

A Postcolonial Psychoanalytic Study of Indigenous Futurism in Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* and Marianne De Pierres' *Nylon Angel*

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Abstract—This article aims to critically assess the projection of 'Indigenous Futurism' by examining the select Australian young adult novels using Jaques Lacan's Anamorphosis from a postcolonial perspective. Ambelin Kwaymullina's speculative fiction *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* (2012) projects a futuristic Australia where the tribal people are seeking independence from a colonial authority. Similarly, the plot of Marianne de Pierres' *Nylon Angel* (2004) revolves around the issues of the marginalized people in Australia in a technodystopian world. The objective of this article is to critically examine these two speculative novels using Lacan's anamorphosis concept to correlate how these authors have connected the contemporary issues in Australia and also how they have speculated the issues of the Aboriginal people in Australia in the future. Additionally, this article also aims to highlight how they have projected the 'Indigenous Futurism' from an Aboriginal man's perspective using anamorphosis.

Index Terms—postcolonial psychoanalysis, Indigenous futurism, stolen generation, anamorphosis, posthumanism

I. INTRODUCTION

'Indigenous futurism' is a cultural movement propounded by Grace L. Dillon. This cultural movement strives to use the arts and other media to express the future of indigenous people. The outcome of this cultural movement is visible in literature, films, video games, comics, virtual reality and other forms of media. Lagace (2018) emphasizes the significance of 'Indigenous Futurism' in video games and also how it actually connects the culture and politics of the colonized nations. This movement tries to reconnect the past indigenous traditional stories and knowledge with the present and the future. This movement seeks to link the present and the future with historical folklore and traditional knowledge. The representative works of this artistic movement contain themes of imperialism, genocide, and environmental hazards.

Indigenous Futurism is also a style of art that envisions a sophisticated technology society for the Aboriginal people. For Instance, in *Black Panther*, the story revolves around the technologically superior country of Wakanda, which is ruled by an Aboriginal king named T'Challa. The movie's key idea is 'Afrofuturism', since it makes an assumption that the native Africans are living in a technologically developed nation. Indigenous writers have embraced the topic of 'Indigenous futurism' as a tool of resistance against futuristic colonialism. This cultural movement brings the ancient customs of the Aboriginal people back together in a fantastic, technologically sophisticated future. For instance, in *Black Panther*, the Wakandans engage in a rite where they consume a heart-shaped plant to meet their ancestors before embracing the throne. "Communicating with the ancestral spirit is an important aspect in the African tradition as it connects the past and present lives" (Vijayasekaran & Alan, 2022, p. 9). In addition to this, they also have the practice of conducting a ritual fight to determine who the king is.

This article stresses on how the select Australian young adult fiction writers have employed "Indigenous Futurism" in their works which is similar to 'Afrofuturism'. This trend primarily promotes the mythology and traditions of the indigenous people in a futuristic setting. For instance, there is a myth in Australia that the continent's mountains and landscapes were shaped by supernatural entities with a close affinity with the natural world. Some Indigenous Australians still hold the concept that the ancient serpents created and guarded their land and were therefore venerated as gods. This is because their beliefs are deeply rooted along with their land and culture and this reference is given by the Aboriginal Australian writer Ambelin Kwaymullina in her young adult fiction *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*.

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The effects of colonization are frequently depicted in science fiction, a subgenre of speculative fiction in general. For instance, the colonization of Tasmania is allegorically depicted in H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. Similarly, Eubanks (2018) in her thesis examines the employment of Indigenous Futurism and the impact of racism in Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* which is a science fantasy novel. In this context, *Nylon Angel* (2004), a sci-fi novel written by Marianne de Pierres is chosen for this study. As Ambelin Kwaymullina's work extensively dealt with mythical representations of Australian Aboriginal people, Marianne de Pierres in her *Nylon Angel* projects the issues of the Aboriginal people in the slums who are victimized by the media and gang lords in future. However, the author places a strong emphasis on science-related catastrophes. This critical comparison is the central theme of this article and it is going to be scrutinized through the psychoanalytic lens.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Weaver (2007) in the thesis titled "At the Ends of the World: Apocalypse and Australian Speculative Fiction" examines the theme of Apocalypse in the Australian context by examining the global issues like nuclear war, environmental degradation and the impact of colonialism by analyzing select Australian speculative novels.

Quealy-Gainer (2014) in the review article summarizes the plot of Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* (2012) in which the protagonist Ashala is betrayed by Justin whom she considered as her lover and also how she escapes from the doctor employed by the colonial government to capture her tribal people.

Murphy (2016) in the article titled "For Love of Country Apocalyptic Survivance in Kwaymullina's Tribe Series" critically analyzes the impact of apocalypse and colonialism in a dystopian future as represented in the tribe series *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* (2012), *The Disappearance of Ember Crow* (2013) and *The Foretelling of Georgie Spider* (2015).

