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Political Poetics and the Power of Things: Nonhuman Agency and Climate Change in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*

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In Alexis Wright's novel, *The Swan Book* (2013), representations of the environment, nonhuman animals and human-made objects extend beyond the function of props and setting to create a strong environmental message and an open and inclusive poetic. This ambiguous poetic mode works to continually disrupt reductionist and anthropocentric discourses of self and other. *The Swan Book* follows the story of a mute and traumatised Aboriginal girl, Oblivia Ethyl(ene), as she travels through a futuristic Australian landscape that has been drastically altered by climate change. Oblivia lives in the north with Bella Donna (a European refugee) until Warren Finch (the soon to be first Aboriginal President of Australia) claims her as his promised bride. Warren takes her, in the company of ghosts and genies, to a southern city. He is eventually killed and Oblivia is free to return north. Drawing on the related fields of ecocriticism and thing theory I argue that in *The Swan Book* Wright's depictions of the nonhuman world complicate conventional understandings of an inert and manipulable nature and in doing so encourage positive political change. In this article I focus particularly on the potential for positive change in our relationship and response to anthropogenic climate change through the disruption of the progress driven narratives of use value and consumption that currently dictate Western capitalist interactions with the environment. I begin with Wright's portrayal of the environmental impacts and political discourses of climate change, using the ecocritical theory of Rob Nixon and Ursula K. Heise to argue that unconventional and creative re-imaginings of ecological realities can play an important role in the fight to stall global warming. However, the political power of Wright's representations of the nonhuman world extends beyond any single political campaign. Thing theory, particularly Jane Bennett's thing-power, allows me to expand my reading of the environmental politics of *The Swan Book* beyond overt depictions of ecological disaster. Wright continually disrupts conventional singular and anthropocentric conceptions of subjectivity and action in ways that respond to Bennett's theorisation of agency as both nonhuman and communal. Building on this discussion of singular instances of nonhuman agency, I use theories of environmental and material feminisms, particularly Karan Barad's intra-activity, to interpret the relationships between human and nonhuman entities (for example the poetic entanglement of Oblivia's body and the natural landscape). I argue that these disruptions of the conventional singular and anthropocentric self combine with a persistently ambiguous and alienating poetic mode to create a productive environmental poetic that not only reimagines the existing narratives of climate change but also challenges restrictive environmental dualisms and encourages a hospitable and non-reductive mode of interacting with the world around us.

Before I continue, I would like to briefly address two aspects of the theoretical focus of this article: a focus on feminist theory and a lack of in-depth analysis of Indigenous philosophies and cosmologies. The feminism of many of my chosen theorists should not go unnoticed. While I do not engage in a full discussion of their theoretical inheritances in this article, it is important to stress that feminist genealogies of thinking through ethical relations with others provide a crucial contribution to thinking through object oriented ontologies. Furthermore, this article does not contain a fine-grained analysis of the role that Indigenous cosmologies play in the representation of nonhuman agency in *The Swan Book*. Indigenous cosmologies and relationships to land are integral to Wright's representation of the environment and much could and should be gained from a thoughtful investigation of the relationship between those philosophies and innovative approaches to the politics of climate change. I recognise this gap and it is

my intention that this investigation of *The Swan Book* be viewed as a complementary rather than an alternative reading of this important work.

