

Dreaming Phantoms and Golems: Elements of the Place Beyond Nation in *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter*

LAURA JOSEPH

University of New South Wales

Australian writer Alexis Wright's 2006 novel *Carpentaria* and New Zealand writer Elizabeth Knox's *Dreamhunter* series (comprising of the novels *Dreamhunter* (2005) and *Dreamquake* (2007)) call up the matter of region and the waste of modernity to secede from the form of nation. As fictional spaces overlaying real places, doubling with a world of dreams and an underworld of nightmares of colonial violence, these novels also move beyond the form of realism. This essay argues that in dispersing the forms of nation and genre through the matter of particular places, these contemporary antipodean novels engage a politics of fantasy to re-imagine the futures of the nation.

Carpentaria and the *Dreamhunter* series deploy matter itself as the fabric of their political and aesthetic challenges. As a substance capable of differentiation away from the limits and boundaries of form, matter is the transformative element that enables departures from spatial, temporal and generic forms in these novels. In analyzing the 'individualizing power of matter', or the way matter tends towards particularity (Bachelard *Water and Dreams- an Essay on the Imagination of Matter* 2) philosopher-scientist Gaston Bachelard enables us to read the presence of materiality in literature as a formal challenge. Asking, '[w]hy does everyone always associate the notion of the individual with form?' Bachelard argues to the contrary, emphasising that 'matter is the very principle that can dissociate itself from forms' (2). *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter* dissociate themselves from the form of nation through the matter particular to region, or the particular matter of region. In *Carpentaria* this dissociating material imagination takes elemental, alchemical and archipelagic forms. In *Dreamhunter*, mineral consciousness, generational memory and alchemical differentiation form the novels' dreams of matter. The intense imagining of the material presence of place in both *Carpentaria* and the *Dreamhunter* series works to dissociate the region from the form of nation to imagine new possibilities for the future of particular places. These contemporary antipodean novels enable thus a transnational reading from the vantage point of region to region. This particular perspective of region offered by these novels also informs the methodology and direction of this essay in its reading between regions and across nations.

Cyclonic, mythic and epic, both novels are charged with a tremendous elemental force and are characterized by a world of dreams and the fantastic elements of ancient and modern magic. These fantastic elements are of course culturally specific; the award-winning *Carpentaria* a massive presence in Australian indigenous literature, while the *Dreamhunter* novels are award-winning Pakeha New Zealand literature. Just as the novels are products of distinct cultural imaginaries, resistance to nation is directed in different ways in both novels. With its apocalyptic explosion and dispersal of the modern nation, *Carpentaria* refuses the terms of nation, while *Dreamhunter*, in rehearsing an overturning of the totalitarian incarnation of the modern nation, interrogates and revises these terms. To these different ends, the novels deploy similar strategies on the level of narrative, figuration and genre. Both these resistances to the forms of nation, the undoing of the modern nation in *Carpentaria*, and overturning of an

oppressive form of national modernity in *Dreamhunter*, are realized through the secession of the matter of region from the form of nation. The materiality deployed by these novels to resist coercive forms of nationhood arises from the substance of region as both natural elements and artificial or waste matter. In *Carpentaria* the dynamic, disobedient, alchemical and archipelagic material elements of the gulf country are harnessed to challenge juridical, discursive and economic claims to the region made by both the nation and international corporations. In *Dreamhunter*, alchemical transformations of the matter of place in and as 'The Place' and the invocation of a mineral consciousness carve out a space outside the temporality and gaze of nation in order to resist the injustices of national regulatory institutions.

Carpentaria and the *Dreamhunter* duet clearly depart from the space of nation by moving away from it nominally and geographically. All three novels unfold within imaginary places that are not quite their geographic equivalent. In *Carpentaria*, most of the action is located in Desperance, a fictional port town bypassed by the ocean. *Dreamhunter* and *Dreamquake* take place in Coal Bay in the fictional nation of Southland, which as Lydia Wevers has pointed out is '[a] place which both is and is not Golden Bay' (Wevers 188) in New Zealand. While Southland erases the nominal space of New Zealand, the geographic formations and particularities remain. Decorating the prefacing maps of *Dreamhunter* and *Dreamquake* are images of New Zealand's famous flightless bird, the kiwi, metonymically and emblematically figuring national particularity. Similarly, while the nominal space of Australia remains in *Carpentaria*, Wright's novel disperses a model of national continence in its coastline movements between and among islands.

