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Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*: "A self-governing literature that belongs to place"

"Heartbeat", or singing the novel afresh

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DÉDICACE

Dedicated to all the agrégation students I taught in 2021-2022, with gratitude for your enthusiasm, kindness—and indulgence!

TEXTE

1 Popular culture, especially music and musicians, but also cinema and popular literature, constitutes a rarely-mentioned facet of *Carpentaria*’s capacious aesthetic, whereby polyvocality, intertextuality, intermediality, and finally intermusicality combine. Although *Carpentaria* is both indebted to, and deconstructs, the European genre of the novel on the one hand and, on the other, the Judeo-Christian literary genre of the apocalypse, the multiple allusions to music and musicians, song and melody offer a clue as to how Alexis Wright has conceived the novel, as well as to how it might be received. The text alludes to a number of modes and styles of music from different periods but often from modern times. Apart from classical sung forms such as opera, arias and cantatas (not the more literary form of the symphony), the novel refers by name to jazz, reggae, country and western, and rock and roll: “One of my intentions was to write the novel as though it was a very long melody of

different forms of music[1]." Singers' names frequently appear, as do their lyrics, so that these references go beyond merely mentioning song and singing, but actualise these things. In this way Wright songifies the novel, or her text songifies itself. Except for Bob Marley, all these artists are white Americans, neither Indigenous, then, nor Australian. Like the rainbow serpent, the aesthetic of the novel is "porous[2]". The novel is intertextually and culturally inclusive while reaching for Americana far more than for "Australiana" (p. 445).

2 What is the function of such musical allusions, and how can the novel itself be considered as a musical composition? Wright stated in "On Writing *Carpentaria*" that the novel "started to be written like a long song, following ancient tradition, reaching back as much as it reached forward, to tell a contemporary story to our ground[3]". The narrative is thus intended to represent both the fluidity of time, and harness the potential of different tempi, that are afforded by music and song as art forms in their own right. In Wright's statement, the idea of song carries as much weight as that of story, so that the oral nature of the storytelling in the novel and of the novel as storytelling, logically received by the ear as much as by the eye is, as it were, covocal: storytelling as speech, storytelling as song. Many cultural traditions foreground song as the medium of performance of epic poetry, including that of the Homeric bard[4]. Wright's novel can rightfully be considered in the light of such traditions. She herself feels "comfortable" using such terms as "epic" and "saga" to describe the Indigenous peoples' "story world[5]". Ancient performance of such works may well have been sung as well as spoken. To use Bakhtin's word, one might consider *Carpentaria* as a "novelization" of Indigenous epic and saga[6]. However, the resulting novel is literally a song, an enchantment, in all senses of the word, of the novelistic genre.

3 As in other fields in which the novel is invested, from ecology to meteorology to garbology (that is, the specific attention paid to the waste of a community), the lexicon of music in the novel is extremely broad. Popular music in the novel is part of the whole, intricate song pattern that *Carpentaria* represents, from the "chant" in the epigraph to the first chapter (and even before that to Heaney's translation of Sorescu's "The First Words", which is a lyric poem), right through to the choir of frogs singing the country afresh in the novel's closing

lines. The frequent references to popular music and musicians belong, as it were, to the real, non-fictional world in the same way as the Gulf of Carpentaria, Brisbane and many other place-names within and without Australia, Tim Winton, contemporary brand names like R. M. Williams boots, Eveready, and Coke, and much else in the novel, do. The aim of the following three sections is to examine how Wright riffs on the three main popular musical forms referenced in the novel.