Turcotte (2018) in the article titled "The Caribbean Gothic Down Under: Caribbean Influences in Pierres' Parrish Plessis Novels" examines the concepts like- Postcolonial theory, Caribbean culture and Indigenous Spirituality in the select works of Marianne de Pierres.

These are some of the research articles related to the select Australian speculative novels in which the authors have highlighted the concepts like apocalypse, postcolonialism and indigenous spirituality.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Numerous scholars have critically examined the idea of a future apocalypse in Australian young adult novels, but the purpose of this article is to critically examine the select works using the anamorphosis concept to psychoanalytically interpret how both the authors have conjectured the problems of a futuristic Australia from a postcolonial standpoint. This article primarily focuses on how the Australian Aboriginal author Kwaymullina has highlighted the concept of indigenous futurism in her writing and how it is diverged from that of the work of the non-Aboriginal author Pierres.

Research Questions

1. How the select Australian writers have exhibited the present crises of Australian Aboriginal people in their works?
2. What are the major themes employed by the select Australian and non-Aboriginal writers to speculate the futuristic issues of Australia?
3. How an anamorphic study of the select young adult fiction could speculate the futuristic issues of Australian Aboriginal people?

IV. POSTCOLONIAL PSYCHOANALYSIS

Fanon was the pioneer in the field of postcolonial psychoanalysis. In his *Black Skin White Masks*, he expounded on Algeria's colonial legacy and prevailing racial politics. Fanon's psychoanalytic investigation was mainly focused on the racial discrimination and the affliction faced by the black men in Algeria. As Fanon (2008) argues that a Negro child having grown up in a normal family would become abnormal when it is exposed to the white world.

In the 1920s and 1930s, medical professionals looked at the physical and psychological health of the colonized people, but many psychiatrists came to the conclusion that European men suffered from guilt more than black men, and that they were also lazy, anxious and indulgent. Additionally, numerous critics who have made eminent contributions to the study of postcolonial psychoanalysis include Homi K. Bhabha, Ashis Nandy, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. Greedharry (2008) argues that psychoanalysis is said to be a pertinent 'reoccurring methodology' in the context of colonial criticism and postcolonial theory (p. 4).

In the colonized countries, many psychoanalysts began to explore about the psyche of the colonizer and the colonized aftermath the European colonization. In the Australian context, numerous Australian psychoanalysts have investigated the effects of colonization in this setting by closely examining the Australian literature. For instance, Ravenscroft (2013), an Australian psychoanalyst in her *The Postcolonial Eye* examined the select Australian novels through a psychoanalytic perspective. The Australian Aboriginal people are facing numerous issues even after the end of the colonial era and this is expressed by several authors in their works. In addition to this, many contemporary Australian writers are addressing the Aboriginal people's issues through young adult literature. Two of such young adult novels

chosen for this psychoanalytical study are Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* and Marianne de Pierres' *Nylon Angel*. These speculative novels are going to be scrutinized with anamorphosis which emphasizes the significance of the underlying meaning (gaze) rather than the straight view (eye).

V. AN ANAMORPHIC STUDY OF *THE INTERROGATION OF ASHALA WOLF* AND *NYLON ANGEL*

A. *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*

The psychoanalytic method of "Anamorphosis" developed by Lacan was initially used to analyze paintings and other visual media, but it is now frequently used to examine literary texts. An anamorphic image provides a distorted image when we perceive it from a normal viewpoint but the intended image of the artist can be viewed in a curved mirror or when we view it from a different angle. Likely, the same context can be applied in the literary texts too. In this research article, this concept is applied in the chosen young adult fictions to speculate the futuristic issues of the Australian Aboriginal people from a postcolonial perspective. The select young adult novels may appear to be 'young adult fiction' or 'science fiction' from a normal viewpoint but when we look at them from the perspective of the native Australian in a postcolonial setting, we might learn about potential crises that the Australian natives may face in the future.

Ambelin Kwaymullina is an Australian Aboriginal (Palyku) writer. In her young adult fiction, *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* (2012), the protagonist Ashala fights to free herself and her tribe from the control of the colonial government and a crazy doctor named Neville Rose. Kwaymullina has used the word 'Illegals' in this text, which is what the colonial administration used to calumniate the tribal people. The author uses this term to allude to some Australian settlers' colonial bias. She claims in her text that the "Illegals" (natives) went away from their houses before turning fourteen just to avoid going to the prison camp. This is a subtle representation of the stolen generation in Australia which was a serious issue that existed before the end of the colonial era in Australia because the European settlers kidnapped the Aboriginal children to annihilate their identity. As Greedharry (2008) emphasizes, a child grows only by looking at its family and the family members and she adds that the surrounding determines the character of a child. In this respect, when the Aboriginal child is removed from its family it would lose its identity.