Where space is 'not-quite', temporality in *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter* is characterized respectively by an overlay of cyclical and generational time and discontinuity. Generational memory in particular is deployed to underwrite the historical time of nation. John Frow, via Pierre Nora's work on history and memory, explicates the distinction between generational memory and historical time in terms of the 'discontinuity or lack of fit between the historical time of the generation and the historical time of the nation' (Frow). Performing a continuous rejection of the historical time of the nation, *Carpentaria* is narrated according to the cyclical, eternal time, of 'the ancestral serpent'. The first chapter 'From time immemorial' opens with the creative serpent's descent 'those billions of years ago', 'long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time' (1). In contrast, *Dreamhunter* operates according to a deliberate manipulation and disruption of futurity and sequence. In Knox's duet past and present and cause and effect are unraveled as the future manifests itself in the dreams of The Place. In both *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter*, generational memory is the key to resisting violent actions of nation. *Carpentaria*'s Joseph Midnight sings directions to activist hero Will Phantom 'unraveling a map to a Dreaming place he had never seen' (375) so that Will might avoid his murderous pursuers. For *Dreamhunter*'s protagonist Laura Hame, it is a magical hymn called The Measures, passed down along the Hame line that conjures a servant able to stand against the future planned by corrupt and violent authorities. The co-ordinates mapped by the novels' spatiality of 'not-quitiness' and temporality of overlay and discontinuity refuses nation and provides the ground on which the texts move beyond realism.

Ironically this departure from realism is precisely where *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter* cast into relief the political stakes of secession from nation. Rachel Falconer theorises

the political implications of this move away from realism towards fantasy in terms of realism's complicity with capitalist modernity. Falconer locates fantasy's challenge to the excesses and injustices of capitalist modernity (to which the form of nation is central) in terms of its proximity to capitalist modes of representation; arguing that 'ironically, the genre that seems to be mounting the most insistent challenge to capitalist excess currently is not realism or tragedy but the one most sympathetic to capitalism's entire "illusory apparatus", that is fantasy' (Falconer 182-83). Falconer also emphasizes realism's complicity with late capitalist economies of representation, where '[i]n the context of speculative capitalism, realism is the fantastical genre, providing the illusion of material solidity and permanence that the actual world lacks' (183).

The specific deployment of a politics of fantasy in *Carpentaria* was explicated by Carol Ferrier in the 2007 Dorothy Green Memorial Lecture at The Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) annual conference.¹ Ferrier emphasized the significance of Wright's break with realism, where Indigenous women's writing has come to be attended by the expectation of certain truth effects. Contextualizing the innovativeness of *Carpentaria* and Vivienne Cleven's 2002 novel, *Her Sister's Eye* within Indigenous women's writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, Ferrier argues that the partial move away from realism of these texts 'marks something of a departure from Aboriginal women's writing' (Ferrier 47). The conscious shift towards a different kind of story is apparent in the opening lines of *Carpentaria*. Beginning as 'a nation chants, *but we know your story already*' (Wright, *Carpentaria* 1), *Carpentaria* dramatizes from the first instant its contestation of what the nation knows. The novel then unfolds as a challenge to, and refusal of the knowledge of the nation, as a story, or more appropriately stories, outside what this nation knows of the region and its people. The politics of the novel's shift away from realism (as the story the nation knows already) and the time of the nation have also been explicated by Wright herself. In her essay 'On Writing *Carpentaria*' she talks about her move away from history –the story the nation knows, or expects to be told- as an escape from 'the colonizing spider's trapdoor' (Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*' 90). Ferrier focused on this quote from Wright and I repeat it here because of its emphasis on specific difference as a departure from nation. Wright says:

I did not want to write a historical novel even if Australia appears to be the land of disappearing memory . . . I have had to deal with history all of my life and I have seen so much happen in the contemporary indigenous world because of history, that all I wanted was to extract my total being from the colonising spider's trap door. So, instead of picking my heart apart with all of the things crammed into my mind about a history which drags every Aboriginal person into the conquering grips of colonisation, I wanted to stare at difference right now, as it is happening, because I felt the urgency of its rule ticking in the heartbeat of the Gulf. The beat was alive. It was not a relic. (Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*' 90)

Here it is a focus on difference, the particular difference of place 'in the gulf'; in its heartbeat, that counters history as the story the nation knows already and the story that would call that beat a relic. Ferrier also emphasizes the presence of the regional and the elemental in Wright's assertion of difference. She discusses this specifically in relation to the particular differences of the North, its:

difference in terms of its different composition of capital, its different

population distribution and its different patterns of exploitation of labour...the difference as well perhaps lies in the ability to feel the presence of the natural world evoked so persuasively. (50)