“Country” music and musicians

4 Australian scholar Joseph Cummins argues that “the concept of the songline, an Indigenous practice combining storytelling, singing, dance and art [lies] at the centre of Wright’s *Carpentaria*[7]”. It cannot be coincidental that two of the characters in the novel especially associated with the songlines, Mozzie Fishman and Norm Phantom, are also those who are particularly fond of country and western music. Although Wright avoids the word “songlines” in *Carpentaria*, she does have Fishman’s pilgrimage follow “the spiritual travelling road of the great ancestor” (p. 114), a “road” shortly afterwards described as the “spiritual Dreaming track” (p. 118). These are explicit references to the Aboriginal songlines, an integral part of the Aboriginal “Dreaming”—Wright uses the upper-case D—which encompasses Indigenous spirituality and profound connection with “Country”, land, sea and sky. Within the Dreaming, the songlines are “physical and spiritual journeys” which “map out country[8]”. In this respect, one can see why country and western music, a pastoral form of artistic expression as its name indicates (the term “country and western” is repeated several times in the course of the novel), would appeal to the author, given that she stated that “country” was “even the central character” in her writing[9]. As they drive along, Mozzie Fishman and his fellow pilgrims form a “riotous choir of *yippee yi-ays*” (p. 116), a rare moment of sheer joy in the novel which casts the narrative ahead to the “mass choir of frogs” (p. 499) with their “sweet” song (p. 496): these singing frogs are as much the main characters in the last lines of the novel as Norm and Bala. “Yippe yi-ay” is the chorus line of “The Old Chisolm Trail”, a nineteenth-century cowboy song about cowboys driving their cattle across desert terrain from Texas to Kansas[10]. The song’s lyrics are delivered in speech for the verses, which give the narrative of the journey, and song for the chor-

uses: this arrangement bears some formal similarity to *Carpentaria*'s balance and blend of speech and song.

5 Fishman is himself a country and western singer, channelling Hank Williams in his own way through a rewriting or creative misremembering of Williams's best-known song, the Cajun-influenced "Jambalaya" (1952). The result is a kind of cotextuality. Fishman sings the "first words" to the song as Williams wrote them, singing the second line as "me got to go for the codfish ladies down the Bayou" (p. 138), originally written by Williams as: "Me gotta go pole the pirogue down the bayou[11]." Mozzie "invented new words to suit himself. But why not! 'Son of a gun, hey, Will?'" (p. 138) Fishman quotes the first words of the last line of each chorus, "Son of a gun", a slightly vague expression, possibly American, to refer to oneself positively, or to someone else affectionately or damningly. He seems to be singing—or talking—about himself. The last line of the choruses, as written by Williams, is: "Son of a gun we'll have big fun on the bayou." Fishman transforms this into the line addressed to Will just quoted, and then sings: "A buzzin, having fun down the Bayou." (p. 138) Here Fishman takes the word "buzzin" from the first line of the third stanza, "Thibodaux Fontaineaux the place is buzzin'", and transposes it to the last line of the chorus. The "codfish ladies" Fishman sings about are nowhere to be found in Williams's original lyrics, nor are any ladies except the persona's sweetheart "Yvonne". The phrase may be gender-inflected and slyly self-referential, whereby "cod*fish ladies*" hints at "fish man"; or there may be a touch of bawdy in the phrase, since "cod" is Middle English for "scrotum" (as in the noun "codpiece", meaning a covering for a man's private parts). The word "codfish" may also be part of the humour attached to his last name to the extent that cod is a seawater fish although he himself has never been to sea (cf. p. 467, "the Fishman never went to sea").

6 Such rewriting of popular song on Fishman's part forms a pattern with the "memory revisions" (p. 50) councils which are convened daily by the Pricklebush elders, as well as with the stories of human history Will Phantom sees on the walls of a rock cave which are "made and remade" (p. 174). Alexis Wright herself considers the stories depicted on rock or cave walls by her people's ancestors as "sung[12]". Thus an Indigenous voice—Fishman's—channels a non-

Indigenous one, in a way which would doubtless not have shocked or displeased Williams. And songsters like Williams and their songs are in fact not satirised, unlike A. A. Milne for example ("*they were changing guards at Buckingham Palace*" [p. 71], an allusion to the eponymous 1924 poem by Milne), later set to music as a children's song, or Coots and Gillespie, authors of "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" (1934), touched on in the text when the Uptown children react excitedly to Elias Smith's arrival: "the children yelling out about Santa Claus coming to town" (p. 66). Williams's songs are not satirised because he is both not linked to a colonial power and, above all, because he is a country artist.