Rob Nixon in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* and Ursula K. Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* both theorise the difficulty of effectively communicating the realities of climate change, which is a central concern of *The Swan Book*. Nixon argues that in a growing culture of spectacle-driven media it is important to actively combat the relative invisibility of its slow violence: that is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Another challenge involved in the depiction of climate change, not only in literary texts such as *The Swan Book* but also in other media, is its global scale. Heise argues that previously, especially in the American tradition, theories of ecological awareness and environmental activism have generally been grounded in ideas of connection to local space and habitat. This connection is evident in common ecocritical terms such as dwelling, bioregionalism and a land ethic (Heise 7). However, to begin to engage productively with the threat of climate change this strand of ecological rhetoric must be complicated by what Heise calls an ideal of eco-cosmopolitanism. We must move into an era of ecological thinking that is no longer anchored in place but instead is based on "territories and systems that are understood to encompass the planet as a whole" (8). While outlining multiple challenges of articulating and understanding the true threat of climate change, Nixon and Heise both argue for the positive potential of narrative depictions. As Nixon states, it is "writer-activists [that] can help us apprehend threats imaginatively that remain imperceptible to the senses, either because they are too geographically remote, too vast or too miniscule in scale, or are played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the psychological life of a human observer" (15). In the context of German sociologist Ulrich Beck's theorisation of risk, Graham Huggan reiterates the importance of projective depictions of climate change, arguing that "[i]t is only through the 'staged anticipation' of world risks that the future catastrophe they portend can become meaningfully present to us, thereby opening the door to preventive action" (90) [1]. In *The Swan Book* Wright provides a projective description of climate change that conveys both its slow violence and its status as a global threat. I argue that through the manipulation of narrative elements such as the postapocalyptic setting, a reader's relationship to the environment represented can be altered; for example, converting the understanding of climate "from a passive constituent to … a strange kind of entangling, nonhuman actor or active presence" (Buell 264–65). Furthermore, as Huggan observes, "artistic attempts to represent the radical contingencies of climate change are likely to be relational and multi-scalar" (92). As I will more fully argue in the conclusion of this article, Wright's fluid, erratic and sometimes inaccessible style foregrounds the need for a shift in the modes of narrating and engaging with the dominant political narratives of climate change. Through these choices of both narrative and style, Wright allows a reader to recognise the reality, enormity, and apparent inevitability of the thing that is climate change.

When describing the setting of *The Swan Book* it is tempting to adopt the term postapocalyptic; however, an important distinction can be made by instead describing it as merely futuristic. The Australia described by Wright may be bleak, but unlike other examples of the emerging genre of climate fiction, Wright does not choose to construct her narrative around any one apocalyptic event. The first chapter opens with the statement that "*[w]hen the world changed*, people were different" (6; original emphasis), alluding to a specific moment when the world changed. However, as the passage continues, this specificity is overwhelmed by a universal and seemingly endless condition of natural disaster:

> They talked about a surviving a continuous dust storm under the old rain shadow, or they talked about living out the best part of their lives with floods lapping around their bellies; or they talked about tsunamis and dealing with nuclear fallout on their shored and fields forever. (Wright 6)

As Frederick Buell observes in "Global Warming as Literary Narrative," we "are inside something we cannot get out of – that perhaps has no outside. And it will not end us and our world abruptly, as old fashioned apocalypses do. It promises to intensify its intimate embrace as it takes us all the way down to lower and lower circles of its hell of degradation" (261). In *The Swan Book* there is no climax that provides an opportunity for heroic action, only a gradual decline over a paradoxically short amount of time. Wright's disconcerting refusal to date her narrative reinforces this feeling of an interminable decline, uninterrupted by recognisable disaster. In the context of his five chosen narratives of global warming,

Buell states that in "emphasizing present dwelling inside, rather than fearful anticipation of [environmental crisis], a potent new intimacy between people and their worlds is created, even as those worlds have lost all biophysical solidity and become scarily mutable" (265). Similarly, a reader of *The Swan Book* is unable to place the ecological ruin described at any fixed temporal distance. In fact, Wright explicitly undermines any divide between now and then, stating "[t]his might be the same story about some important person carrying a swan centuries ago, and it might be the same story in centuries to come" (333). As a result, instead of being provided with any convenient temporal gap between now and a (theoretically preventable) future of environmental disaster, a reader is left with the challenging – but more realistic – understanding of the clear and present danger of a changing climate.

