

[can] hear their intake of breath, the compassion in their voice, their amusement at the foolishness of mortals' (Review). Such narratorial simulations of breath intake, exasperation, wonderment, and affirmation of the story's 'truth,' serve to mimic aspects of oral performance. Oral literature scholar Ruth Finnegan points out that orally-delivered texts rest on performance 'and that in turn means that more than just "verbal" elements are involved' (19). The art and meaning of verbal texts, says Finnegan, 'are realised not just in words but also in the teller's delivery skills, the occasion, or the actions and reception of the audience' (19). Wright has thus sought to represent (and to highlight) the performative toing-and-froing that occurs between an orator and his/her audience during oral storytelling.

But beyond their evocation of oral performance, what is the narratological purpose of these exclamations? Who is the narrator actually addressing? Several longer exclamatory interventions, including the following one, may help us to answer these questions. Relatively early on in the course of the story, the narrator makes this statement: 'But listen! Listen? Quiet, quiet, at the back. Listen. You are not going to believe this' (74). This statement in particular, in second-person speech, can only be configured as an aside addressed to particular *listeners*, suggesting the main purpose of all of the exclamatory interjections is to conjure up, in the mind of the reader, the image of a crowd of people sitting around listening to an orator tell a great tale. This orator is heard continually breaking up the story with commentary and spontaneous exasperations, for the benefit of the listener, as the story becomes exciting or unbelievable. The appeal to be 'quiet, at the back' suggests that we might imagine a group of communal listeners sitting around a campfire or in a big hall or some such, being told a great story. Wright herself says the story in *Carpentaria* 'is told from the viewpoint of old people—how they see the world. What I tried to do is show how old people would tell a child a story about what's important' (qtd. in Vernay 121–22). From this we might suppose to imagine that in the main narrative of *Carpentaria* wise elders are the orators and younger, curiously-minded Aboriginal people are the listeners.²

However, to leave our analysis here is to sell the text short because such an explanation of orator/listener positioning cannot account for the beginning to the novel. The very first sentence of *Carpentaria* is: "A NATION CHANTS, *BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY*" (1). Written in capital letters and italicised as shown, the nation's bombastic story and all of its incumbent history is brought to a halt after just three words. The nation-story, articulated here as chant, a monotonous refrain that irritates, is interrupted, derided and dismissed by the 'we'-narrator, who has heard it all before. The narrator of this opening statement cannot be narrating to the same communal listeners referred to above. The 'compassion' that Ravenscroft found in the voice of the narrator, who utters things like 'What a story!' and 'Never mind!' is absent here. The narratorial tone is different in the opening block of capitalised text: it is distanced and dismissive rather than warm and familiar. This is because, I suggest, there is a different narrator and—more importantly—an altogether different *narratee* in the opening few lines of capitalised text. The only other block of similarly capitalised text in the novel is at the beginning of Chapter 2 (11). Both of these two text passages demarcate themselves from the rest of the text by way of a dotted line. They are strictly portioned off in form, tone, typeface, and by a dotted line, from the rest of the narrative. What is their function? How are they to be related to the rest of the narrative? An examination of the second block of text helps us to address these questions. It reads, in its entirety:

- . *Carpentaria*. London: Constable [2006], 2008.
- . 'On Writing *Carpentaria*.' *HEAT* 13, new series (2007): 79–95. Reprinted, Western Sydney University PDF: 1–17.
- Young-Ing, Greg. 'Aboriginal Peoples' Estrangement: Marginalization in the Publishing Industry'. *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature*. Ed. Jeannette Armstrong. Penticton: Theytus Books, 1993. 177–88.