7 Hank Williams was one of the most influential composers and singers in twentieth-century North American music, and his influence continues to be felt among succeeding generations of popular musicians. Mozzie Fishman is "the country and western big man" (p. 118), an undoubted term of approval on the narrator's part which might equally be applied to Hank Williams. The fact that country music became a significant cultural force in North America and beyond is largely due to his efforts alone. This kind of popular music is, like *Carpentaria* itself, inclusive, blending various styles including African-American and French influences. Many Australian Indigenous people are fond of country and western music, and some use it to promote their rights struggles[13]. Incidentally, as Fishman sits in his car channelling Hank Williams, he not only sings but dances: he is said to "[break] into a jitterbug" and "shak[e] about" (p. 138). Fishman expresses his undoubted exuberance, contrasting so heavily as it does with his overwhelming later dejection in the narrative when he feels he is shrinking and becoming a beetle (p. 400), through the medium of dance and song. The fact that the novel closes with Norm Phantom and Bala walking "home" to the music of the frog choir in the final lines, rather than with their being stationary, hints at the possibility of dance: the two brief final paragraphs contain the phrase "they walked" (p. 499) three times altogether. They walk to music as the country is sung back into being after the storm. This motif of walking and movement to music is arguably analogous to dance. And, if this argument is plausible, it confirms Cummins's concise definition of the Dreaming given above which explicitly includes dancing.

8 Both Mozzie Fishman and Norm Phantom love country and western music, but what is also relevant is the fact that the terms with which the narrator depicts this love show how such music forms part of the two friends' Dreaming memory. Country songs spring to Fishman's mind "from a buried heyday" (p. 118) which could include other memories and suggests that such songs are capable of being brought back to life (just as Norm Phantom is able to bring fish miraculously back to life through his decorative art; and see below in relation to Bob Marley). The adjective "buried" returns in a similar context, again in connection with Fishman, whose "deeply buried emotions" arise within him as he tries to fall asleep (p. 143): Fishman is a living repository of remembrance in which his Dreaming knowledge of the songlines lives alongside his country music expertise and his personal memories. All these different strands of memory are fused together in him.

9 After Norm Phantom has buried Elias Smith at sea, the narrator says that Norm "quietly sang country and western songs as though borrowing well-used treasures from his house" (p. 258). His treasures are these songs, and his treasure-house is his memory. The wording is similar to that used to describe Norm's Dreaming memory earlier in the same chapter (Chapter 8): "Men such as Norm Phantom kept a library chock-a-block full of stories of the old country stored in their heads" (p. 235): terms like "library", which could be a room or rooms, or a whole building, and "store", find their equivalents in the ideas of "house" and "treasure".

10 As with Norm Phantom and Mozzie Fishman, country and western songs are associated with Angel Day, and this provides a link between the three of them that underpins their romantic involvement. The first of two country songs associated with Angel Day is "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On" (Hank Locklin, 1959), which the narrative says Angel Day sings while Mozzie Fishman is away (p. 324). Wright quotes the two chorus lines as originally written, and the song is an unproblematic objective correlative for Angel's purported loneliness during Fishman's absence. Shortly after the depiction of Angel in her new house singing this song, the focus shifts back to Bruiser and Truthful who drive up to her house in order to accuse her of the "neglect" of her two sons who died in jail (p. 325). As they get out of the car, Dolly Parton is "singing loudly on the radio, *God doesn't make honky*

tonk women" (p. 325). In the style of Mozzie Fishman's take on Hank Williams' songs, the line here is a misquotation or misremembering of the title or lyric on Wright's part or that of her narrator. The title, and chorus line, of the song is: "It wasn't God who made honky tonk angels". Originally dating from 1952, and written by a man (J. D. Miller), the song's argument is that if faithless women exist it is not God's fault but that of married men who, by pretending they are single, seduce women[14]. Given Wright's extreme care with word-choice, she may well be alluding to the original title and therefore directly to Angel, while implying, through the substitution of "women" for "angels", that Angel is indeed a woman and no angel.