Throughout the text, Wright also addresses the global scale of climate change. While the setting of *The Swan Book* is Australian, Wright's environmental critique is not limited to a localised conception of place. In the novel, the character Bella Donna, for example, is a European climate change refugee who arrives in Australia after the destruction of her homeland by warring nations made desperate by rising sea levels and (un)natural disasters. The swans that arrive at the swamp because their migrations have been disrupted serve to reinforce Bella Donna's narrative of global destruction. While their situation is a specific and localised result of climate change, through Bella Donna's stories they become part of a global history of swans. Their story is continually mirrored by and embedded in Bella Donna's global catalogue of swan stories. By creating this global narrative of environmental disruption, Wright discourages what Nixon would describe as the "planetary delusion that we can segregate orderly societies from those abandoned to climate change" (267) [2]. However, it is important to note that, although this global narrative addresses the challenge of representing the scale of climate change, Wright does not present an uncomplicated version of Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism (that is, systems of ecological thought that encompass the planet as a whole). Instead, she plays out the tension between local connection to place and the need for global action. It is the character Warren Finch who, in a telling example of dramatic irony, champions the call for international co-operation when he tells Oblivia, "*I am in government you know,*" suggesting that his political reach extends globally: "*My parish is the world. Wherever I am needed in the neighbourhoods of power*" (238; original emphasis). But the arrogance of this approach to environmental policy is satirised in *The Swan Book*: Warren Finch is seduced by the myth of western political power and as a result he forgets much of the connection to the environment that he gained by being raised as what Wright calls "a special test case for the curriculum of … keepers of Country" in which "his schoolroom and teacher were the land itself" (102). Once this connection is dulled, action seems to be replaced by illusory political rhetoric. In this way, while maintaining that understanding climate change as a global threat is vital, Wright also highlights the problematic outcomes of allowing the need for global action to become abstract and unfocused, losing connection to local and material realities. Though Warren himself is often satirised, the intimate connection to place and the primary importance of Aboriginal relationships to land that his education represents are vitally important to environmental representations in *The Swan Book*. I argue that Wright represents climate change on a global scale without disregarding localised environmentalism, foregrounding what Huggan describes as "the productive alliance between local and global ecological consciousness that is facilitated by literature's imaginative capacity to move freely across different scales and levels of action and thought" (98).

One of the key challenges to positive action on climate change is its virtual invisibility. The thus-far unmet need to fully recognise its existence and extent calls for a reassessment of our established modes of understanding and articulating our changing climate. As Huggan states, "climate – whether changing or not – can be difficult to visualize since, perhaps particularly in the case of global warming, it tends to be abstracted from the more readily identifiable phenomenological patterns within which weather can be experientially registered" (101). As a result, "a different aesthetic, potentially reaching to infinity, would appear to be required for which there are no obvious literary models" (101). I argue that through continual disruptions of both conventional ideas of agency and anthropocentric conceptions of subjectivity, Wright embraces this call for a different and challenging aesthetic. Ecocritic Claire Colebrook argues that "[as] long as we think of climate in its traditional sense – as our specific milieu – we will perhaps lose sight of climate change, or the degree to which human life is now implicated in timelines and rhythms beyond that of its own borders" (567). To begin to change negative patterns of human behaviour we must change negative patterns of thought. Throughout her work, Australian eco-philosopher Val Plumwood builds on the central idea that today's ecological crisis has its basis in the widespread proliferation of the Human/Nature dualism: that is, "a system of ideas that takes a radically separated reason to be the essential characteristic of humans and situates human life outside and above

an inferiorized and manipulable nature" (*Environmental Culture* 4). In *The Swan Book* Wright disrupts such Western assumptions of a rational human self and a nonhuman other and, in doing[so, encourages an open and non-reductive environmental ethics. Examples of this disruption are common in *The Swan Book* as this kind of ambiguity is an essential stylistic feature of the text and seems to grow seamlessly from Wright's singular authorial voice and Indigenous worldview. On the simplest level of nonhuman agency are examples of anthropomorphism such as the lonely crow that "chuckl[es] its secrets" (Wright 177) into Warren Finch's ear and communicates its feelings of loneliness through an ABBA rendition; or Rigoletto, the talking monkey who is a major presence in the second half of the novel as he accompanies Oblivia on her journey home until he departs with the Harbour Master (an elder who arrives at the swamp early in the novel and remains with Oblivia on her journey) in search of a palace. The ghostly manifestations of Bella Donna and the Harbour Master, who periodically appear after Oblivia's departure from the swamp, also subtly introduce a form of nonhuman subjectivity. Death (or in the case of the Harbour Master, possibly just physical absence) does almost nothing to change the role of either character and through their continued presence the inanimate (though still human) memory of the dead is transformed into an actual and uncomplicated agency.

A more complex example of nonhuman agency that spans the length of the text is the actions and movements of the swans. A global mythology of swans is constructed throughout *The Swan Book*, both by direct quotations from swan-related poetry and prose, and by Bella Donna's retelling of her own and others' swan mythologies. As previously stated, this poetic and mythic history of swans helps place Australia's changing climate in a global context. However, a reading of swans in *The Swan Book* (even a specifically ecocritical reading) is restricted and incomplete if this intertextuality, this language of swans, is allowed to eclipse the swans themselves. Swans have both a physical and active presence in the text, and I turn now to an investigation of the effect that this materiality has on representations of nonhuman agency.

