

The Narrative of Resistance and Healing in the Indigenous Australian writers, Sally Morgan and Alexis Wright

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If we consider the indigenous narrative as a response to historical and cultural trauma, then the fiction of the individual of having 'lost' a culture blends with the collective experience of attempted 'erasure.' This trauma brought about by the Invasion of 1798 (led by Captain Cook) becomes the center of the narrative attempt to confront and heal the wounds of culture 'annihilation.' We are a storytelling species. We live and die for the stories we tell. Storytelling is the primary ontology of the human intellect and part of our cognitive 'DNA.' These versions of reality that express almost all human emotions from hope to nightmare, define our conscious and unconscious existence. When Lukacs explained that storytelling in the epic form focused on the quest for origins, he created a self-reflective mimetic apparatus for the conversation about narrative. When Brooks writes about narrative deceptions and when Harrari considers that some narrative lead to collective fictions based on 'false memories,' they both raise the issue of what is narrative truth and does that truth even exist. Or is all truth 'fiction.' When Princess Diana died, people worldwide was grieving and weeping for her death, which I found incomprehensible until I read Andrew Greeley's piece in the NYT, suggesting that this wasn't unusual. It was the audience reaction to a world-wide fiction about a princess; she was a character in a story. Greeley's argument makes sense. Narrative is a redemptive act, in the case of Morgan and Wright who retell and reframe the trauma of personal and collective cultural wounding. Narrative becomes a healing act. Morgan and Wright by reclaiming the right to a narrative voice, structure and syntax, heal the cultural wounds inflicted by the Invasion. By telling those stories, they reject an identity destroyed and created by colonial power, and they heal the alienation through connections with ancestors, earth and the dreamtime. In Morgan's case, her main character, Sally, has been told that she is Indian and not 'aboriginal.' She and her family lead a wounded and alienated life. However, when Sally begins to question her identity and finally pushes her mother and grandmother to tell their stories, the healing process begins, and Sally and her family embrace their ancestral past and present. The stories told by her mother and grandmother create a healing environment. Wright refuses to be limited by time and space, so that her narrative moves outside of the limits and includes conversations with ancestors who walk alongside the characters; Wright abolishes the western concept of time within her narrative; her use of ancestors is not in the Hollywood cinematic sense; instead they are an immanent presence.