Wright emphasizes that this 'presence of the natural world', the particular difference of the North is not only central to the novel, but originary. Recounting a conversation she had with a friend on the banks of the Gregory River in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Wright offers her response to her friend's comment that 'the white man had destroyed our country' and the spectacle of introduced weeds choking the indigenous trees:

What he said was true, but what I saw was the mighty flow of an ancestral river rushing through the weeds, which were only weeds fruitlessly reaching down into the purity of this flowing water.[...] The river was flowing with so much force I felt it would never stop, and it would keep on flowing, just as it had flowed by generations of my ancestors, just as its waters would slip by here forever. It was like an animal, very much alive, not destroyed, that was stronger than all of us. (79-80)

This river flows through the opening of *Carpentaria*, a prelude that asserts that '[i]t takes a particular kind of knowledge to go with the river, whatever its mood' (3), asking:

Can someone who did not grow up in a place that is sometimes under water, sometimes bone-dry, know when the trade winds blowing off the southern and northern hemispheres will merge in summer? Know the moment of climactic change better than they know themselves? (3)

In *Carpentaria* regional differences as the elemental matter of place, as 'the particular kind of knowledge' of the Gulf people, elicit a shift away from the nation's claims to knowledge and attempts to control the region. The novel's first chapter concludes in a telling shift from the institutional spaces of nation, as knowledge and church, to the elemental dynamics of place:

But this was not Vaudeville. Wars were fought here. If you had your patch destroyed you'd be screaming too. The serpent's covenant permeates everything, even the little black girls with hair combed back off their faces and bobby-pinned neatly for church listening quietly to the nation that claims to know everything except the exact date its world will end. Then, almost whispering, they ask shyly if the weather has been forecast correctly today. (11)

Just as a cyclone tears apart Desperance, 'the most improbable of all coastal towns' (457), the nation 'that claims to know everything' is undone here by a shy question about the weather forecast. The all-knowing nation cannot predict vicissitudes of the elements. Ironically, the town's apocalypse is meteoric; its 'world...end[s]' through a cyclone. Thus these girls 'almost whispering', 'ask[ing] shyly' gesture to an understanding of place that is beyond, and prior to, the knowledge and gaze of the nation. It is through this regional, elemental materiality that *Carpentaria* moves away from the space of nation.

Carpentaria invokes the elements not just to call forth a knowledge older and deeper

than nation, but conjures the furies of water, earth, fire and air as the matter of resistance to national as well as international attempts to claim, know and control the region. The novel's epigraph, Seamus Heaney's 'the first words', is an invocation to 'Let everything flow/ Up to the four elements,/ Up to water and earth and fire and air'. In *Carpentaria*, as in Heaney's poem, the elements are called upon to wash away the pollution of words; 'to drink' in the deeper knowledge of 'what the birds and the grass and the stones drink'. The elemental fury that *Carpentaria* seethes with – the enraged, volatile and dynamic elements of earth, water, air and fire – rise up to foil attempts by international corporations to locate and kill the local resistance groups: 'Fishman and his men were saved by a stroke of nature from early detection by the helicopters. Even the afternoon rainstorms could beat the monitors in New York' (445). Further, it is a whirlwind that gives the final impetus to the fire set by Fishman and his men to destroy the mine. When '[i]t looked as though the fire was going to peter out...just sitting, smouldering, not knowing where to go next because the wind was not blowing strong enough to fan it in the right direction' (410), a whirly wind emerges from 'the hills themselves', 'just as a matter of fact sprang up' to revive the inferno. This 'fiery whirlwind shot into the bowsers and momentarily, lit them up like candles' (411). In *Carpentaria*, it is the enraged animation of wind, water, dust and fire² alongside the action of the region's people that enacts a furious resistance to the dispossessions and violence of both national and international power structures.

