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THE USE OF GOTHIC ELEMENTS AS MANIFESTATIONS OF REGAINING ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IN KIM SCOTT'S *BENANG: FROM THE HEART*

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Abstract: *In the latter part of the 20th century, Australian Aboriginal writers began to use a previously avoided mode of fiction which depicted their people as monsters and brutes: the Gothic. Deconstructing and reversing the self-other dichotomy inherent in this tradition, many writers attempted to use the characteristics of the Gothic mode to illustrate the plight of Aboriginal people. This essay analyses how Kim Scott in his novel* Benang: From the Heart *abuses the traditionally Gothic elements to demonstrate the difficulties of the Aborigines' identity formation and the recovery of a lost cultural identity.*

Key words: *Aboriginal Gothic, Kim Scott, Benang, the Other, identity formation*

Gothic as a mode of fiction dominated the British literary scene in the 18th and 19th centuries, precisely at the time of the explorations of the Australian continent. Australia and its peculiarities provided abundant source material for the mode, but since Aboriginal people were represented as the monsters and brutes in these works, Aboriginal writers avoided this mode of expression. However, in the latter part of the 20th century, Aboriginal writers began to rewrite the form and use it for their own purposes: deconstructing and reversing the self-other dichotomy inherent in the Gothic tradition. Many writers, e.g., Kim Scott in his novel *Benang: From the Heart*, attempted to use the characteristics of the Gothic mode to illustrate the plight of Aboriginal people and the difficulties of their identity formation.

According to Turcotte (1998), Gothic is "a literary form which emphasizes the horror, uncertainty and desperation of the human experience, often representing the solitariness of that experience through characters trapped in a hostile

environment, or pursued by an unspecified or unidentifiable danger" (p. 1). Australia was perceived as a haunting place starting from its discovery, and due to the Gothic's obsession with the unknown and mysterious, it became a subject of Gothic literature. The grotesque and bizarre nature of the continent corresponded to the fears and themes of the mode. These themes include "isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown. And for each, the possibility of transformation, of surviving the dislocation, acts as a driving hope" (Turcotte, 1998, p. 1). Althans (2010a) argues that this initial stage of the Gothic presence in Australia can be called 'imperial Gothic' and 'colonial Gothic,' as these modes "served the purpose of justifying colonialism as well as affirming and perpetuating the colonizer's discourse of legitimate power" (p. 13). The perceived savage, that is, the Aboriginal person, acted as the "repressed 'Other,' representing society's dark underside" (Althans, 2010a, p. 13). In this way, the white versus black dichotomy was maintained in the mode of imperial Gothic, and the main fear of people revolved around the possible threat of savagery.

Turcotte (1998) argues that "the history of the Gothic in Australia is the story of change and adaptation" (p. 11). Indeed, the British tradition of gothic fiction was soon adapted to the Australian milieu, and a unique type of 'Australian Gothic' developed. Althans claims that "Gothic fiction was soon embraced as a possibility to express the colonial experience of isolation, disorientation and hardship" (1998, p. 15). The focus centered around the topics of convicts and the Aborigines, specific to the Australian life. Marcus Clarke, Barbara Baynton and Henry Lawson are writers who experimented with this particular mode. Turcotte maintains that even though these writers "may have insisted on the realist dimension of their work [. . .] their exploration of the anxieties of the convict system, the terrors of isolated stations at the mercy of vagrants and nature, the fear of starvation or of becoming lost in the bush, are distinctly Gothic in effect" (1998, p. 3). Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the emergence of the Australian Gothic was an innovation, its mode of portrayal still corresponded to the British ideological tradition, as many of these works portrayed the Aboriginal people and their culture as the 'other' that is fearful and monstrous. It is precisely this aspect of the Gothic that prevented Aboriginal writers to use this mode of fiction as a possible medium of expressing their identity. According to Turcotte (1998), the Gothic mode

> generally represented for them a disabling, rather than an enabling discourse. In obvious terms, the Aboriginal peoples were themselves constructed as the monstrous figures haunting the Australian landscape, specters more frightening than any European demon, because they

> represented a physical threat to settlers and to theories of enlightenment which believed in the civilizing presence of Whites. (pp. 9-10)