The physical presence of swans is introduced in the first chapter and is maintained to the novel's conclusion. The swans' non-migratory movements and inexplicable actions imbue them with a sense of unusual agency. However, unlike Rigoletto, or even the ABBA-singing crow, the swans' agency is not realised through overt anthropomorphic action: they do not vocalise their thoughts or motivations, nor are these clearly explained by the narrative voice. Bella Donna describes herself as "*the storyteller of the swans*" (Wright 17) and creates general narratives (usually enacted by the white swans of Europe) that are made vague by their multiplicity and fragmentation. These narratives do little to decode or encode the living bodies and singular actions of the physically present swans.

In order to craft a reading of the materiality of swans as an active presence in the novel, I will focus on their actions following the death of Bella Donna. In the days (or possibly months) after her death, swans converge on the swamp. They proceed to mourn her in distinct stages: initially searching for her lost presence; angrily patrolling the swamp as a single, tight formation; and sitting "glued to the shores of the swamp... their long necks hung with their heads almost touching the ground" (Wright 91). That the swans should feel such deep and lasting grief over the death of Bella Donna (and that it should manifest itself in a manner resembling stereotypical stages of grief – denial, anger and depression) insightfully provides a sense of nonhuman subjectivity. If left uncomplicated, this would be simple anthropomorphism: the swan is recognised as a mourning subject as it resembles a mourning human subject. However, in its final stage, Wright's representation of the swans' mourning exceeds anthropomorphism. Through a combination of a foregrounded materiality and an uncanny hyperbolic extension of the established narrative of human grief, the swans cannot be easily read as either thinking human being as subject or unthinking animal body as object. The passage that begins with the description of the swans' melancholy posture and "doleful" gaze is suddenly interrupted by violent attack: "Instead of the swans saving themselves from the swamp people's dogs, they continued staring like statues at the broken forms of silver reflections, shimmering over the water" (Wright 91). "The swan frenzy rage[s] on and on" with dogs and seagulls feasting on the flesh of still-living swans that refuse to swim away, or even move. In order to travel around the swamp Oblivia is forced to "crawl over dead birds" and her attempts at funeral pyres become bonfires large enough to "creat[e] a haze over the swamp" (91). Throughout this scene, the brutal materiality of the swans is continually foregrounded – they are statues, corpses, blood, flesh, feather, food and fuel. Yet the underlying causes of this gruesome objectification are strong emotion and a radical separation of mind and matter. Bill Brown explains that the word "things" is used "to index a certain liminality, to hover over the threshold between the

nameable and the unnameable, the figurable and the unfigurable, the identifiable and the unidentifiable" (4–5). In this way, as the swans oscillate between and exceed the categories of both subject and object they become things. Furthermore, this liminality is heightened by the fact that even the motivation behind this mass suicide (previously so notably human) becomes unstable. Though perhaps the foundation of their actions could still be read as grief, their magnification, brutality and communal nature makes the motivation for the swans' "eerie pact" (Wright 91) uncanny and elusive. In his article "A Pebble, a Camera, a Man Who Turns into a Telegraph Pole," John Frow reflects on Zbigniew Herbert's poem "Pebble," stating that "to be so purely a thing, so deeply withdrawn from capture by others, is to pass into that mode of irreducibility and unknowability that we call the subject" (272). As the swamp dogs slowly massacre the swans, the swans become such a pure thing. Through her representation of the swans as exceeding the categories of both subject and object, making them things, Wright creates a disruptive nonhuman agency that is not reliant on overt anthropomorphic representation.