"Rock and roll" (p. 389): Presley, Orbison, Holly, and Sonny and Cher

11 Three seminal figures of rock'n'roll music are cited in the novel, two by name (Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison) and one, Buddy Holly, through the synecdoche of his lyrics. The first two are each named twice, these names being used not in relation to the artists' music but for their names' connotative value and the "image" (p. 44) they call to mind. This is one example of the way in which the novel plays with contemporary celebrity culture. Stan Bruiser has "Elvis combed-back hair and sideburns" (p. 33), which the reader is expected to recognise as being associated with Bruiser's attempted creation of a virile self-image attractive, like the singer, to women: in fact, it ultimately works against him since his toxic hypermasculinity does not in fact correspond to Presley (who was virile enough but not toxically so) or the latter's innate artistry. But some men in Desperance, be they Indigenous or white, are said to have "mutton-chop sideburns" after Presley (p. 44), this sort of emulation perhaps denoting cross-cultural mimetic desire for the kind of affluence and sexual attractiveness associated with Presley's image. A similar but more positive phenomenon can be noted in the case of Roy Orbison. Both Mozzie and the young male pilgrims in his convoy wear "Roy Orbison sunglasses" (pp. 118, 138). This seems to be an example of what in marketing is called meaning transfer, whereby the qualities and cred-

ibility of a celebrity—in this case, Roy Orbison's cool image and perhaps also his talent—are believed by the consumer (or wearer) to transfer to the latter[15]. The implication is that Fishman and his cohort acquire cool and credibility through wearing sun-glasses associated with a pop music star. Because Roy Orbison (1936-1988) was white, the pilgrims may also be trying to project the message that if they want they can play the game of the white man's celebrity culture. It is true that these artists were in some ways out of date by the time in which the novel is set (the 1990s), but their artistry, fame and recognisability were still alive and present through records and archive material (photos, posters, TV shows and books). These references to American music superstars may also represent a turning towards a culture that is neither mainstream Australian nor European.

12 The role of Buddy Holly (1936-1959) in the novel is slightly different since the first words of a song of his, "Heartbeat", is cited without his name. Like Presley and Orbison, Holly was one of the founders of rock and roll music and, like them and Hank Williams, is venerated to this day by fans and succeeding generations of musicians alike. Returning to Desperance on the last leg of his pilgrimage, among the sounds he hears are the "music of *Heartbeat why do you miss* on a car radio, voices and laughter." (p. 143) Once again, Wright is aligning herself through the art of song with innovative artists who (also) manage to reach a global audience. Wright had used this technique earlier in the chapter when quoting the title of the Sonny and Cher song "I Got You Babe" (p. 121) which the pilgrims tap their car roofs to as they wait to fill up with petrol. The fact that all the pilgrims tap out the song's beat together shows how music can be a unifying social and spiritual force. Apart from the association with American popular culture and song, especially to the extent that rock and roll and artists like Sonny and Cher were perceived as countercultural when they first emerged, such songs may form part of the subtext of the novel. In this chapter, ostensibly about Mozzie Fishman (whose name gives the chapter its title), Angel Day leaves her husband Norm and the Phantom household. Fishman does not here admit that it is him that Angel Day has run off for. This becomes clear later in the novel when Norm recounts the stiry of Angel's leaving him with Fishman to Elias Smith's corpse (p. 228). "I Got You Babe" and especially "Heart-

beat”, which is directly linked to Fishman, may stand as teasing allusions to his affair with Angel Day.

“Mesmerising” (p. 431): Bob Marley, reggae and cultural struggle

13 Bob Marley provides a rebellious cry for the rights of the oppressed, a counterpoint in the novel to country music and tamer popular music. Marley is honoured globally for his music and message by Indigenous communities including Australian First Nations people, who burn a sacred flame to his memory in Victoria Park in Sydney. Like those of country music and musicians, it is not surprising to find his name in a novel devoted to contemporary Indigenous experience. As an activist Alexis Wright is well-known for having worked among Indigenous people living in difficult circumstances. She may see in Marley something of a kindred spirit. Mikal Gilmore has written of Marley: “His songs were his memories; he had lived with the wretched, he had seen the downpressors and those whom they pressed down[16].” The phrase “His songs were his memories” chimes with the presentation of song and the songlines in *Carpentaria*, and more broadly with Indigenous philosophy.