However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, Aboriginal writers began to use the Gothic by reversing its binary oppositions, and by deconstructing the perceived monstrous nature of the Aboriginal people. One of the most important parts of Aboriginal Gothic is magical realism combining "the magical and the realist, into a new perspective of the world, thus offering alternative ways and new approaches to reality" (Althans, 2010a, p. 26). As magical realism frequently appears in the works of and about Aboriginals, it is many times referred to as 'Aboriginal realism,' or, 'maban reality.' This latter term was coined by Mudrooroo, one of the first people applying the Gothic mode to their writings. He derived the phrase from the Aboriginal shaman figure, the maban. Maban reality in Mudrooroo's understanding denotes

> a uniquely Aboriginal reality which is contrasted with white scientific reality imposed on the various Aboriginal peoples of Australia through imperial power. [. . .] Accepting the supernatural as part of everyday reality, maban reality acts as counterreality, grounded in the earth or country, to a rational worldview and the demands of a European realism. (Althans, 2010a, p. 28)

Althans argues that this maban reality fuses the Aboriginal tradition and the white reality by recapturing and continuing the native tradition, and questioning the validity of European ideas. When the European Gothic tradition is permeated by this maban reality, a unique style of Aboriginal Gothic appears (2010a, p. 28). In the Aboriginal Gothic, the roles are reversed, and the white presence becomes the monstrous figure, the source of terror. In Althans' words, "the subversive and transgressive qualities of the European Gothic are unearthed and turned against the most notorious Gothic perpetrator, the white invader" (2010a, p. 29). Turcotte (2009) also argues that the writers engaging in Aboriginal Gothic

> use a type of Gothic tone to alert us to the sinister side of Australian history, in works that both refute the notion of a history that began with European occupation as well as insist in the acknowledgement of the violent specters that haunt the relationship between Black and white Australia. (pp. 361-362)

Kim Scott's novel *Benang* is a great example for the Aboriginal Gothic tradition, as it focuses on distinctively Gothic concerns: "identity fragmentation, psychic and bodily disintegration, difficult liminal states, transgression of

boundaries, and spatial oppressions" (Ng, 2007, p. 149). According to Althans (2010b), the picture on the novel's front cover (titled "European Subjugation") already invites a Gothic reading, as it depicts "zombified shadowy figures standing surrounded by blazing flames, as if to be burned at stake [. . .] set against a pitch-black background" (p. 105). The critic argues that the picture "relates colonization to the Gothic – a demonic covenant which [. . .] Kim Scott in his novel destroys by subversing its discursive binaries and ideological flaws and transforming them into powerful strategies of reclaiming indigenous identity" (2010b, p. 103). Indeed, the great innovation of the novel lies in the fact that it reverses the binary opposition of the white master and the indigenous subject to illustrate the recovery of a lost cultural identity. The abuse of Gothic elements to demonstrate Harley's quest for identity and search for a past exposes the monstrosity of the white invader and the need for cultural survival.

As in the traditional Gothic stories, Harley's journey starts with the discovery of documents, containing terrible secrets. Nevertheless, Althans argues that this initial stage of the story already transgresses and resists the traditions of the British Gothic fiction, as here, the manuscripts do not embody the reliability of the written word and the unreliability of orality. In *Benang*, "the whiteness of paper is spurned and Aboriginal identity is regained. Accordingly, one of the major themes of the novel is the problematic role historic records played in silencing Aboriginal voices in a Gothic incarceration of the mind" (2010b, p. 106). Althans further argues that this denial of the credibility and legitimacy of found manuscripts does not mean that Gothic tradition is denied: it is rather a denial of the rigid dichotomies of the literary mode, hence "the return to orality must be seen as a means to overcome both white historiography and the legacies of colonial Gothic fiction in a transformative defiance" (2010b, p. 106). As orality plays a significant part in Aboriginal culture, the rejection of white storytelling indicates a rejection of white influence and a return to the native traditions.