In addition to animate beings such as ghosts and animals, there is a range of examples of inanimate nonhuman agency in *The Swan Book*. In *Vibrant Matter* Jane Bennett theorises a world "where the line between inert matter and vital energy, between animate and inanimate, is permeable – and where all things, to some degree or other, live on both sides" (352). Bennett argues that advocating the vitality of matter – what she calls thing-power – can have positive ramifications in environmental political theory and practice, conjecturing that "the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (ix). To demonstrate the more disturbing manifestations of thing-power, Bennett uses a description of a New Jersey "garbage hill". She evokes the physical agency of the dump by quoting at length Robert Sullivan's detailed description of toxic elements combining and melding and, after rain, oozing out in a "bluish caramel" fluid slowly moving to join with local groundwater. Sullivan goes on to refer to this phenomenon as a kind of birth (Sullivan 97). This example of the ongoing agency of a human-made product is strongly recalled in *The Swan Book* by the flotilla of ex-Army vessels dumped in the swamp. The vessels have fallen into disuse and, by exceeding the limits of their human-made materiality and intended use, are propelled from the concrete and specifiable object of ship into the ambiguous status of thing. For, as Bill Brown states, "[w]e begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls... when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily" (4). Furthermore, the hulls find new agential roles in a similar way to Bennett's rubbish hill. Sitting in the swamp, their rust slowly stains the water around them and they exude not only strange, toxic waste, but malevolent history: "It was easy, and eerie, to see the bleeding heart, rust-staining yellow water. It gave you the shivers. If you looked closely at the flotilla for long enough you saw people at war. Saw military parades. Dead men walking up and down on the decks" (Wright 58). Long after fulfilling their intended use, these human-made products continue to exert their presence and take upon themselves the new agential roles of makers of waste – physical and historical. In Wright's world, agency is not dependent on human, or even animal, subjectivity.

Bennett presents thing-power as an "alternative to the object as a way of encountering the nonhuman world" (xvii) and argues that its theorisation can act as a political and theoretical tool for redefining our relationship to the natural world. After establishing this potential, she moves beyond thing-power's focus on separate and individual entities, arguing "the locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group," (xvii) an assemblage. This shift has ramifications for the environmental politics of *The Swan Book* that I will explore through a combination of the work of posthuman feminist theorists Karen Barad, Astrid Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker.

In "Posthumanist Peformativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" Barad concludes that "'[w]e' are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located in particular places *in* the world; rather we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity" (828). With the term intra-activity Barad evokes a sense of a mutual becoming – the idea that "[r]eality is not composed of things-in-themselves, or things-behind-phenomena but 'things'-in-phenomena" (817), things in relation. Intra-activity is exemplified in *The Swan Book* by literary and linguistic choices that are often so subtle they are easily missed, but can also be read as poetic incorporations of an Indigenous philosophy described by Stephen Muecke as an ontology that "allow[s] for non-human modes of existence and radical transformations from the human to the non-human and vice-versa" (2). After they leave the swamp, Oblivia and Warren Finch journey into the desert accompanied by Hart, Mail and Doom (the three genies). While attempting to run away, Oblivia almost treads on a snake:

> The girl felt the serpent eyes staring into her mind. She felt the sensation of its glare and the immediacy of her fear travelling back through its nervous system, pushing its strength down though [sic] the muscles of its body, and from there her fear sat like a spring in readiness, as the snake prepared to strike... Perspiration ran from her forehead onto the snake's shiny head and over the black beads of its eyes. (Wright 183)

Throughout this encounter, Oblivia and the snake are inseparable. The gaze of the serpent travels through her mind and its own body, shaping and affecting its physical reality and her own. Her fear becomes a part of the snake's nervous system and her sweat runs into the snake's eyes. Through these persistent assertions of shared and equal intra-actions, Wright conveys a mode of becoming that does not rely on the agency of a singular subject, exerting its will on the world. Instead, Oblivia, snake, fear and muscle become a human-nonhuman assemblage. Agency is shared as "there is not so much a doer (an agent) behind the deed ([the snake strike]) as a doing" (Bennett 28).