Along with the dynamism and force of the elemental matter of the novel, *Carpentaria* deploys an alchemical genesis in its rearrangements of the matter of waste. This material ingenuity is similar to, and productively read alongside the move away from 'one Australia' Georgine Clarsen identifies in her analysis of *Bush Mechanics*. Through this creative refiguration of waste material, the modern nation is disfigured and ultimately torn; literally culminating in an island of matter floating away from the nation. From Angel Day's fabulous tip construction, to the 'The red ochre spectacle' of Mozzie Fishman's 'travelling cavalcade of religious zealots' as 'an astonishing modern day miracle of recycling' (120), *Carpentaria* is replete with alchemical transformations of the waste of the modern nation. For example:

On the spiritual road, which was indeed hard and bumpy, the life of these vehicles had been refashioned many times over. In an astonishing modern day miracle of recycling by those spiritual men of Fishman's convoy who had artisan hands and the minds of genius, using tools and parts found only in nature, all of these vehicles survived over thousands of the country's hardest rock and gravel. (120)

The alchemical ingenuity of desert car repairs has been addressed by Clarsen in her reading of *Bush Mechanics*. This 1998 documentary series showcases the car repair advice of five bush mechanics from Yuendumu in the Central Desert. Like Mozzie Fishman's convoy, where '[t]he motors were pieces of modern art held together with rusty wire and leather belts or whatever it took to keep the cars on the road' (143), *Bush Mechanics* constructs everything from break fluid and windscreen-wiper blades to mufflers and emergency clutch pads from a combination of materials on hand. Clarsen argues that these assemblages of waste matter of '[s]pare parts filed in collective memory, and scattered in old car wrecks along dirt tracks' suggests 'that technologies do not carry within themselves one fixed meaning and direct us to consider new ways to imagine the country we are told is "one Australia"' (Clarsen). *Carpentaria* moves away

from ‘one Australia’ most explicitly when the waste of the modern nation forms new islands that float away from the continent.

Carpentaria contests the contiguity of ‘one Australia’ on the level of spatiality through a shift from the singularity and coherence of the continent form towards the multiplicity and dispersal of islands. The alchemical arrangements of the waste of national modernity in *Carpentaria* become literally a move away from nation as the wreckage of cyclone ravaged Desperance (which with its Uptown, Eastside and Westside functions as an allegory of Australia) forms ‘an extraordinary floating island of rubbish’ (493). ‘The serpentine flotation’, an ‘embryonic structure’ (494) of matter floating and congealing is figured as a birth resonating with ‘the sounds of labour’ (494). This genesis metaphor is continued as it becomes a sustaining ‘new island’ (494), where ‘astonishing plants grew in profusion’. The centrality of the island metaphor to *Carpentaria* has been emphasized by Wright, who says ‘when I look at the novel it is like seeing a myriad of ideas that have created the same thing: islands’. The multiplicity of island forms, which form the matter of *Carpentaria* evoke the image of the archipelago, which Elizabeth McMahon has argued offers a model of ‘sustained inhabitation’ away from the border anxieties of the continent nation (McMahon 202)³. The archipelagic model of floating matter, set in motion by the fury of the cyclone—and as Bachelard assures us, ‘a poetics of the storm’ is ‘a poetics of anger’ (Bachelard *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* 16)—is the creation of an ancient regeneration far older than nation, mobilized by Wright to literally and metaphorically undo the form of nation through the creation of new islands.

The political weight and force of disobedient, alchemical and archipelagic matter such as that *Carpentaria* imagines has been taken up by Gail Jones in her theorization of the politics of hope and dreaming. Jones asks ‘[m]ight the metaphors of dreaming allow for, or even inaugurate, a social imaginary that includes the forms of daydreaming necessary to imagine a politics of hope?’ (Jones 19). *Carpentaria* concludes with Hope searching for Will, who she sees in her dreams, stranded on this floating island of rubbish. The fate of Hope and Will is left untold but the possibility the novel leaves open is perhaps this politics of hope—Hope searching for Will, on an assemblage of matter that is literally floating away from the nation.

The matter and hope of the future and the will to change it in *Carpentaria* is realized through furious elemental energies, alchemical and archipelagic rearrangements and regenerations of the waste matter of national modernity and a cyclical and ancient temporality that undoes the historical linear temporality of nation. Like Wright’s novel Knox’s coterminous *Dreamhunter* duet unfolds in the ‘not-quite’ allegorical space of nation and is characterized by a temporality of discontinuity and overlay. In *Dreamhunter*, a mineral consciousness, self-differentiating matter and alchemical magic of and as civil disobedience constitute the matter and hope of the future.