The discovered papers testify to the general racist attitudes of the whites and their attempts to eradicate the native blood from Australia. As the narrator puts it, in order to justify the actions of the whites, "it was necessary to believe that the land's people and ways were inferior, and to ensure that there was proof of that" (Scott, 1999, p. 312). Eugenics was a prevalent idea in the first part of the twentieth century in Australia, and it was applied as a supposed solution to the 'Native Problem.' In the novel, Kim Scott incorporated A. O. Neville's – a Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Western Australia between 1936 and 1940 – ideas "of improving Aboriginal people through removal of half-caste children, of encouraging whites to procreate with Aboriginals to destroy the indigenous people, and of subjugating them in all ways possible" (Strelau, 2000). Neville writes that

"as I see it, what we have to do is uplift and elevate these people to our own plane" (Scott, 1999, p. 11). He believed that the key to the achievement of this elevation was "the need for both biological and social absorption. Dilute the strain. [. . .] Uplift a despised race" (Scott, 1999, p. 27), and that "the black will go white. [. . .] The position is analogous to that of a small stream of dirty water entering a larger clear stream. Eventually the colour of the smaller is lost" (Scott, 1999, p. 4). That is, even though he wanted to improve the conditions of the Aborigines, he firmly believed in the inferiority of the indigenous people, and strived to eradicate not only their culture, but also their physical traits.

In *Benang*, it is Ernest Solomon Scat who embodies the ideals inherent in eugenics. He is the representative of the white attitudes regarding natives, and his actions demonstrate the double nature of the white ideals: on the surface, his efforts seem worthy, but after a deep investigation, one can see that his efforts serve only the purposes of the whites. His figure is also reminiscent of the great Gothic creator characters, most notably the character of Victor Frankenstein. Like Frankenstein, Ern applies scientific methods to achieve his aims: to create a new species "in his own image" (Scott, 1999, p. 158), one that would be better and more perfect than anything existing so far. Ern wanted to "prove his superiority" (Scott, 1999, p. 44), and it was his ambition "to have the first white man in the family line" (Scott, 1999, p. 149). His creator figure is emphasized by the narrator as well: "The whole process appealed to Grandad's sense of himself as a scientist" (Scott, 1999, p. 28); "Whatever the confusions of my genealogy, there seems little doubt that my grandfather intended to be my creator" (Scott, 1999, p. 32). His efforts soon turn into obsession, like in Frankenstein's case: Ern is so obsessed with his project that he completely discards morality and ethics from his actions. He acts as a God-like figure in trying to create a white man from himself, and although he needs Aboriginal women for this purpose, the emphasis is on his act of creation. According to Slater (2005),

> Ern desires the 'first white man born' to be [. . .] motherless, a miracle of masculine auto-reproduction. Scott highlights that in the 'creation' of Harley the Nyoongar women's only capacity is as body machines, to serve as incubators and storehouses of the foetus [. . .]. Ern disposes of the women once they have a male child. He desires to be read as a scientist in the service of the nation.

Aboriginal women serve not only as means to achieve his aims, but they also serve as objects of his obsession, continuing the line of Gothic elements in the novel. According to Althans, "Ern creates a Gothic reality by supplanting his first wife Kathleen [. . .] with the younger Topsy, at first by letting her pass as Kathleen

[. . .] and soon afterwards by simply calling her his wife" (2010b, p. 109). The disposability of the two women in Ern's eyes symbolizes their objectification. Nevertheless, Ern's cruelty does not end with replacing one wife for another. His wives are further victimized by his obsession, as he is as much preoccupied with the white exterior of the women as with creating the first white man born. Initially, he only commands them to stay in the house, to wear gloves and to powder their faces (Scott, 1999, pp. 112, 154), but later he applies horrific methods to whiten Topsy: "Ern poured bleach into the hot water, placed his hands on the top of Topsy's head and pushed her under. Her glittering belly stood out from the water like an island, and little rivulets ran down it" (Scott, 1999, p. 158). Torturing Topsy in order to make her white ends in her death, and according to Selles (2007), with the metaphor of the baths, "the attempt at dissolution of the natives into whiteness is brought to the absurd, extreme limit" (p. 154). With the metaphor of bleach and the murder of Topsy, Scott illustrates how the assimilation policies of the whites end in the death of Aboriginal people. Moreover, Topsy's case also emphasizes the identity crisis of Aboriginal people caught between their true identity and the white ideals pertaining to them; and the problems resulting from the internalization of white views: "Topsy was a very determinate woman and so she tried only to exhale, as if by doing this she could expel that part of her that was deemed so unattractive [. . .]. Her face began to remind her of a kangaroo" (Scott, 1999, p. 368). The image of the kangaroo symbolizes how Topsy tries to be something else, and how her face loses its human characteristics despite the fact that the whiter look was believed to be more attractive.