14 Bob Marley is a literally iconic figure in the novel because his name occurs several times in the text in relation to his image printed on T-shirts. Even though Marley is seen as a positive figure in global culture and by Indigenous communities, this does not mean his image is systematically associated with positive characters in the novel. The boys who attack Kevin Phantom are “jeaned and Bob Marley T-shirted, gammon Rasta men from the prickly bush ghettoes of East Side” (110). A keyword in this phrase is the adjective “gammon”, meaning fake, which is in common use among Indigenous Australians[17]. The boys’ T-shirts and Rasta look seem to be a cover for their violent intentions since they are aligning themselves, or pretending to align themselves, with an artist who said: “Rasta don’t believe in violence[18].” The three young boys who are wrongly taken into custody for Gordie’s murder are said to be “all Bob Marley look-alikes” (p. 299). This elliptical way of depicting the boys’ appear-

ance is a literary technique in that it enables the author to avoid giving a long physical description of the boys while informing the reader of the latter, assuming the reader recognises the allusion. The boys' looks might mark them out as potential rebels which would be an additional reason for white law and order to suspect them of the murder[19]. Such T-shirts return when Will Phantom is rescued from his imprisonment at the hands of the thugs from the Gurfurritt mine by two young men sent by Mozzie Fishman "with Bob Marley staring from their Rasta-coloured T-shirts" (p. 387), shortly to be identified with their T-shirts as Will Phantom and the "two Bob Marley faces" (p. 388) are forced to flee the heat of the flames destroying the mine. By the time the trio manage to meet up with Fishman, the two boys are called "Rasta boys [...]" and "Rastafarian god men." (p. 406) Rastafarianism is a Jamaican sect who pay allegiance to Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia as their god, and consider blacks as a chosen people. The term "god men" might suggest that they are seen, or see themselves, as somehow divine because they have punningly managed to pluck Will from death by sheer "will power". (p. 406) But it may also allude to the fact that the boys' Rasta identity aligns them with Haile Selassie, that they share in his perceived divine status. The image by which Marley is said to be "staring" from the T-shirts already suggests that the boys are somehow avatars of Marley, as well as the idea that Marley is himself alive (as does the reference in the text to his actual music, discussed below). At the same time, such allusions may stand as an indirect comment on the dearth of available indigenous role models and the global commodification of resistance figures like Marley.

15 In Chapter 12, the colour of the "Rasta-coloured T-shirts" is made explicit when one of the three boys driving Angel Day is said to be wearing a "rainbow coloured reggae T-shirt" (p. 432). Bob Marley and reggae iconography are associated with the colours of the rainbow. In the present context, the explicit "rainbow" might be an allusion to the rainbow serpent on the cover of the first Australian edition of the novel, which is a picture of Indigenous activist Murrandoo Yanner's rainbow tattoo, Yanner being one of the inspirations behind the novel according to Wright's dedication page. The rainbow serpent is the "creative serpent" present in the novel from the first page on, and the boy's T-shirt is a reminder of that continuous presence within

the land[20]. The three young men are said to be “escaping into the world of reggae” (p. 413), reminiscent of Polly Walker’s statement: “Songs stir the spirits of listeners, creating a liminal space in which people can ‘lose themselves[21]’ [...]” The song the boys “hum to” is Bob Marley’s “‘Buffalo Soldiers’”, a slight misquotation of Marley’s title, “Buffalo Soldier”. Buffalo soldiers were nineteenth-century African slave-soldiers so-called by Native Americans because their hair reminded them of buffalo fur. In this concatenation of Marley, abused Afro-Americans and Native Americans could certainly be a subtext for struggle and rebellion on the part of the Indigenous youths here. Marley’s “mesmerising voice rose from the dead out of a dust-ingrained cassette player.” (p. 431) The song, one of Marley’s slower ones, does indeed have a hypnotic rhythm, over which Marley’s voice sings deep. The recording enables Marley to appear to live again: it is as though he and his voice were alive in the Dreaming, like the ancestors; and perhaps the youths who align themselves with Marley in the novel do consider him as their ancestor in their struggle for cultural recognition, just as he himself struggled for the rights of black people and the oppressed in what was often, though not always, a non-aggressive, melodic mode like the song “Buffalo Soldier”.