The relevance of Barad's theory of intra-activity extends beyond the relationship between specific human and nonhuman actors as it speaks to a more general and consistent mode of being in the world. In their article "'Weathering': Climate Change and the 'Thick Time' of Transcorporeality" Neimanis and Walker state that "acknowledging the agency of nonhuman nature increases the sense of our shared presence and shared making of the weather-world" (564). They call for the creation of an imaginary of "intensity": an acknowledgment that "*our bodies* and *our time* are mutually implicated in environmental changes" (559). They argue "the weather and climate are not phenomena 'in' which we live at all – where climate would be some natural backdrop to our separate human dramas – but are rather of us, in us, through us" (559). Readers of *The Swan Book* might begin to glimpse what Neimanis and Walker's imaginary of intensity could be. From the opening passage, Wright draws depictions of landscape and nature into her descriptions of Oblivia's thought and person. This conflation is not just a metaphorical device; it is also a cohabitation of space. The first two sentences of the novel read: "Upstairs in my brain, there lives this kind of cut snake virus in its doll's house. Little stars shining over the moonscape garden twinkle endlessly in a crisp sky" (Wright 1) [3]. What begins as a contained, and notably human, spatial metaphor of a doll's house is suddenly expanded to the bewildering expanse of an endless sky. In the passages that follow, Oblivia's mind contains a junk-filled bushland, a backwater swamp and "the biggest slum of a *dirty* desert in one of the loneliest places in the world" (3). In this passage – and continually throughout the novel – Wright constructs poetic and abstract manifestations of the strong physical and spiritual bond between Aboriginal people and the Australian landscape (Bayet-Charlton 172). As Fabienne Bayet-Charlton states in "Overturning the Doctrine: Indigenous Peoples and Wilderness – Being Aboriginal in the Environmental Movement": "I cannot remove humans from the landscape. Aboriginal people are an integral part of the Australian landscape. We are the land, the land is us" (171). In *The Swan Book*, this conflation of self and space is not only poetically effective; it is, in the context of environmental politics, mutually beneficial. I argue that the fusion of subjectivity and space iterates the transcorporeal intensity demanded by Neimanis and Walker. By shaping the environment as an integral part of a human subjectivity Wright encourages a reader to see and feel land that is not just lived on, but lived through. It is through this understanding of the environment, where human corporeality and agency are inseparable from nature, that we might begin to grasp that our human lives are inextricably entwined in the life of what surrounds us.

The complex and multiplicitous articulations of nonhuman agency I have outlined all contribute to a disruption of reductionist discourses of self and other. However, I would further argue that this disruption is continually and essentially enacted at the level of poetics through a radical and productive ambiguity. Creative writing has the ability to make "visible new possibilities for radically open and non-reductive ways to experience the world" (Plumwood "Journey" 17). Indeed, these possibilities can only be articulated through the radical otherness and ambiguity of poetics. As Hélène Cixous states, in appropriately ambiguous terms: "What is most true is poetic because it is not stopped-stoppable. All that is stopped, grasped, all that is subjugated, easily transmitted, easily picked up, all that comes under the word concept, which is to say all that is taken, caged, is *less* true" (4). This sentiment is mirrored in *The Swan Book*: "The girl convinced herself that only mad people in the world would tell you the truth when madness was the truth, when the truth itself was mad" (73). In Wright's poetic form there is an ambiguity, a madness perhaps, that is at times bewildering. Her style is both fluid and erratic, bordering on stream-of-consciousness with both political satire and fantastic elements forming the unquestioned reality of Oblivia's world. I argue that this inaccessibility is essential to the novel's political power [4].

The enormity and urgency of the political, social and economic change required to stop, or even slow, the current trend of global warming indicates that its timely implementation will require a fundamental shift in our modes of engaging with the world around us. Wright's poetics allows a reader a (productively hyperbolic) glimpse of how and where that shift might take place. The recognition that a thing extends beyond our immediate understanding works to disrupt the growing global assumption that that which is not human is necessarily inert, manipulable, interchangeable and, ultimately, commodifiable.

In *The Swan Book* Wright creates a space in which the enormity and spatial and temporal dispersion of climate change is made relevant and real. Through examples of nonhuman agency she disrupts conventional anthropocentric conceptions of the self. Furthermore, she constructs the will of those nonhuman agents, not as singular actions, but as communal and mutual intra-actions. These continual re-imaginings and disruptions combine with Wright's persistent poetic ambiguity to create a productive environmental poetic. In a space of radical otherness, where the dualisms of self and other, human and nature, animate and inanimate are complicated and fluid, we might begin a conversation that moves beyond the reigning and reductive environmental discourses of consumption and conservation and begin to re-imagine the value of the material world and humanity's place within it.

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Endnotes

1. "staged anticipation" qtd from Beck, Ulrich. *World at Risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009. 10-11.

2. This importance of large scale narratives has become increasingly discussed in contemporary ecocriticism – take for example Richard Kerridge's statement in his discussion of literary representation of the relationship between the global and the local, that "no perspective is valid in ecocritical terms if it allows one to immerse oneself in a single place, oblivious of the lines of economic and ecological connection that lead to other places" (73–74).

3. "Cut snake": "mad as a cut snake" is an Australian idiom for being crazy or out of control.

4. This power is multiplicitous in its relevance and an exploration of Wright's disruptive poetics in the context of Indigenous sovereignty and whiteness theory is, in my opinion, a vitally important undertaking and one I hope to undertake at a later date.

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