Ern's merciless behavior regarding women does not end with Kathleen and Topsy, since he systematically abuses other Aboriginal women sexually. His son, Tommy experiences the maids coming and going after becoming pregnant, and many times witnesses his father's cruelty: "Tommy remembering the ropes on his mother, remembering the many girls and women" (Scott, 1999, p. 403). Ern's treatment of women reflects the general attitude of white males regarding Aboriginal women: men show no respect towards these women, they treat them as objects, and what is more, the women (especially young girls) are subjected to sexual abuse and venereal disease as a result of the atrocities. The sprees of the white men greatly affect the community of the Aborigines: "Whalers had touched this coast for years and years. It had become necessary to hide the women away" (Scott, 1999, p. 457). These women cannot hope protection form the official forces, either, as the policemen themselves often abuse them (Scott, 1999, p. 392).

The result of these sprees and sexual abuses are the half-caste children. Whether they are the results of the sprees, or the results of breeding experiments, half-caste children are the products of the ideals of white superiority. The figure of

the half-caste is reminiscent of the Gothic monsters, as the half-caste is something that seems unnatural at first, evoking fears. He or she is in an in-between category, with no clear definitions and with no clear sense of belonging. According to the 1933 *West Australian* article that Scott is quoting at the beginning of the novel, a half-caste is "merely a passing phase, an incident in history, an interesting event in what we call 'progress', a natural transmutation in what we know as cultural evolution. He will solve himself and disappear" (Scott, 1999, p. 4). The half-caste is the representation of the assimilationist policies, and of the genocide of Aborigines. According to Uncle Jack, the absorption of Aborigines is "another sort of murdering. What the law was doing. And helping people do. Killing Nyoongars really, making 'em white, making 'em hate 'emselves and pretend they're something else, keeping 'em apart" (Scott, 1999, pp. 337-338). The internalization of the ideas of white superiority results in the dissolution of Aboriginal communities.

Nevertheless, not only assimilationist policies meant death for the natives. The white presence on the island resulted in the murder of thousands of innocent people, simply because they were in the way of white colonizers. Whites killed without discrimination in the name of progress. Moreover, several of the killings were permitted by the police in the name of revenge (Scott, 1999, p. 175), although the allowed number of victims was always exceeded. Rotting corpses, skeletons and bones prevail in the novel as the signs of death creating a suspenseful, Gothic atmosphere; but the fact of killing as an accompaniment of white presence is silenced by the whites. The accounts of white and black relations are different on the basis of who is retelling them. According to the whites, "there was never any trouble. Never blood spilled, or a gun raised in anger" (Scott, 1999, p. 183). Uncle Jack's reaction to this reveals the reality: "Don't need guns when you got poisoned flour, poisoned waterholes" (Scott, 1999, p. 183). A highly detailed scene of killing emphasizes the cruelty of whites and the misery of innocent people: "In the little space between gunshots there was the sound of running feet, other bodies hitting the ground, screams and shouting. Small voices, too" (Scott, 1999, p. 186). The Gothic atmosphere is further developed with the image of the dead bodies: "when the wagon passed the tree next morning, the bodies still hung from the tree" (Scott, 1999, p. 187), and with the tree steeped in blood. According to Selles (2007), these images imprint the "massacre of a people and the guilt of another for ever in the Aborigines' and all Australians' consciousness" (p. 152).

The novel's symbolism is greatly illustrative of the whites' massacre of the Aboriginals, as several things connected to death are associated with the color of white (the whiteness of paper standing for the unreliability of the documents, and the consequent eradication of Aboriginals were already mentioned). The basis of

the fact that white is the color of death seems to be located in a Gothic-toned Aboriginal myth, according to which "the white ones were the dead returned; brains askew, memories warped, their very spirit set adrift" (Scott, 1999, p. 246); and "whether they were dead returned, or not, they brought death with them" (Scott, 1999, p. 493). Associating the color white instead of the color black with death is a great innovation of Scott, as he reverses the Gothic tradition of connecting blackness (and therefore natives) with the underworld. Here, the whites are the harbingers of death, and the allusion is further developed by identifying white as the color of death and disease:

> On either side of us trees, dying, turning white. Once there were many, many more of them, and they were alive, and they drank the rain and returned it to the sky. Now their roots shriveled in salt water and – thus betrayed – they raised bare and brittle limbs to the sky. (Scott, 1999, p. 34).