Conclusion: “as though he were no more than a song” (p. 440)

16 To conclude with a question: why did Alexis Wright choose to foreground so many non-Australian, non-Indigenous artists and songs, instead of choosing Indigenous ones? One can only speculate here as to a possible answer. The contemporary Indigenous reggae artist Willie Brim (full name Ngunbay Willie Brim, born 1959 in Northern Queensland) has said that he is happy to compose his songs in reggae mode if that will help get his people’s message across, but that he does not want to adhere to Rastafarianism because for him it would be a betrayal of his own ancestral spirituality[22]. *Carpentaria* is not an ethnographic study of Indigenous people, and indeed appeals only occasionally to Indigenous language. The Indigenous fondness for such music need not cynically be seen as the result of an enculturative strategy on the part of the white community or media, and the

popular music references examined above concern music known to be enjoyed by the Australian Indigenous communities, and very possibly by Wright herself, corresponding to the playful side of her approach to novel writing rather than to any deep ideological aim. In the scene in which Mozzie Fishman rewrites the lyrics to "Jambalaya", he is said to be "singing on about some place as if he knew where it was" (p. 138). This corresponds to the songlines description he later gives Will of "several hundred sites in a geography he had never travelled" (p. 467), and the fact that this is in fact a songlines description is later substantiated through the narrative internally focalised through Will who stays awake "to sing the Fishman's ceremonial song cycles all night" (p. 477). Fishman himself is said to deliver his version of "Jambalaya" "to the spirits" (p. 138): his performance of this (relatively) contemporary song is not primarily for the people around him, even though he turns to Will in his car, enthusiastic about his own renderings, but rather a Dreaming ceremony, and he and his convoy are following the Dreaming track. Fishman's, and Phantom's, love of singing country and western songs is thus compatible with the Dreaming tradition. The attachment of the Indigenous people in the novel to "country", consonant with their Dreaming spirituality, epitomises, beyond this sense of belonging local and national, their commitment to the interconnectedness of all life and a profound respect and fondness for the earth as a whole.

17 Some of the most insightful contemporary philosophical inquiry into the art and practice of singing may well be the writing of the much-missed phenomenologist and poet Jean-Louis Chrétien (1952-2019) in *L'arche de la parole* (1998), as well as *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole* (2002 [23]). In the latter, Chrétien gives his appreciation of the act of singing in the following terms: "*Chanter, c'est faire que ce que nous sommes au plus intime, et ce que nous éprouvons de plus secret, s'élève depuis la poitrine et la gorge et résonne dans l'espace et le monde* [24]". This appreciation chimes with Mozzie Fishman's approach to singing whereby "country and western melodies" are said to be "jumping from his soul out to the world through his steel-grey beard" (p. 118), with Chrétien's "*au plus intime*" and "*de plus secret*" corresponding to Mozzie's "soul", the philosopher's "*poitrine*" and "*gorge*" equivalent to Fishman's "beard", and the vast spatial reference ("*monde*", "world") being identical in both.

Chrétien writes that the "*manifestation*" of the singing voice is "*tout à la fois intensément spirituelle, et intensément sensible*[25]".This duality echoes Fishman's way of singing, with its spiritual dimension (he sings "to the spirits") and physical one (he sings from within his body out through his beard, and dances to the songs he sings). In fact, in the relationship between the Fishman and the songs he sings, the songs are the active partner: he is not at first described as singing the country and western melodies, they enter his mind and "jump" out into the world via his body and vocal apparatus. The reason for this is that Fishman feels "so happy". Like the sadness of a song, Chrétien writes, "*la joie [d'un chant] s'impose avec une évidence qui est propre au musical. La voix semble s'oublier en son propre chant, et comme se perdre* [...[26]]" The phrase "*comme se perdre*" recalls the idea of losing oneself in song as outlined by Polly Walker. In relation to a novel which attends so closely to voice, Chrétien's words would seem to be a fitting description for Fishman's singing, and may be applicable to the musical way in which the novel conveys sorrow and, *afresh*, in its closing lines, the possibility of joy. The description implies that Fishman becomes his song, and on Will Phantom's hard journey north he, too, becomes "no more than a song" (p. 440): the metam/Orphic force of Alexis Wright's novel manifests in its self-songification, that is, turning itself, its characters, and everything in it, finally into song.