Centered around a magical place of discontinuous space and time, the *Dreamhunter* novels dream into existence a space outside of the cartographic space and historical time of nation. This spatial and temporal resistance at the core of the duet is forged from the underside of national modernity. A desert-like landscape of indeterminate distance, this place is called simply The Place. The Place, Wevers has argued, operates according to a ‘poetics of modernity’; where ‘The Place, as well as the commodity culture built on it, represents the future in the past: what modernity can and has looked like’ (196). As with

Carpentaria and its treatment of the waste of the modern nation, *Dreamhunter* mobilizes The Place, as the dead underside of the colonial nation of Southland, to carve out a space of resistance to a totalitarian state. The Place is a space of suspended temporality: in The Place, ‘leaves don’t fall from the trees here unless someone walking by brushes them off. Nothing is alive, and nothing is dead’ (Knox, *Dreamquake* 451). In its stopped and overturned time, The Place is outside the linear temporality of the nation. ‘[O]nly continuous from the outside, not from within’ (Knox, *Dreamhunter* 165) and ‘out of the world of longitude and latitude’ (10), the Place eludes the nation’s institutional gaze in its resistance to being coherently mapped. Institutional control is further circumvented through the Place’s use of dreams as appeals toward civil disobedience.

The duet’s politics of fantasy becomes explicit in *Dreamquake* when it is revealed that dreams from The Place are The Place’s attempts—as a ‘mineral consciousness’—to communicate future injustices of an increasingly centralized, corrupt and punitive government: ‘It tried by the only means available to it – the memories of the lives its territory had encompassed – to tell anyone who would listen’ (*DQ* 478). The most horrific message from the mineral consciousness of The Place is the ‘dreadful dream’ Buried Alive, the nightmare the duet’s protagonist Laura Hame infects hundreds with in order to spread the message of the Place. A visceral experience of someone trapped in a coffin, Buried Alive is the Place’s attempts to say ‘there is something underneath all of this, someone buried alive’ (*DQ* 478), an encryption of the cost of national modernity to, as Laura’s father Tziga Hame puts it, ‘Let them see that their dreams are ghosts and the place is a tomb, a tomb of the future’ (*DH* 284). The narration of this dream is a script of cinematic terror:

He began to scream. The reverberations of his screams gave him the whole shape of the box, narrow-walled, low-roofed, unyielding. Its lid was screwed down hard and would not give. Earth was piled over the lid, airless earth, pressing down hard.

He screamed and moaned, he fought the box, in a frenzy of terror. He struggled and scuffled, strained his head up so that it beat against the coffin’s lid.

[...] The dream went on. Laura knew it did. The buried man suffered. He waited to die in a mess of blood and filth. (*DH* 389-390)

In its ‘frenzy of terror’ and ‘mess of blood and filth,’ this dream, and indeed all the dreams that can be found or ‘caught’ in the Place is deployed to challenge corrupt and malevolent authorities, and reveals the violence, horror and waste buried beneath national modernity.

The function of dreams of The Place as resisting national modernity is most apparent in the dream contentment. A potentially epidemic dream, contentment turns people into ‘serene sleepwalkers’ (*DQ* 398). Contentment and nation are explicitly conflated through the thoughts of the dream’s focaliser: ‘he was the architect of the prosperity of his nation’ and ‘Whatever wrongs he’d committed were only, in the end, part of this loveliness, this life he’d made, this nation he’d shaped...’ (*DQ* 401) *Dreamhunter* insists that contentment is the most insidious and the most dangerous aspect of nation; in the duet it is discontent and disobedience to authorities – enabled through the particular magic and dreams of place - that change the future.

The Place as this space of discontent and disobedience, confounding to the time and gaze of nation, is created through generational memory and an affinity with soil. A magical song called The Measures, passed down through the Hame family, combined with their ‘peculiar[ity] about dirt and sand and stones’ (*DH* 96) works to raise a golem-like servant from the ground. This servant is controlled by arrangements of letters NOWN inscribed upon it. Reading literally, Laura refers to the sandman she summons as Nown. Nown is sculpted and called forth from the matter of the place in a peculiarly overdetermined way – it is revealed towards the end of *Dreamquake*, when Laura discovers the letters N and O carved into the ground at the borders of the Place that the Place is a Nown, that ‘someone had brought the land itself to life and tried to make a slave of it’ (*DQ*314). Created out of elemental matter, an echo of alchemical holy-grail of the homunculus or artificial man, the Hames’ successions of golems are overdeterminedly alchemical figures. Indeed, Nown’s material challenge extends to the level of the letter. As an arrangement of letters from the present as the now to known—noun, thing, subject or object—Nown moves towards either non-existence or non or self-determination of own.