Here, the trees are clear references to the Aboriginal culture; and the whiteness of the trees stands for the white people's destruction and murder.

Associating whiteness with disease is further supported in the novel. First, the venereal diseases of the Aboriginal women originate from the white men. Moreover, there are several white (or alleged-to-be-white) characters who have various frightening and disgusting diseases:

> Daniel Coolman's body began to swell, and he could dress himself only with Harriette's help. [. . .] He had lost his upper lip through cancer, and so grew his moustache long, combing it down over his mouth and parting it when he ate. His food disappeared, as it were in encores of exits, entering his mouth as if between curtain. (Scott, 1999, pp. 338-339)

The passage demonstrates that the monstrous Gothic figure with no lips and with disease-ridden body is not an Aborigine – as it would be in a traditional Gothic story – but a white person. According to Slater (2005), Coolman is literally marked by racism, and his "adherence to pioneering values and capitalism results in his body becoming monstrous and riddled with disease." His cancer is the result of his fear of difference and of his unwillingness to go against white ideals.

The other figure in the story who is crippled is Sandy One, with a cancerous tongue: "There was the trouble with his tongue, at the tip. It was wooden and dead, the skin turning black and flaking all the time" (Scott, 1999, p. 251). His dead tongue is a symbol for his failure to speak up for his black family and for his overt racism. According to Slater (2005),

> Sandy's life has been so compromised by racism that he cannot speak out against prejudice, which results in his tongue becoming deadened, and useless as a weapon to defend his family. His body, like the body of the land, is a damaged body, its withering and deterioration a document of the effect of assimilation practices.

Althans (2010b) further argues that the disease-ridden organs are also indicators of the white inability to orality. Beside Daniel and Sandy One, she also mentions Ern, who, as a result of a stroke, is not capable of coherent speech. The critic claims that "this pathological rendering of white characters at once highlights the privilege orality holds in the story and further Gothicizes everything white within the story" (p. 111).

Last but no least, whiteness as a sign of death is also represented in the most evident symbol – in the presence of white bones in the text: "Bones, white like the skin of the young ones will be, the children flowing on, becoming paler and paler and just as dead" (Scott, 1999, p. 269). Althans argues that "the constant reference to the white bones of the massacred by white settlers [. . .] form a silent accusation of white murder" (2010b, p. 112). Moreover, one can argue that the quotation from the novel also stands for the cultural death of the Aboriginal people, as through assimilation, not only their skins will become whiter, but also their views and ideals, resulting in the death of Aboriginal traditions. Selles (2007) has another point of interpretation: he believes that the white bones together with the fact that the whites are said to be the ghosts of dead Aborigines, deconstruct the notion of whiteness: "the distinction between whiteness and blackness comes to be blurred when black corpses are said to have white bones, [. . .] which shows that there is no intrinsic, essential difference between 'blacks' and 'whites'" (p. 154). Indeed, this deconstruction of whiteness proves that race is socially constructed, and its definition is arbitrary. This can be observed in the novel as well, when one of the officials says: "And it is I, or my representatives, who decide who is or is not Aboriginal" (Scott, 1999, p. 123), and when "they who were thought so pale, must have suddenly appeared so dark" (Scott, 1999, p. 254).

The protagonist, Harley is born into this milieu as the product of his grandfather's cruel eugenic project. He suffers from identity crisis and from his in-between status, which produce bodily symptoms (in a truly Gothic fashion):

> As the first-born-successfully-white-man-in-the-family-line I awoke to a terrible pressure, particularly upon my nose and forehead, and I thought I was blind. In fact, the truth was there was nothing to see, except – right in front of my eyes – a whiteness which was surface only, with no depth, and very little variation. (Scott, 1999, p. 11).