NOTES

1 Alexis Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*", in Lynda Ng (ed.), *Indigenous Transnationalism: Alexis Wright's* Carpentaria, Artarmon, Giramondo, 2018, pp. 217-236, p. 225.

2 Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria*, London, Constable, 2008, p. 2. Hereafter, references to the novel, in this edition, are given as page numbers in brackets within the body of the text of the essay. This article is not intended to be exhaustive, and relatively straightforward references to Neil Diamond and his songs, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore, for example, are not discussed here. The whole question of the nature of the relationship between literature and music, in general and in *Carpentaria*, naturally goes far beyond what is said here.

3 Alexis Wright, “On Writing *Carpentaria*”, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

4 See for example Georg Danek, Stefan Hegel, ‘Homeric Singing – An Approach to the Original Performance’, 2002, https://www.oeaw.ac.at/kal/sh.

5 Alexis Wright, “On Writing *Carpentaria*”, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

6 Cf. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 7.

7 Joseph Cummins, *The Space and Time of Imagined Sound: Australian Literature and Music, 1945 to Present*, D. Phil. Thesis, UNSW, 2015, p. 9, DOI: 10.26190/unsworks/18835 (https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/18835).

8 Martin Renes, “Dreamtime Narrative and Postcolonisation: Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* as an Antidote to the Discourse of Intervention”, *The Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia*, vol. 2. n° 1, 2011, p. 116. Wright writes the word “dreaming” in the novel both with and without the upper-case initial letter. With the latter, it refers to Indigenous spirituality.

9 Jean-Pierre Vernay, “An Interview with Alexis Wright”, *Antipodes*, vol. 18, n° 2, December 2004, pp. 119-122, p. 121.

10 Wright’s father was a “cattleman” (cf. for example Eric Forbes’s interview with Alexis Wright, “On the Couch: Alexis Wright”, November 4th 2008 http://goodbooksguide.blogspot.com/2008/08/on-couch-alexis-wright.html, an American word according to OED. Perhaps Wright’s interest in cowboy (cattleman) songs is an affectionate reminiscence of her father.

11 All quotations from Hank Williams’s original lyrics to “Jamabalaya” as found here: https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/hankwilliams/jambalayaonthebayou.html.

12 Alexis Wright, “On Writing *Carpentaria*”, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

13 Cf. for instance Sophie Verass’s fine and sensitive article, especially regarding the long history of Indigenous people’s acquaintance with country and western, “Six stars of Aboriginal country music”, https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2016/06/17/six-stars-aboriginal-country-music.

14 The song was a direct answer to “The Wild Side of Life” by Hank Thompson (also 1952), which blamed women rather than men for women’s infidelity. On a separate point, one wonders whether Wright has not

conflated the original song-title, which ends "honky tonk angels" with the Rolling Stones' song "Honky-Tonk Women" (1969).

15 See "meaning tranfer", *Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, from which this explanation is derived.

16 Mikal Gilmore, "The Life and Times of Bob Marley: How He Changed the World" in *Rolling Stone*, March 10th 2005, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-life-and-times-of-bob-marley-78392/.

17 For a detailed discussion of the use of this adjective in Australia, especially in the Northern Territory cf. https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/resources/aus/word/map/search/word/gammon/The%20Centre/.

18 Marley is quoted as saying said this in a 1973 interview which appeared on a 1980 record entitled "Bob Marley Interviews", produced by Tuff Gong International, Ltd., Kingston, Jamaica. The quotation is from the conference paper "Religion and Revolution in the Lyrics of Bob Marley" by Jan DeCosmo cf. https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/CA/00/40/01/62/00001/PDF.pdf.