The issues of the Aboriginal people such as climate change, colonial discrimination, inequality and stolen generation are clearly elucidated in this young adult fiction and this could be explored through an anamorphic study from a native man's perspective. Additionally, the author Kwaymullina (2012) hypothesizes in this work of fiction that there will be only about seven cities in the future which is an allegorical representation of a gloomy future. Neville, the story's antagonist argues that he is imprisoning the "illegals" (tribes) in order to keep the cities in harmony and ensure that they never pose a threat to humanity. However, according to Ashala, the apocalypse would not occur because of the 'Illegals' (the tribal people), rather it would happen because of the people like Neville, which in the postcolonial context signifies that the world would come to an end because of the political ascendancy of the imperial powers. Neville believes that the existence of 'illegals' will jeopardize the equilibrium of the planet. This represents the impact of colonialism, which occurred in Australia when European settlers took control of their lands after the Indigenous people's enslavement and it also projects how the authority would pose a threat to the freedom of the Aborigines in future.

Despite Ashala's imprisonment, she manages to communicate to her friend and the 'serpent' god through dream walking. These are some of the mythical fantasy elements employed by the author to try and communicate to the readers effectively and she tries to retrieve the Australian myth about 'serpent' god as the Australian Aborigines have a belief that the Australian lands are created by a huge serpent which is a symbol of deity for them. As Sommerova (2013) states that the Aboriginal people had their own customs, traditions and beliefs before the invasion of the Europeans. Apart from the mythical images, the author has imagined a futuristic Australia in which the tribal youths are born with supernatural abilities. This could be compared to the plot of X-men series through an anamorphic study as the mutants are considered to be marginalized by some of the white men in that film series. As Lund (2015) argues that Marvel Comics' mutants have been represented as 'others'.

B. *Nylon Angel*

The plot of this fiction revolves around the protagonist Parish Plessis and her struggle against a gang lord Jamon Mondo in a media dominated society in a cyberpunk world. The plot of this fiction may appear to be a science fiction due to its inclusion of themes like posthumanism and urban fantasy. However, this article argues that this fiction could be analyzed as a postcolonial speculative fiction through an anamorphic reading as this fiction speculates the advanced forms of colonialism in future. According to the Lacanian notion of Anamorphosis, a shift in the perspective could deliver us several meanings. In this context, this research article aims to identify the issues of the Aboriginal slum people represented in this fiction through a native person's viewpoint. For instance, there are two cities in this fiction in which the Tert is a slum where the poor people use it as a residential place and Viva is the city of residence for the rich people. By examining this story from the perspective of an Australian Aboriginal man, it is possible to draw parallels between it and the current state of affairs in Australia, where a large number of Aboriginal people live in cramped quarters due to inadequate housing facilities.

The setting of *Nylon Angel* is a techno-dystopian society where crime lords and the media employ streetpunks and cyborgs to assault the populace and raise their ratings. Jamon Mondo, a crime boss wants to take over Tert city, but a

local named Daac (Dark) fights to defend his place from the cyberpunk culture. He asserts that “Tert” is his people’s property, and he vows to recover it. In the words of Weaver (2011), “To portray the sinister effects of a world dominated by multinationals, cyberpunk often employs a dystopian setting, almost invariably imagining a world worse than today” (p. 161). Numerous characters in this fiction are depicted as genetically modified hybrids and also humans altered with bio-robotic experiments. Despite the projection of an urban fantasy setting, the author has also introduced the indigenous tribes as the protectors of the Tert society. Death, in the Kurdaitcha people’s tradition is brought on by bad spirits or spells. The Kurdaitcha men were brought in to execute the offenders and convicted felons. This reference which the author has inserted into the story should be examined from the viewpoint of a native.

This fiction digs deep into the issues of the Aboriginal people when Parish enters Tert. Marianne de Pierres emphasizes the advantageous position of the Viva city people, which alludes to the white people in Australia. The projection of media control over the slums in this fiction is one of the futuristic perceptions of the author. In a technodystopian world, how the poor people would be affected by the media and megacorporation are exposed through the medium of this speculative fiction. The author tries to project the pathetic situation of the fishing families belonging to the ‘Tert’. They are only provided with polluted lands and contaminated water and this made them to suffer with severe health issues. In addition to this, the author also emphasizes that the constructions and pools in the futuristic Australia which are built on the old mortgages and backyards and people might not know what lies beneath their land. In this respect it could be considered a reminiscent of Australian Aboriginal past through an anamorphic study. It is a known fact that several restaurants and buildings are constructed in Australia in the places which were earlier used as Aboriginal prisons.