Harley's sense of oppression undermines Neville and Ern's idea that whiteness uplifts and elevates the Aboriginal people. Moreover, the whiteness that Harley sees in front of him – that is, his own whiteness, – has no depth. Selles claims that here, "the concept of the superiority of whiteness is toppled: it is denied depth, by contrast to the emotional, spiritual depth linked to Aboriginal (black) people" (2007, p. 154). Harley is psychologically crippled by his grandfather's project, and he does not have a fulfilling identity: "This much was clear; I was a fraction of what I might have been" (Scott, 1999, p. 26).

His rootlessness gains physical manifestation, as well, through an element of magical realism. He discovered early that he had a propensity for elevation, which at the beginning of his self-discovery was identical with his lack of a sense of belonging:

> My feet scrabbled to remain on the pavement. Even after I had crammed my pockets with rubble, earth, and loose change I still needed to keep a firm grip on the wheelchair or risk drifting away. (Scott, 1999, p. 33)

> Nyoongar language. Culture ... I thought of all the things I did not have. Unsettled, not belonging – the first white man born – I let myself drift. I gave up, and drifted ... (Scott, 1999, p. 109)

His elevation is an ironic allusion to Neville's idea of elevating the Aboriginal people through making them white: whiteness for the Aborigines in reality means being rootless, with no firm identity. According to Armellino (2007), "this abrupt evasion of the domain of reality illustrates the protagonist's initial position and state of mind: from this insecure position – itself the negation of a standpoint – it is a matter of necessity to work his way back to the ground" (p. 17).

His identity crisis is also demonstrated in the numerous mirror scenes of the novel. Several Aborigines use the mirror in an attempt to search for their identity:

> Hovering before a mirror, I saw a stranger. [. . .] it was terrible to see the shapes, the selves I took. (Scott, 1999, p. 12)

> Topsy used Ern's mirror, just as Kathleen had. It was patchy, and so their faces were incomplete. There were flecks and spots, and there were pieces of themselves missing, and yet each believed that it showed how others saw her. There were increasing areas of blackness, more pieces missing and making her invisible. (Scott, 1999, pp. 160-161)

These scenes show how distorted and fragmented the self-images of these people are: as they internalize the stereotypes pertaining to them, they can only see

themselves through the white perspective, while their original sense of self is still there somewhere, making it impossible to have a clear definition of themselves. According to Strelau (2000), the image of mirror is a very strong representation of the failure of white policies, as

> Whites have tried to re-create their own image by forcing blacks to accept their cultural mores, their control, and their lifestyle. This superimposed image, reflected in the mirror used by Harley and his ancestors, is a distorted one, for the Aboriginals can only see themselves as 'throwbacks' in that colonial mirror.

Harley is in this impoverished state of false identity, and his lack of self-definition and purpose is so strong that he feels himself dead: "At so many funerals I have felt lonely, that it was I who had already been dead longest, that I myself represented the final killing off; the genocide thing, you know" (Scott, 1999, p. 446). From this status, Harley is literally reborn after his accident, and he recalls that "I had come back from the dead" (Scott, 1999, p. 14). After this, the documents of Ern gave a new meaning to his life:

> Raised to carry on one heritage, and ignore another, I found myself wishing to reverse that upbringing, not only for the sake of my own children, but also for my ancestors, and for their children in turn. And therefore, inevitably, most especially, for myself. (Scott, 1999, p. 19)

In Althans' view, "Harley's return from the dead follows stock Gothic patterns and at the same time marks his death to the white world as an initiation into the essence of his Nyoongar heritage" (2010b, p. 110). His resurrection demonstrates that the white presence can be overcome, and that the Aboriginal heritage can still be recovered.

Harley begins his journey of discovery with the help of Uncle Jack and Will, and he also takes revenge on his grandfather. From this point on, he can be paralleled with Frankenstein's monster, who also tried to take revenge on his master. In a Gothic fashion, the creature turns against his creator, and demonstrates that the prescribed role of the monster is interchangeable between the creator and the creature. Harley inflicts violence upon his own and Erns's body:

> Soon I turned to my grandfather's flesh. I wanted to mark him, to show my resentment at how his words had shaped me. (Scott, 1999, p. 37)

> I bathed him in salty water, was slow and gentle with my touch. The wounds I'd given him grew, and in unforeseen ways. (Scott, 1999, p. 78)