As a sandy prosopopoeia, Laura Hame’s creation of one of these golems can be read as raising up and differentiating of the matter of place. After completing the spell, Laura saw:

the back of the head she had shaped stir, a crack appear in the sand where what she had shaped came to an end, and the earth itself began. Laura watched Nown lift his face from the riverbed. He came up shaking off clots of sand. Only not *all* of the sand fell. Instead it sorted itself out, some grains rising like steam against Nown’s face settling there and shaping it. He turned towards Laura, his skin of sand still rearranging itself. She saw his skin move to make sharp ridges of an eyelid. She saw his nostrils becomes dark and deep, then flare, as though he drew breath. She saw his lips split in two, and teeth rise up before the hollow of his mouth, and sand run from the hollow, leaving only enough for a tongue... (*DH* 367-368)

As the ground raised up, this sandman is instrumental in the task of resisting the nightmarish future of the nation. A Deleuzian model of differentiation reveals a further layer of the sandman’s elemental resistance, that is as matter’s challenge to form. In *Difference and Repetition*, Giles Deleuze says of differentiation that ‘it is as if the ground rose to the surface, without ceasing to be ground’ (28), emphasising the destructive power the matter of differentiation holds over form:

all the forms are disintegrated when they are reflected in [the] rising ground [of matter]...the rising ground is no longer below, it acquires an autonomous existence; the form reflected in the ground is no longer a form but an abstract line acting directly upon the soul. When the ground rises to the surface, the human face decomposes in this mirror in which both determinations and indeterminate combine in a single determination which ‘makes’ the difference... It is better to raise up the ground and dissolve the form. (28-29)

The form of the raised up ground in *Dreamhunter*, then, is differentiated matter that acquires an autonomous existence to undo temporal, geographic and economic claims of national modernity and resists the nationalizing force of epidemic contentment. Even

within the seemingly solid form of this sandman figure matter is foregrounded as being at the heart of things. The last image of the final sandman transformed into glass, describes how ‘The setting sun shone through his glass body, and showed up the dark matter at its heart – his heart, a rust stained rock from the track bed’ (*DQ* 501). Here, again, matter is at the heart of change. This ‘dark matter’, metaphorically Nown’s affective connection to the Hame family, compels this golem to rise up out of the ground and overturn national contentment.

The duet concludes with the question ‘Was the ground angry? Was it trying to get up?’ (*DQ* 507) As the anger of the ground trying to get up and shake off inhumane and violent forms of national modernity, *Dreamhunter* imagines a particular substance of Place and invokes matter as and of the heart of elemental substance to unravel the time and form of a nightmarish national future.

In *Dreamhunter* as in *Carpentaria* imaginative intensity informs the particular matter of the novels’ challenge to nation. Taking the regional particularity from *Carpentaria* and the self-determining matter of *Dreamhunter*, the novels can be seen to further specify each other. Reading *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter* together enables the regional differences foregrounded by each to be further cast into relief as evolutions of islands, or a face emerging from the soil, where both texts erode the face of nation in a prosopopoeia of region. The politics of the fantastic intensity that compels both novels is further illuminated by Bachelard’s assertion of the necessity of imaginative excess and his alignment of the dynamism of imaginative matter with justice:

How unjust criticism is when it sees in language only an ossified form of an inner experience! On the contrary, language is always a little ahead of thought and a little more impetuous than love...Without this [imaginative] exaggeration, life cannot develop. Life always takes too much of everything in order to have enough. The imagination must take too much for thought to have enough. The will must imagine too much in order to realize enough. (253)

In their arrangements and rearrangements of matter, *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter* imagine too much: in *Carpentaria* so that Will might be found by Hope, in *Dreamhunter* so that the nightmares of the future might be overturned, and both so that the futures of these particular places might be realised away from the violent pasts of nations.

NOTES

¹ The lecture was published in *JASAL* Special Issue 2008: The Colonial Present.

² From an ecocritical standpoint it can be argued that in its elemental fury, *Carpentaria* phrases the ‘poetic of nature’ that Environmental Historian Libby Robin calls for when she declares that ‘[i]f we are to take nature seriously, there must be a poetic of nature as subject that counterbalances the overwhelming ‘objective’ voice favored by science’ (299).

³ For an exegesis of the political stakes of island versus archipelagic modes of inhabitation, see also McMahon, “Encapsulated Space: The Paradise-Prison of Australia’s Island Imaginary”, *Southerly* 65.1 (2005): 20-30.

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