The slum people in the ‘Tert’ are employed as underground workers as they believed that the use of human labour would be cheaper rather than employing humanoids for this work and this represents the poverty of the slum people in the future which is also one of the major concerns of the Australian Aboriginal people. The people of Tert are ready to clean the place which is previously a place for feral creatures due to its unclean condition. As Junankar et al. (1991) emphasized in their article that the poverty level and the unemployment rate of the Australian Aboriginal people are higher than that of the non-Aboriginal Australian people.

VI. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A. *Depiction of Contemporary Politics*

This section of this article focuses on how the select young adult novels could be associated with the contemporary politics and issues of Australia through an anamorphic perception. For instance, the concept of stolen generation is projected in Kwaymullina’s *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* in a subtle way. In addition to this, the impact of Aboriginal people’s custodial deaths in Australia is also projected in this fiction as one of the chapters in this fiction deals with the death of Ashala’s sister, which is considered to be a custodial death but there is a twist in the story. The author wants to allude to the contemporary politics and issues of Australian Aboriginal people through her work. As several Australian journals suggest that the rate of Aboriginal people’s custodial deaths are higher than that of the non-Aboriginal people in the last ten years.

Similarly, Marianne de Pierres in her *Nylon Angel* highlights about the polluted soil, contaminated water and the emission from the industries and how it is affecting the marginalized people in the slum areas which could be associated with the contemporary situation of Aboriginal people in Australia. Allam (2020) in the guardian article states that the Aboriginal people in Australia have below 1% of all water licences in Australia and it is considered to be a form of economic and cultural dispossession. This aspect could be examined through an anamorphic study because Pierres has projected the water contamination as a major threat for the natives belonging to Tert which allegorically reflects the present Australian crisis as we all know that in the contemporary age, the Australians are facing environmental hazards including deforestation, clearing of agricultural lands, illegal fishing and the infrastructure development in the coastal areas. In addition to this, the Australian Aboriginal people are currently lacking basic household in many places of Australia. As Hudec (2013) argues that the indigenous people are still relying on government for basic household facilities and they definitely have an inferior housing facility system when compared to the household system of non-Indigenous people.

B. *A Comparative Analysis of Major Themes*

Kwaymullina’s *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* highlights the cultural concepts of Australian Aboriginal people like Australian myths, Indigenous tradition and Dreamtime Storytelling. In addition to this, the author has also highlighted the impact of ‘stolen generation’ which is one of the major issues of the Aboriginal people. The concepts like ‘Dreamtime Storytelling’ and ‘Indigenous Futurism’ helps to reconnect the past with the present and the usage of mythical images and references makes a connection to revive the culture of native inhabitants. This fiction also tries to reconnect the myths of the Indigenous people with the present. This implies a meaning that the author has a deeper connection with the Australian myths and the Indigenous traditions and she tries to revive the culture of Aboriginal people in the futuristic context.

On the other hand, in Pierres’ *Nylon Angel*, the author has projected the impact of genetic experiments and the usage of cyborgs as a replacement for humans. This fiction envisions that how the artificial intelligence can be blended along

with the humans like the implantation of maps in human's retina as depicted in the novel. As Nayar (2014) states about the depiction of cyborgs in the film *Terminator*, in which Arnold Schwarzenegger played the role of a cyborg who develops the traits and feelings of a human person in the Terminator franchise's follow-ups. This is one of the pertinent futuristic aspects that how the human body could be blended with the machine in the futuristic world. However, this fiction also has the elements of Aboriginal clan names and their practice which is also one of the features of cyberpunk fiction, in the words of Cavallaro (2000).

Classical mythology, voodoo, spiritualism, neo-Christian cults and a whole theology of artificial intelligences constantly interact with modern and postmodern technologies. Cyberpunk has not only redefined current understandings of science fiction. It has actually forged a new language and image repertoire to describe and negotiate contemporary culture in relation to both the future and the past, and by stressing the enduring hold of mythology and fantasy (p. xii).

VII. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it is evident that Kwaymullina (Australian Aboriginal writer) has used "Indigenous Futurism" as a cultural movement to bridge the past, the present, and the future. She has incorporated Australian mythology and indigenous culture into the storyline of this work of fiction. On the other hand, the contemporary issues of the Australian Aboriginal people like water poisoning and subpar living facilities and also the science-related problems are speculated in *Nylon Angel*. Through an anamorphic study, this research article claims that both the authors are highlighting the present crises and also speculating the futuristic scenario of the Australian cities from their perspectives but from the viewpoint of an Aboriginal man, Ambelin Kwaymullina appears to be much more connected to the myths of her homeland. However, the Aboriginal people's household issues and the scientific-catastrophes are highlighted by Pierres in her *Nylon Angel*.

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