> I wrote END, CRASH, FINISH into his skin. I poured black ink and ash into the wounds, and tended them carefully so that the skin would heal and seal the letters stark and proud. (Scott, 1999, p. 445)

The inflicted tortures reflect how Ern treated the Aboriginals in his life. The salty bath is a reminder of the bleach baths he gave to Topsy, and the words carved into his skin are reminiscent of what Ern did to Harley: he stamped him with his whiteness, taking away his heritage. The torture Harley imposes on Ern is not only physical, but also psychological: Harley almost entirely destroyed Ern's house, which is "a metaphor for the deconstruction of this white heritage, for the house is a white colonial marker" (Selles, 2007, p. 155). The demolition of the house coupled with Harley's resistance to cut off the tree representing Aboriginal community are attempts to erase the white presence from the land (Selles, 2007, p. 155). Moreover, Harley also destroys the work of his grandfather, burning it piece by piece, torturing Ern: "One at a time, bit by bit, I wrote out Grandad's so carefully collected and meticulously filed documents. One at a time, I held each before his eyes, put a match to it, and let it fall when the flame reached my fingers" (Scott, 1999, p. 349). Nevertheless, the torture of his grandfather indicates that Harley still operates within the racist framework he inherited from Ern: "Ern's words have fashioned Harley's thinking and he imagines that transformation is only possible through the utilization and abuse of others" (Slater, 2005). Harley moves beyond this restricting framework only when he reconnects with his lost ancestors.

Harley's recovery happens with literally tracing back the history of his family and with the incorporation of his heritage. That is the time when he finds his roots and his true identity. His change is symbolized with his flying, which is different from the elevation experienced earlier in the story; and with his footprints: "I was still a lightweight, but as I walked hand-in-hand with my young children, I noticed that my footprints in the sand were almost as deep as theirs" (Scott, 1999, p. 452). Now, Harley is able to remain on the ground and to control his flying. Nevertheless, he had a hard time in reconnecting with his family, as his complexion made people feel uncomfortable. It seems a paradox that he looks like a white man, and still, he practices the ancient traditions: "I suppose this is what made people wary, when they came to my little performances. I was so pale, there were strange scars marking my burnt and wrinkled skin, and yet I had that way of hovering, and of singing" (Scott, 1999, p. 459).

Harley's search for the past is strongly connected to the land that he travels through. The novel makes this bond strong by connecting the blood of ancestors with the land in a Gothic image: "Even in darkness, and after, and even when it no longer stains the crusty skin, blood continues to seep down and down to water

below. The paths we took have disappeared and been sealed, and yet at the very least we still skim, humming, along the scar tissue" (Scott, 1999, p. 187). The metaphor of blood seeping through the land is a reference to the Aboriginal community's bond to the land as a living entity. This is in a sharp contrast with the white colonizers' attitude towards the land. Scott demonstrates these different views with the image of flying and elevation: both Ern and Harley fly in the novel (although Ern does not realize it [Scott, 1999, p. 53]), looking down at the land, but in different ways. While Harley sees the landmarks of nature and the spots where his ancestors lived, Ern can only see the railways, wires, and other man-made objects. Armellino (2007) argues that Harley's view on the land provides the meaning for his flying: flying for Harley "represents the spiritual bond granting him an elevated point of observation from which to gaze down over the land; to know it, recognize it, narrate it, and sing it" (p. 30). That is, elevation loses its initial ironic and negative connotation by the end of the novel, and Harley is elevated from the limited perspective of the white man to the fully developed identity of an Aboriginal person.

All in all, Kim Scott's novel as a representation of Aboriginal Gothic managed to upset the traditional Gothic symbolism in order to illustrate the identity crisis of and the historical injustices pertaining to the Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, by deconstructing the image of the color white and by demolishing the basic binary opposition of white and black, Selles (2007) argues that the novel is offered as a kind of reconciliation: "reciting and storytelling, oral, pre-literate forms traditionally associated with Aboriginal culture, are mediated through the written, printed word and the English language, the coloniser's mode now recognized as common legacy" (p. 155). That is, the novel due to its linguistic combinations is as much a hybrid creature as Harley himself; it dwells on the frontier of two cultures and serves as a connection between them.

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