goddam permission” (21–5). In “Raggedy Anne”, Moreton attacks men’s selfish lust and ruthlessness by exposing their lack of sensitivity to other people’s need. Unlike a man, who quickly “pay[s] homage to his conscience” and “redeem[s] his innocence,” a woman is “sentenced to a lifetime of never being able to forget/ for his Crime” (64). This poem is also formally interesting: the opening conversational tone suddenly takes an unexpected turn with the short, only one or two word lines of blunt antitheses (“Yes/ I will/ No/ I won’t; Yes/ I do/ No/ I don’t”) to make the message even more emphatic.

The same holds true for the poem “Womankindness”, which opens with a series of rhythmic repetitions, with lines returning repeatedly, just as in oral delivery: “She is trying to get out/ She is trying to get out/ She is trying to get out/ This woman inside of me/ This woman inside of me/ This woman inside of me/ She is ready to come out/ She is ready to come out/ This woman inside of me/ This woman inside of me” (50). Like “Ode to Barbie” and “Raggedy Anne”, it is pervaded by a sense of female identity:

She has seen too much now
 this woman inside of me,
 to be ever the misinformed,
 menial
 meek,
 dutiful courtesan again.” (51)

Although initial rejection letters from publishers stated that her poetry was “more polemical than poetic,” as Moreton writes in the Introduction to her collection in *Rimfire*, several poems are nonetheless very illustrative of the opposite (Moreton, Taylor, and Smith 2000, viii). She moves freely in intellectual, philosophical and metaphysical spheres, thus transcending the narrowness of an individual, particular and local observation. In this sense, Moreton speaks not only to and of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, but of the universal. In the poem “Sanguine”, for example, she meditates on the quick passing of time, reminding the reader that life is inevitably approaching its end:

Each moment passes
 into the next
 And one day
 your regrets
 may multiply,
 because while you were regretting
 you were forgetting
 that
 Life is short. (2)

Thus, she advises the reader, “do not hold tightly onto that which can be purged by fire/ and water,/ but rather that which you can hold only/ in spirit and thought,/ emotion and memory” (2). Still, modern society gives priority to material wealth, Moreton laments in “The Callused stick of wanting”, for “everything had been sold/ [...]/ to that persistent evil,/ the monetary devil” (16). Moreton develops this theme also in “Poverty Is Silence” and criticizes the servile attitude of society towards this force: “The only truth/ being in/ monetary power,/ For Money Speaks/ and poverty is silence” (47).

Only a few of her poems deal with love. There is hardly anything more exciting in our life than those magical and buoyant moments when we fall in love, Moreton reflects in the short lyric “Love Infected”. The poem “Mother”, on the other hand, focuses on parental love; the

first-person meditation on the complexity of relationship within a family is supported by the speaker's knowledge that "all love takes time/ to comprehend and fulfill" (38). The quality of this poem, as well as of Moreton's poetry as a whole, rests on the sincerity of content arising from the personal tone she employs. In this sense, her oeuvre adheres to the traditional definition of poetry as a genre that expresses the emotions of the poet in conjunction with a particular experience or affinity. The things I never knew about you: me, another intimate piece of writing that suggests the flavor and dimensions of Moreton's recitation, is a lyrically even and logically coherent expression of the speaker's intuitive awareness that she has spent her whole life not knowing her true being and the hidden recesses of her heart. The poem springs from a personal experience: the speaker regrets that she has remained a stranger to herself. However, behind this individual aspect, one can read a general truth:

I think it is with much regret
that I never knew you,
the colour of your eyes,
the texture of your hair
or the shape of your mouth.
Yet it is your eyes I stare into
when I look into the mirror,
your lips my lover kisses, (38)

The notion that a person can transcend alienation from the self, as well as heal the split between the self and the world by making one's life genuine and sincere, also pervades the poem "Corners of Her Mind". By portraying a concrete personal situation as a source of reflection, Moreton conveys the wisdom that "beauty in the eyes of others/ is worthless/ without/ beauty in the eyes of self" (20). What really matters is not an outside world characterized by hypocrisy, indifference and betrayal, but human inner life, Moreton further meditates in "The Never Ending Rain". This is why she writes "Every breath I breathe I breathe for me/ and not for the one who would not notice my waving hand/ as I drown in this/ emotional sea" (33).

5. Conclusion

Without analyzing other poems we can conclude that Moreton is a very ingenious and creative author. Although she owes her fame and recognition much more to the fact that her verse embodies the shape of her faith and devotional posture than to the technical perfection of her expression, she has produced provocative and empowering articulations of racial traumas that have undermined the status quo and contributed to a positive change in Australia.⁹ This quality of her poetic expression places her in the league of poets like Oodgeroo, Jack Davis, Kevin Gilbert, Lionel G. Fogarty, Alf Taylor, Lisa Bellear, among others, who have considered verse as a "verbal discourse in which message is dominant and the aesthetic function is subordinate" (Mudrooroo 1990, 35). Given the increasingly wider public and scholarly interest in their message, which

⁹ For indigenous Australians this means their successful blending into the mainstream society; the process that has just begun after they were isolated from the rest of Australia, following the Nugget Coombs' 1976 plan for self-governing indigenous communities. See Adi Wimmer's article *Autonomous Aboriginal Communities in Australia*.

culminated in the Prime Minister's apology to indigenous Australians for past mistreatment and in the subsequent process of reconciliation, Moreton has provided additional evidence that works of art are an important site for negotiating change. Destabilizing white readers' assumptions about the authority and entitlement of their race, her poetry can be seen to contribute to what Walter Mignolo describes as the undoing of "the coloniality of knowledge" (2005, 391). And what is also important – alongside the dark picture of their disenfranchisement and a more radiant picture of their enduring resilience, inventiveness and power, which further Moreton's reputation as an important advocate of indigenous rights – her verse offers an illuminating insight into secret inner worlds and makes an excellent point of departure for many discussions on a global scale.

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