19 Elias Smith is said to have dreadlocks, considered in the West to be a specifically Rastafarian, Jamaican hairstyle (cf the OED definition of dreadlocks), and it is surprising that "It was the first time anyone in town had seen anyone with dreadlocks" (67). It may stand for the alienation between Uptown and the Pricklebush mob. Some Australian Indigenous people consider that their ancestors wore dreadlocks long before this hairstyle became associated in the West with Jamaica and reggae: on this point, see Victoria Grieve-Williams, "'Reggae Became the Transporter of Our Struggle... and Our Love': Willie Brim, Cultural Custodian, Bush Doctor, Songman of the Buluwai People of North Queensland", in Olivia Guntarik and Victoria Grieve-Williams (eds.), *From Sit-ins to #revolutions: Media and the Changing Nature of Protests*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2020, pp. 95-112, p. 100.

20 The first edition of the novel, including the front and back covers, the latter crediting Yanner for the rainbow serpent tattoo, can be viewed here https://archive.org/details/carpentarianovel00wrig/page/458/mode/2up.

21 Cf. Polly O. Walker, "Singing a New Song: The Role of Music in Indigenous Strategies of Non-Violent Social Change", in *EOLSS* (Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems), 2009, pp. 130-155, p. 131.

22 Cf. Victoria Grieve-Williams, "'Reggae Became the Transporter of Our Struggle... and Our Love': Willie Brim, Cultural Custodian, Bush Doctor, Songman of the Buluwai People of North Queensland", *op. cit.*: "the Buluwai do not subscribe to Rasta as they have their own cultural tradition, their own language and spirituality."

23 I draw on Chrétien's *L'arche de la parole* in my article "Degrees and Limits of Expressibility in Popular Song", in the online journal *DCLP* (*Dire et chanter les passions*), September 1st 2021, https://www.dclp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/DCLP_N1_GRAFE.pdf, to which, if I may, I refer the reader. The article discusses the idea of the metamorphosis of singer into song with which the present essay concludes.

24 Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Saint Augustin ou les actes de la parole*, Paris, PUF, 2002, p. 151.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

RÉSUMÉS

English

Popular music constitutes a rarely-mentioned facet of *Carpentaria*'s intermedial aesthetic. "Song", part of Diana Brydon's "Reading across the Pacific: Reorienting the North", briefly evokes song in *Carpentaria*, though only "national" song(s). In "Dreaming of Others: *Carpentaria* and its critics", Alison Ravenscroft is "puzzled not only by song but by the entire scene" when Fishman sings country songs. Yet Wright wrote *Carpentaria* "while listening to music", including "blues" and "country"; it "started to be written like a long song". Some popular singers are either named or suggested by their lyrics. We consider these artists and their work in context, within Carpentaria's appeal to Americana, not Australiana, and to polyvocally singing the novel afresh. Wright later co-wrote the song "Giidang"—"heartbeat" in the Gumbayngirr language.

Français

La musique populaire constitue une facette rarement mentionnée de l'esthétique intermédiale de *Carpentaria*. « Song », qui fait partie de « Reading through the Pacific: Reorienting the North » de Diana Brydon, évoque brièvement la chanson dans *Carpentaria*, mais uniquement une ou des chansons « nationales ». Dans « Dreaming of Others : *Carpentaria* and its critics », Alison Ravenscroft est « déconcertée non seulement par la chanson mais par toute la scène » lorsque Fishman chante des chansons country. Pourtant, Wright a déclaré que *Carpentaria* « a commencé à être écrite comme

une longue chanson » ; elle l'a écrit « en écoutant de la musique », notamment le blues et le country. Certains chanteurs ou chanteuses y sont soit nommé.es soit évoqué.es au travers de leurs paroles. Nous considérerons ces artistes et leur travail en contexte, en réfléchissant à la façon dont *Carpentaria* s’intéresse à l'Americana plutôt qu’à l'Australiana, et à la polyvocalité du roman. Par la suite, Wright a co-écrit la chanson « Giidang », qui veut dire heartbeat en langue Gumbayngirr.

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